

**SECTION 1**  
**METHODOLOGY**

## **CHAPTER 1**

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### CAPAX IMPERII ? SCRIPTURE, TRADITION AND 'EUROPEAN-STYLE' CRITICAL METHOD

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In the last two hundred years critical method in Scripture and Tradition with its epicenter in northern Europe (including Britain) has amassed a formidable panoply of instrumenta studiorum. Secondary and tertiary centers have appeared in the United States and wherever the writ of European academic methodological orthodoxy runs. Indigenous and homegrown traditions of critical appreciation have all too often been ignored and the propagators of the- European-style appear to think their approach is of global and universal applicability. The experience and vicissitudes of other religions as each undergoes servicing by these methods is worthy of a quick survey, if only in the light of the Akan proverb: "Let those whose neighbors' thatch is on fire, keep water handy." Or to vary the metaphor, if we feel certain conditions coming upon us, let us prepare for surgery and exchange notes on surgeons and techniques.

Christianity has been in the eye of the storm and has herself generated a good part of the shakti. She has to live in a European situation in which thanks to her own inner nature as a prophetic religion and as dominant religion in Europe for a thousand years, as well as the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, the economic, social, political, literary, industrial, technological and scientific revolutions, she could no longer make herself understood. People could no longer understand her language, imagery, thought forms, they were no longer able to accept the Bible and religious tradition as the Church understood them. Christians had taken over the Jewish Bible as their Old Testament on their own terms. Semitic and Judaic scholarship as they revived questioned the Christian terms of the take-over and then the attributions

of author ship and other presuppositions. Soon the five books of Moses were being divided up among authors, redactors, strata of tradition, amphictyonic sources. Myth, oral traditions, comparative exegesis of ritual were demanding a verdict. In addition there were among many other features totally new understandings of messianism and eschatology. The dialectic of the study of the economic and social forces of the old Middle East (West Asia) were transforming interpretation. The incredible finds of archaeology and of texts, parchments and scrolls, made critical Biblical study a matter for daily newspapers and best seller super-market books.

Much of all this applied in different ways to the New Testament. The traditional attributions of the Gospels met an early demise, source criticism was followed by redactor criticism. Text studies, after a bewildering middle period, issued in some broadly agreed principles. All these things were valuable towards helping us to know what the early community was like and the kind of discourse which lay behind the narrative. Critical method was still crude, yet as we look back we see that critics have seldom lacked optimism about what they can achieve and a certain dogmatism about the Success and value of their findings. The quest for the historical Jesus in some shape of form and its accompanying insistence that they can know not only what he said and did but also what he did not do and say, is still with us.

Each generation of scholars tried to improve on the last, more fine-tuned and sophisticated methods were brought forward under such banners as "Hermeneutics," "Form Criticism," and *Auslegungsgeschichte* (Critical History of the Exegesis). In the meantime, other disciplines had come of age and they too joined in. Archaeology, Linguistics and scientific etymology, Comparative Literature, Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology and others were brought to bear. Methodologies from Marxism, the Natural Sciences as well as Social Sciences and New Feminist Studies have been effectively called in. Every day new developments appear and have to be tackled. The effect of newspaper and television publicity is worthy of study.

There have been lulls in the process. Sometimes it appeared that criticism was ebbing into silence or was at least less boisterous in

exuberance. For example, before World War I at the end of his *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, (German original 1906), Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) could say that the critics had unchained Jesus from the rocks to which tradition had bound him and he had then passed through their midst, that is, escaped them. Repeatedly the warning is given that the critics look down the well of history and see not the Jesus of history but a reflection of themselves. Even so, Bultmann and the neo-Bultmannians were to rally and attempt new Quests for historical Jesuses right down to the 1970s.

The two World Wars and the collapse of European political dominance did something to teach the European spirit that it could not expect to conquer and subdue everything indefinitely. In Natural Science there have been a series of reminders of the limitation of our human intellectual capacity to comprehend and apprehend everything here and now, our desire to lay down not only what can be but what cannot be. There have been warnings of how groups of humans who began as innovators tend to gang up together and impose dogma and defend their own out-worn orthodoxies and sacerdotal privileges. Thus the upshot of reading Einstein (1879-1955) is to realise how slowly scientific groups were to readjust to Einstein's thought. Kuhn showed us how methodological shibboleths become paradigms which assist in obscuring the truth. Feyerabend poured scorn on the methods of study which were supposed to ensure on-going critical advance. Kline has indicated a collapse in the self-confidence of Mathematics while Capra has filled many young scientists with despair as to the rightness of their ideas about humankind's march through science to perfection.

Already in the mid-1960s there were warnings that if students of Scripture and tradition thought they had survived the effects of demythologisation, form-criticism and all the other criticisms of those days, there were yet greater new things for them to experience. Natural science, the social sciences as well as critical studies in languages, linguistics, semiotics, literature, Philosophy, cybernetics, almost every discipline and method known to human kind has something to teach us. Let two almost random examples

concerned with the New Testament suffice.

Raymond F. Collins' Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Doubleday, 1983) is by an American Roman Catholic priest who teaches at the Louvanium in Belgium. The book has an Imprimatur by a high official. That is, it is considered safe by the hierarchy. After chapters on the formation and canon, carefully stating "heretical" views as well, the book goes on to historical critical methodology, text, form, source and redaction criticisms. The chapter on Structural Analysis deals with the work of Greimas, Levi-Strauss, and Propp and such themes as syntagmatic, paradigmatic and semantic analysis as well as 'semiotics and narratology. The next chapters deal with the history and methods of exegesis, the authority of the magisterium and the "Modernist" crisis where the Vatican tried to muzzle critics. There is a section entitled "The conflict resolved." The book ends with list upon annotated list of instruments of study, critical texts, concordances and lexica, as well as a guide with bibliography to understanding relevant Marxist disciplines connected with ideology and methods derived from dialectical materialism, social and economic studies.

It is of course regrettable that there is nothing on critical theories derived from Psychology and Women's Studies but probably they each deserve a volume of their own. Similarly, justice is hardly done to computers. Scholars of Bible and tradition both Jewish and Christian are devoted to these machines. They can change their word-processor founts to exotic scripts, they can recall obscure information, the inmost secrets of word use, meaning and nuance are not hid from their screens. They can interface with the most detailed bibliographical retrieval systems in the world. For days on end their conversation is only of this.

As my other example, let me just mention at random some of the topics of the fasciculi for the years 1986 to 1988 of Semeia, an experimental journal of biblical criticism, which goes to members of the very large Society of Biblical Literature and to hundreds of Seminary and University Libraries. The subjects dealt with include social scientific criticism of the Hebrew Bible; apocryphal Acts of the Apostles; orality, aurality and Biblical narrative; text and textuality; speech act theory and biblical criticism; female

wit in a world of male power-most of the material treated in each is Biblical.

What has been the reaction to all this? Everyone has heard of the Fundamentalists and Televangelists, many of whom will have no form of criticism and insist on trying to understand ancient documents and traditions literally, or as they understand literally. Then there is the Church of Rome which tries to regulate and to sift the good from the bad. The Church of England allows the debate to go on unchecked: there are influential groups supporting both sides as well as the middle. Up to the times of their sad and lamented deaths I was in touch with Bishop J.A.T. Robinson whose *Honest to God* (London, 1963), thanks to unsought newspaper publicity, became a best seller, and with Professor Geoffrey Lampe who one Easter morning before millions of BBC viewers said the empty tomb was a late accretion to the resurrection narratives. His last book *God (IS Spirit)* (London, 1977) seems to call in question the foundations of the fundamental Christian dogmas. Lampe was physically and spiritually a giant: generous and devoted, valiant, he had won the Military Cross for bravery on the Normandy Beaches. There can be no possibility except that he meant by critical method to unlock the original springs of Christianity to enable her to serve the modern (European) world. Both men remained to the end practicing and faithful officials of their Church, men of deep mystical saintliness and love for everything that has breath. Both insisted that criticism did not empty the Churches but that it helped many to retain their faith, for it swept aside much unnecessary luggage from the past. Similarly they felt remarks about criticism weakening the old religious ethical control on scientists and big business and failing to produce a working public ethic, were not reasonably laid at criticism's door. Lampe felt that attacking the critics was like Shakespeare's Cleopatra having the messenger (bringing bad news) beaten up. I feel sure both would have welcomed the film of "The Last Temptation of Christ" despite its foolishness for its stimulating people to think over what a real incarnation may involve.

I have reason to believe that many of the German critics who hold Chairs ultimately. connected with *cuius regia eius religio*

Lutheran areas in Germany are of similar types. The situation in the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand is somewhat different. In those countries many of the scholars who work on religious material are in "secular" Universities and a good number of them have become post-Jewish or post-Christian or have not practised any religion. For them Scriptures and Traditions are specimens. In their own estimation they approach them with impartial objectivity, they are not concerned with what effect their work has on public ethics or on religious bodies, no more than scientists hold themselves responsible for military or commercial use of their research. It is truth as they see it, for truth's sake, the uncovering of knowledge for its own sake, which may incidentally lead to the uncovering, as they see it, of other people's unknowingness, blindness, ignorance or chicanery. The ethical conundrum is not theirs alone, it belongs to all humanity and sound answers will have to be found.

Because she has generated more critical study and development of method than any other, because more advanced methodological technology has been used upon her, Christianity has constituted our main case study. Each one of the other world religions has much to teach us in this regard. Time only remains for me to glance cursorily and haphazardly at some aspects of the matter. Judaism, while we know it came from Asia and till 1948 had roots and shoots in many other parts of the world, became an essential part of European life and culture. Jews were to be found in every country of Europe before or not long after "the mainstream" arrived. They contributed for centuries to every facet of European life. In fact before the 1940s, it is impossible to imagine Europeaness without including Jewishness. Yet the Europeans in every land made them feel like aliens and sojourners. It is no wonder they gave the lead in critical study of their own religion and in ways both oblique and direct of the "major" religion, Judaism's daughter, Christianity. In their case critical method of the type we are discussing may be traced from before Spinoza (1632-1677) onwards in every generation. But here I just want to mention two Jewish people whose thinking has decisively influenced critical thinking in every walk of life, not

least religion. Marx (1818-1883) born into an intensely Jewish environment was baptised in the Lutheran Church as part of the attempt of German Jews to leave the ghetto and join German life. With his Jewish honesty and clear-sighted sense of justice he saw how religion was used. No wonder he called it opium. Yet Marxist categories of method and thought, together with the deep care for underprivileged and oppressed can help to lead on to remarkable religious developments like Liberation Theology.

Freud (1856-1939) as a Jew in late 19th and early 20th century Vienna could wish with his fondest dreams hope religion was an illusion which would fade away with so much of the superstition and savagery of man's *primaevae* youth. Sad to say some of its pernicious perversions did not fade fast enough to save him from exile and millions of his fellows from a worse fate. The Freudian tendency not to recognize a place and future, for good or ill, of religion has remained to render the work of many a critic one sided and less true to human experience as it has been envisaged by most people in history and by many today.

With regard to Islam, I have collaborated with a traditional Bihari Shia Ithna 'ashari Maulana and with a Swahili Mwalimu for over twenty five years and found no lack of critical method and acumen. I have heard admiration of the trouble Europeans have taken to study Islam as well as amazement at the puerility and offensiveness of some of their study. The "Orientalism" debate has in the last ten years erupted in western books and journals but is far older in Muslim thought. Basically it is the conviction that much of 'European' study is the academic aspect of Imperialism and has underlying it the old racist ideologies. Among other things these include "the them and us" attitude, with "us" as the most highly evolved and advanced. It includes the idea that you can study a religion as a set of economic, social and psychological factors which make the believer into a fool, a charlatan, a fanatic or someone out to gain a material advantage. It includes the idea that you can isolate and atomize religion into a number of problems, which you can define and analyze, layout in front of you as

you would dissect a frog (first kill your frog) or the leg of a cadaver. Or it can be inspected as you look at an artifact in a museum, out of its context, in a light and setting you have chosen, to be studied in terms you lay down, in answer to questions you have formulated, in the face of "problems" you have thought up. Wonderful results have been achieved, but new more organic and natural methods are now urgently called for and those within the household have the initiative, not the uninvited guest. In surveying Islam at the present time Muslim scholars point out that Fundamentalists and Puritans have for centuries been an accepted part of their scene and that the divorces between religion and philosophy, religion and science, common sense and scripture, are not among their problems in the same way as these matters have afflicted Christian History in the last centuries.

I have learned much by studying the effects of modern critical western scholarship on Hinduism, Buddhism and the classical Chinese ideologies, but I do not have time at this point to give even a summary. However, because it is a factor often forgotten in scholarly circles let me say a little about African Traditional Religion (with the traditional religions of the Black Australians, of the peoples of Papua/New Guinea, of the Native Americans, in the background). Unlikely as it appears at first sight, European type critical scholarship has done some of its most valuable work here and in some ways the study of these religions has much to tell Europe by way of healing. Some of the greatest scholars came under unlikely auspices-Call away, Roscoe and Junod were missionaries, Rattray and Evans-Pritchard were government anthropologists. Anyhow, a bright constellation of interpreters of African religion arose including before long Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, Marcel Griaule and others. In time scholars of African religion as such, Parrinder, Idowu, Awolalu, Mbiti arose. The earlier volumes of the UNESCO History of Africa tell us of an Africa which is one, and includes Egypt, which goes back to human beginnings, which preserves and tells forth the best primal principles of humanity. Something of the nature of the oral, which is not the non-written or the pre-literate but a living enduring form of its own, independent of machinery, the printing press, the word processor, the air waves and electronic screen. It is part of the

living rhythm, music, color and movement of the wholeness of communal life not a dead museum piece, but something with a context, a roundness and an ecology. This is a study which cannot be done sitting in Munich, London and Harvard but a triumph of *Der praxis der Feldforschungsarbeit*, the praxis of field-study, experiential learning. The scholar has to enter into it fully, a total immersion. Truly those great scholars we mentioned were converted to African religion and the rest of their lives outside Africa was to them an exile in profane lands. In the meantime Levi-Stauss was doing his work on Amazonian myth and new ways of studying ritual and symbolism were being produced. It looked as if critical study had at last begun to crack its European mould and to tell us something common to primordial humanity, to the very shape of the human mind. Africa has done much for the world beside provide the labor force which did so much to open up the Americas and the natural riches to keep the global economy moving.

Sikhism is a world religion: not only has it followers in the Punjab, all over India, in the United Kingdom, United States, East Africa and Oceania, and elsewhere, it spans the great divide between the so-called western religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and the eastern (Hinduism and Buddhism) and Chinese classical ideologies (Confucianism, and Taoism). It also has many features which go back to the primordial pre-Aryan religion of India. It has all these things, a personal God of love who is One and active in the cosmos, the idea of 'karma', of moksha, it teaches an idea of balance and of reciprocal wholeness not unlike but not totally like yin-yang, yet in every case it presents these ideas on its own' terms, in a way which makes it different from other religions. Again it has a Book, but Sikhs are not just a people of a book, nor is the Book just an in libration of the divine word: the Guruship is invested in the word enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib and in the Khalsa past, present and future. This means that if properly understood and fairly presented In context and in full, Sikh Scripture and Tradition has nothing to fear from any true criticism properly used. It has never lacked critical acumen of its own. In fact we can say the first Guru was also the first relentless Sikh critic of all empty word-forms, of all religiosity,

empty worship and blind acceptance of tradition. It has a living, native born and organic tradition of criticism. A number of the Sikh scholars at this Conference are notable exponents of it as well as of western method. As for the newer types of criticism I mentioned above, a decade ago I found Sikh scholars at Chandigarh, Amritsar and Patiala deeply conversant with the latest in

structuralism, semiotics, narratology and the newest literary criticism. Sikhism has nothing to fear, she has always welcomed scholars from wherever they come, but obviously this does not mean she should sit around and be overtaken by the outside world and by misunderstanding. She has to make sure the truth is established and be prepared to argue it out. She has to have everyone of her own people and well-wishers well informed. The ignorant are not enemies, but Sikhs must not miss a single chance to tell others the truth about their religion. (We are meeting in Los Angeles: just a few years ago at the time of the hostage crisis in Iran, a Sikh was stoned in Los Angeles because his turban and beard reminded people of the Ayatollah Khomeini).

To achieve this purpose of thorough self-education, may I mention some items which people here in the west need badly in English with key words and phrases of course in Gurmukhi (For give me if they exist and I am oblivious of their existence). It is the basis of all sound Scripture study that we should understand the text by the text, therefore if we are to be well prepared to discuss the Sikh faith we need concordances like the two volume Patiala Sabadanukramanika but with the various sentences and lines containing the words, combined with idea and theme concordances like the Patiala Vicar Kos, adapted to be used in English. We need a dictionary like the Amritsar Sri Guru Granth Kos combined in a user-friendly way with something like Shackle's Glossary. Above all we need some commentaries we can trust, a compendium made from works like the Amritsar Sabadarath, the Jullundur Darapan and the Patiala Bani Prakas. Of course Professor Harbans Singh's Sikh Encyclopedia will do a great deal for us, perhaps then we will not need Kahn Singb Nabha's work so much after the Encyclopedia appears. I ought to mention how useful

"Loeb" edition, that is. original with interleaved translation, can be. Harbans Singh Doabia's and the Singapore Holy Nit Nem are an untold delight to anyone who loves prayer. As for translation of the Granth Sahib, neither Gopal Singh nor Manmohan Singh equal for beauty of English the UNESCO Selections. It is to be hoped that mother-tongue English users who are bilingual in Punjabi and brought up with the Sikh Scriptures in the original, will produce a handy one volume briefly annotated translation. I am sure some of our Sikh brothers or sisters here present would be able to tell far better than I the vistas that are opened up by audio-visual cassette. But the printed instrumenta studiorium I have mentioned are the nuts and bolts, the main beams and planks, the woof and warp of this study. Even in the original, outside the Punjab they are not often available for use, I doubt that the state-wide University of California bibliographical retrieval system, one of the greatest and best in the western world, could assemble these simple and basic tools of reference for you in the original languages. Even if assembled, how many people would be able to use them? How many can be used by an average well-educated western Sikh? Is it admirable to equip ourselves with "hi-tech" when our rank and file do not have basic equipment?

To conclude, Tacitus says of the Emperor Galba that by the consensus of all he had the capacity to rule as long as he was not Emperor (capax imperii nisi imperasset) . So it is with critical method, it has a wonderful ability to get to be in charge of everything but although it seems in every way so capable, it must be prevented from absolute and sole rule. In its proper place it can be a wonderful goad and paidogogus (slave-tutor) to arouse us and push us on to greater effort. May the one true Guru use whatever is of Sewa in this offering, may he burn away in critical fire whatever is gross or dross

## Notes

- 1 I am most grateful to McHenry Library Inter-Library Loan and to Mr. John Grinnell, Research Assistant, for their help in locating and obtaining books on Sikhism for me. This article being prepared in a great hurry was only made possible by their quickness in obtaining the many books used therein. Thanks are also due to Ms. Meg McCray

for her typing from a worse than illegible manuscript. I was greatly impressed by the efficiency, courtesy and generosity of the organizers of the Conference. Any such Conference organized by a University could not have been more efficient and certainly would have cost a great deal more.

- 2 English version preface dated 1910, reprint London, 1960, page 403. Schweitzer's book is the best summary to 1906. Another standard summary of New Testament critical study which partially covers the same ground and then brings it up to 1962 (with an up-date to 1986 by Tom Wright) is Stephen Neill's *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, (Second Edition), Oxford, 1988. Alan Richardson's *History Sacred and Profane*, London, 1964, remains a concise and fair-minded statement of the developments or retardations of the European mind which made criticism necessary if the Bible and early tradition were to be understood. For a recent brilliant survey see Lesslie Newbigin *Foolishness to the Greeks*, London, 1986.
- 3 See Ravi Ravindra's article "Physics and Religion", in edited Mircea Eliade's *Encyclopedia of Religion*, sixteen volumes, New York, 1986. This *Encyclopedia* is a wonder of modern high-power finance, technology and scholarship. I count some ninety-nine articles plus numerous biographies dealing with African Traditional Religion. On Sikhism there are only seven articles, though some of these are superb (for example, *Adi Granth* by S.S. Kohli and *Sikhism* by Khushwant Singh) the need for the importance of Sikhism and its multi-facetness to be brought to the attention of scholars like the compilers, tells its own story
- 4 Thomas Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- 5 Paul Feyerabend : *Against Method*, London, 1975
- 6 Morris Kline: 'Mathematic, the Loss of Certainty, Oxford, 1980. Fritjof Capra: *The Tao of Physics*, Berkeley, 1975 and *The Turning Point. Science, Society and the Rising Culture*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
- 7 Recently a U.S. Oxford University Press catalogue reminded me I could cheaply buy a Concordance Program which makes word counts, indexes and concordances. It can be applied to do stylistic, morphological and syntactic analysis as well as thematic and content analysis. It can investigate things like alliteration. To think of the time I spent so happily forty years ago writing and sorting cards for the Oxford Patristic Lexicon to earn two shillings an hour, a Princely wage. I also learned a great deal
- 8 I refer here to the settlement of 1648 by which areas which had a Lutheran ruler became Lutheran and Chairs of Bible and Theology

- in the relevant Universities became Lutheran too
- 9 Details of these *instrumenta studiorum* in order as they are mentioned:  
*Adi Granth Sabad-allukramanika* compiled by Gurcharan Singh, two volumes, Patiala, 1971.  
*Guru Grallth Vicar Kos* compiled by Piara Singh Padam, Patiala, 1969.  
*Sri Guru Granth Kos*, fourth edition, three volumes. Amritsar. 1954-1967. (This ought to be expanded to include key words, not only problematic words, to be something equivalent to Gerhard Kittel's *Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, translated as *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ten volumes), Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964 onwards. (The German in its antecedents goes back to 1883 and 1933. The book has been a basic help to scholarship since 1933. The use and meaning of key words in Old Testament, old Middle East, intertestamentary times, in New Testament, early Patristics, and the early Rabbis are given.) Christopher Shackle: *A Guru Nanak Glossary*, London: S.O.A.S., 1981. *Sabadarath Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji*, fourth edition, four volumes, Amritsar, 1959-1969. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darapan* by Sahib Singh, ten volumes, Jullundur 1962-1964. *Guru Nanak Banl Prakas.* by Taran Singh. two volumes, Patiala, 1969. Kahn Singh Nabha : *Gurusabad Ratandkar Mahan Kos*, second edition, Patiala. 1960. *Sacred Nitnem* by Harbans Singh Doabia, second edition. Amritsar, 1976. (See also his diglots on *Hymns and Teachings of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib*, *Sacred Japji*, *Sacred Sukhmani* and *Holy Nit-Nem with translation of Japji* by Rajinder Singh Vidyarthi, fourteenth edition, Singapore, 1988.) The Hemkunt Press. New Delhi, is also issuing valuable diglots like A.B, Mansukhani : *Hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib*, 1975 and other works
- 10 It is worth noting that recently the University of California Press published a Quran Concordance based on Arberry's translation but using Arabic roots. Also Amana published the first American Version of the Quran
- 11 Tacitus *Historia* I : XLIX. The meaning of this was the first explained to me at school at Simla in the 1930s, I am grateful to Mr. Dale Easley of the Reference Section of McHenry Library for quickly and accurately locating the exact reference.
- 12 *Paidagogus*, a scriptural Latinization of a *Koine* Greek word meaning a slave whose task was to tutor the children of the household, and though often he could be very stern and demanding, he was a servant, (Quite often he was respected, loved and given freedom).

## CHAPTER 2

### ISSUES OF SIKH STUDIES

**DALJEET SINGH**

It is a welcome sign that in the last few decades interest in the study of Sikh religion, its institutions and history has grown both in India and abroad, both among Sikh and non-Sikh scholars. It is indeed a healthy development. But, partly because of the variant background from which scholars are drawn and partly because of the methodologies of study followed by them, a few problems have to be faced and solved. In this brief article we shall consider a few of them.

The first problem that has arisen concerns the methodology adopted in the study of Sikhism. This issue relates not only to the study of Sikhism, but also to the study of other religions, or of religion as such. In fact, the problem is ontological in nature. It is basic to almost every religion that there is a Spiritual Reality that is different from the empirical reality we perceive with our senses. Irrespective of the fact whether or not the phenomenal reality is considered to be real or not, the Spiritual Reality is regarded as more real or true. It is the description and definition of this Reality by a religion that form the very basis of the study of that religion. Answers to questions whether that Reality is creative, attributive or otherwise, determine the structure of a religion and furnish valid clues to its study and classification. For example, no student of the *Guru Granth Sahib* can fail to understand that for the Gurus, God is not only Creative and Attributive but He is also Immanent, reveals Himself to man, and operates in history with His Will. The Gurus have repeatedly emphasized these aspects of God. Guru Nanak says, "O Lalo, I say what the Lord commands me to convey."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the scriptures and the basic doctrines of every religion define Reality in their own

way and no study of any religion would be true or even valid unless that definition is kept in view. It is, therefore, axiomatic to say that the study of the ontology or the spiritual base of a religion is essential to the proper understanding of it and its development. Yet it is this very issue that raises the first problem.

Since the advent of science and more particularly since the last century, materialistic philosophies have gained considerable relevance. In fact, in the fields of sociology, economics, political science, psychology and history, it is the materialistic interpretations that are by and large accepted as valid. Each of these social sciences has developed its own particular discipline and methodology of study. As all these studies relate to the phenomena of the empirical world, either taking little account of or denying the transcendent world, their world-views are from the point of view of religion, partial or lopsided. Seen from the angle of social sciences, there is substance in the argument of these scholars of phenomenology that the acceptance of the existence of transcendence is an uncalled for assumption that would knock off what they consider to be their scientific basis. The argument has validity in the field from which it emanates. But, the confusion and the fallacy arise when this argument is carried to the field of religion. For, by its very definition, the study of religion involves the study of the transcendent or the spiritual. Therefore, in the study of religion it would be an equally uncalled for assumption to accept that there is no transcendent element. For many a religion believes that the transcendent is also immanent and operates in history. Accordingly, religion has developed its own methodology and principles of study leading to a world-view which is holistic and comprehensive instead of being limited and narrow. In fact, the denial of the spiritual element would not only vitiate the study of religion, but would also rule out the very meaning or need of such a study. It is in this context that we quote Dr. Hannad Arenett who after invoking the age old view of Parmenides and Plato about the existence of the supra-sensual world writes, "Meanwhile, in increasingly strident voices, the few defenders of metaphysics have warned us of the danger of nihilism inherent in the development; and although they themselves seldom invoke it, they

have an important argument in their favour; it is indeed true that once the super sensual realm is discarded, its opposite the world of appearances as understood for so many centuries, is also annihilated. The sensual, as still understood by positivists, cannot survive the death of the super sensual. No one knew this better than Nietzsche who, with his poetic and metaphoric description of the assassination of God in Zarathustra, has caused so much confusion in these matters. In a significant passage in *The Twilight of Idols*, he clarifies what the word God meant in Zarathustra. It was merely a symbol for the super sensual realm as understood by metaphysics; he now uses instead of God the word true world and says: "We have abolished the true world. What has remained? The apparent one perhaps? Oh no ! with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one."<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that the study of religion, its institutions and history cannot be kept limited to the study of its phenomena because such a study in order to be complete must essentially embrace the study both of its spiritual and empirical aspects. In this context Dr. Huston Smith writes, "Ninian (Smart) approaches religion from the angle of phenomenology and the social sciences, whereas, a philosopher, find phenomenology confining. Ontology is too central to be bracketed."<sup>3</sup>

This observation is particularly valid in the case of the study of a religion like Sikhism in which the Gurus establish an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. In fact, transcendence is fundamental. Every couplet in the over fourteen hundred pages in the *Guru Granth Sahib* stresses that there is a higher level of Reality than the physical reality we perceive with our senses, and, unless we work in tune with that Reality, our problems of conflict, disharmony and war will not be solved. The Guru clearly envisages three stages of the progress of life, after God had expressed Himself. "*First*, He manifested Himself; *second*, He created the individuality; *third*, He created multifarious entities; and *fourth* is the highest level of the God-conscious being who always lives truthfully."<sup>4</sup> And, it is this destiny of man, the Guru exhorts him to fulfil. "O man, you are supreme in God's creation, now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."<sup>5</sup> This is Guru's thesis in the

*Guru Granth* According to it, real knowledge comes from the area of the transcendent. He is the Teacher who enlivens man's spiritual dimension and gives him a universal consciousness and a discriminatory vision. This realm is noetic. It was the knowledge thus gained that made Guru Nanak change radically almost every religious doctrine that stood accepted in the earlier three thousand years of Indian history. Against the world being illusory, delusive (*Mithya, Maya*) or a place of suffering or misery, he called it real and meaningful; against asceticism, monasticism and Sanyasa, he accepted the householder's life and full social participation and responsibility; against celibacy and woman being sin-born, he gave religious sanctity to marriage and equality to women; against the rigidity of Varn Ashram Dhanna and the institution of caste and pollution, he stated that yoga lies not in one-point meditation but in treating all men as one's equal; against withdrawal from life and taking to renunciation and Sanyasa, he stressed that he knows the way who works and shares his earnings with others. There was nothing new in the social milieu to warrant this radical thesis. And, yet, scholars employing the methodology and tools of social sciences say: Guru Nanak contributed no new religious thought; Sikhism is hardly a religion; it is a combination of Vaisnavism and Nathism, two cults recommending celibacy and withdrawal from life, and accepting caste discrimination or that it is a peasant faith. For the Guru, God is the source of truth, knowledge and energy; that way alone we can explain the revolutionary activities of Muhammad and Guru Nanak. That is why in Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism God is given the symbol of Light and in Islam and Sikhism he is called "Truth". For the man of faith the door to truth is through the spiritual dimension of man. For the social sciences the only reality is the physical world and science constitutes the exclusive door to its secrets, the mystic world being just unexplored area of darkness. But, for Guru Nanak, unless man awakens his spiritual dimension, he cannot know reality nor live a truthful and harmonious life in this world; for, spirituality forms the base of all moral life. Schweitzer, while surveying the entire field of western thought, comes to the dismal conclusion that there is no trace of the ethical in the reflective thought of man. That is why

for the social sciences morality is just a defense mechanism or a reaction formation in response to environmental impacts, religion too being a similar behavioural phenomenon without any separate or independent roots.

It is in this context that William Nicholls feels that the culture and consciousness of the modern secular universities are unsuitable to interpret the culture and consciousness of the authors of scriptures, "In so far as we adopt the culture of the secular university, we are systematically in opposition to the texts we are studying. In so far as we take our texts seriously, and are successful in interpreting the intention of their writers, we are in opposition to the university and its culture."<sup>6</sup> Nicholls cites the following typical case of distortion by Morton Smith who is blind to the colossal spiritual energies generated by Christ and the phenomenal response he had over the centuries in shaping history and men. "A striking example of this limitation may be observed in the work of one of the most brilliant and respected present-day scholars. Morton Smith.

His recent book, *The Secret Gospel*, begins as a piece of literary detection which compels admiration, but it takes a startling nose dive at the point that it comes to the historical substance of the matter. On the basis of a second century source of doubtful provenance, which he prefers to more central sources on no other apparent ground than that it was secret, Smith believes he has unmasked the truth about Jesus—he was really a magician, and perhaps one who used homosexual practices in his rites of initiation. The fact that this theory is shocking to the susceptibilities of the believer is not an argument against its truth. After all, many simple Christians will be almost as disturbed by the growing consensus of scholarship that Jesus was thoroughly Jewish and had no thought of founding a new religion. What is more to the point is the total inability of such a theory to explain how such a person could also have been the originator of the lofty spiritual teachings to which both the Gnostic and ecclesiastical traditions bear witness.<sup>7</sup> What needs to be emphasized is that religious phenomena or history is intimately related to, if not the product and expression of, its spiritual base. Both components have to be studied together one cannot be fruitfully studied in isolation of

the other. No wonder Nicholls writes, "Thus, it can seem somewhat ludicrous to watch scholars in religious studies abdicating a function they alone can perform and bowing down to the latest theories in anthropology, which seem unable to recognize in religion anything beyond a highly abstract code for ordering data and uniting and separating bits of information. Even if it has to be acknowledged that religions may perform such functions, to suppose that this exhausts their role is to betray a crass failure to enter the outlook of other human beings, for whom religion was and perhaps still is a living reality, opening doors on to the spiritual dimension and raising their existence to a higher level."<sup>8</sup>

We do not say that an anthropologist or sociologist should not study religion, but it would only be an anthropologist's or sociologist's view of religion by the use of his own methodology. Whereas the anthropologist is entitled to express his point of view about a religion, the reader is also equally entitled to know that the study is by an anthropologist by the use of an anthropologist's methodology. Because, from the point of view of the man of religion, such studies would be limited in their scope, partial in their vision and inadequate as a study of man in the totality of his being and functioning, i.e., of his spiritual and empirical life.

There is also another related point. In the study of religion it is not only necessary to know the methodology the author is using, but it is important to know who the writer is and what is his own faith or training. Unlike as in science, religion is also the study of the inner life of man. It is, therefore, relevant and necessary to know about the religious belief and background of the writer, i.e., whether or not he accepts the existence of the transcendent or the supra-sensual elements. It is in this context that Dr. Noel Q. King writes, "One general conclusion which I draw from a long study of the critics, of which the above is a sketch, is that it is most important to remember the personality and circumstance of the critic. In a Natural Science like chemistry it may not be necessary to know anything about the human being who is writing. In any subject which entails human subjects, the work must be put into a personal context. Accordingly,

one feels every work of critical scholarship should have a government Statutory warning that its consumption may be deleterious to the soul's health. If it is to do with religion, it should also have a statement of ingredients, including the religious standing of the writer. If he or she is a believer, it is necessary to know this, so that the critical reader can allow for bias. If he or she is not a believer, we should have some indication of that too, lest the disillusionment or enlightenment of a post-Christian, a post-Jew or a post-whatever should give the critic rosy-coloured spectacles or a jaundiced outlook.<sup>9</sup> Let us quote C.G. Jung about objectivity of Sigmund Freud, "There was no mistaking the fact that Freud was emotionally involved in his sexual theory to an extraordinary degree. When he spoke of it, his tone became urgent, almost anxious, and all signs of his normally critical and skeptical manner vanished. A strange, deeply moved expression came over his face, the cause of which I was at a loss to understand. I had a strong intuition that for him sexuality was a sort of numinosum. This was confirmed by a conversation, which took place some three years later (in 1910), again in Vienna. I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, 'My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.' He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, 'And promise me this one thing, my dear son, that you will go to church every Sunday.'<sup>10</sup> It is strange that Freud, who was basing his theories on and interpreting the dreams of others, including those of Jung, was curiously enough anxious to conceal his own and his private life. The motive for such concealment could hardly be academic or scientific. Jung writes, "Freud had a dream-I would not think it right to air the problem it involved. I interpreted it as best I could but added that a great deal more could be said about it if he would supply me with some additional details from his private life. Freud's response to these words was a curious look - a look of the utmost suspicion. Then he said, 'But I cannot risk my authority.' At that moment he lost it altogether. That sentence burned itself into my memory; and in it the end of our relationship was already foreshadowed.

Freud was placing personal authority above truth.”<sup>11</sup>

We quote the instance of another great man. It is well known that the followers of Ramanuja, a philosopher of Bhakti, are very particular that the food they eat is undefiled. Therefore, the rule had been that if while cooking or eating the food another person cast a glance on it, the entire food was thrown away and the food cooked and eaten again. This being the Vaisnava culture, let us record what Mahatma Gandhi, a protagonist of the Hindu tradition, writes, “.....but for years I have taken nothing but fruit in Mohammedan or Christian household.....In my opinion the idea that interdining and intermarrying is necessary for national growth is a superstition borrowed from the West. Eating is a process just as vital as the other sanitary necessities of life. And if mankind had not, much to its harm, made of eating a fetish and an indulgence, we would have performed the operation of eating in private even as we perform other necessary functions of life in private. Indeed the highest culture in Hinduism regards eating in that light and there are thousands of Hindus still living who will not eat their food in the presence of anybody.”<sup>12</sup> It is not our object to deride anyone, but we wish only to show that cultural or personal prejudices die hard, and these consciously or unconsciously colour one’s vision. It cannot, thus, be denied that in the study of religion objectivity of vision can, at best, be only limited. It is, therefore, essential to know of the background, beliefs and predilections of the author in order to enable the reader to assess and appreciate the value of his views and the slant of his vision. In scientific studies the data and facts are mechanical, quantitative and special that are generally measurable by fixed and accepted yardsticks. Even in that field we have come to a stage where the observer’s relative position in space and time affects his measurement and inferences. In the matter of religion the difficulties of unbiased assessment are far too great because here the field of study is primarily the emotional, the moral and the spiritual life of an individual or his society. An illustration would be relevant. Two ideas are intimately connected with the martyrdom of Christ, namely, that of the act of redemption and of the resurrection of Christ. Howsoever one may view these ideas, it would, indeed, be

impossible to understand and interpret the moral base and development of Christianity without accepting their validity, the deep faith and response they inspired and the abiding influence they exercised on the early Christian society. In the same way, it is fundamental to the Sikh religion, as stated by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus in their hymns, that God had revealed Himself to them and that their hymns embody the commands of God. Therefore, in spiritual matters the genuineness of an idea is indicated by the spiritual and moral faith it evokes in the hearts of the people concerned. We do not urge that a sociologist or an anthropologist is debarred from evaluating religious matters and developments. But, the man of faith has also the right to know the writer's belief, i.e., whether he is an atheist, a materialist, an evolutionist, a Marxist or a sociologist. We shall specify our point still further. W.H. McLeod, while evaluating the originality of the religious thesis of Guru Nanak, writes that it is misleading to suggest that he originated a school of thought or a set of teachings.<sup>13</sup> As against it Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, the Muslim philosopher and scholar, finds in the entire panorama of Indian religious history only two tall persons, namely, Lord Buddha and Guru Nanak.<sup>14</sup> These contrasted assessments might be explained by the fact that whereas McLeod has for many years been a part of a local Christian missionary organization in the Punjab, for Muhammad Iqbal, Guru Nanak is the only man of God in India, who like Prophet Muhammad combined the spiritual life and the empirical life of man and started a religion of the 'deed', proclaiming and preaching the Oneness of God and the brotherhood of man. Another student of cultural history, H.S. Oberoi, views Islam and Sikhism in altogether a different light. "Sikh religion is first and foremost a peasant faith. Sociologists have often spoken of how Islam is an urban religion, Sikhism may be spoken of as rural religion. When dealing with the beliefs, rituals and practices of the Sikhs - be they religious or political- it is always worthwhile to constantly remind ourselves that we are fundamentally dealing with the peasantry and the world-view of this social class has historically always been very different from other social classes. A lot of knotty issues to do with Sikh studies would become

easier to solve if we stop applying paradigms that have developed out of the study of urban social groups -merchants, middle-class or city workers-and deploy concepts that relate to the day-to-day life of the peasantry.”<sup>15</sup>

In the above context, two points can hardly be overemphasized, namely, what is the methodology of study a scholar is using and what are his personal belief and background, i.e., whether the study, examination or interpretation is under the discipline of sociology, anthropology or religion.

Next is the issue of breaking the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. In most religions for one reason or the other, this dichotomy exists; and it is more so in the Indian religions in which asceticism, monasticism, celibacy and ahimsa are almost the essential features of the religious life. In India, Guru Nanak was the first person to break this dichotomy, and proclaim a religion of life-affirmation, with emphasis on moral life of man. Monasticism, asceticism and celibacy had become such essential symbols of the religious life that the Naths questioned Guru Nanak how he was claiming to follow the religious path while living the life of a householder. Similar doubt was expressed by Sant Ram Dass of Maharashtra when he found the Sixth Guru riding a horse armed like a Warrior. The Guru's reply was clear and categoric. He said that Guru Nanak had given up mammon but had not withdrawn from the world, and that his sword was for the defence of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. In short, it is the Sikh doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri* which looks odd to votaries of pacifist religions. Outside India Moses and Prophet Muhammad broke this dichotomy and each created a religious society that not only sought to tackle the socio-political problems of man but also sanctioned the use of force for a moral purpose. On account of this difference between the pacifist and non-pacifist religions and the consequent differences in conditioning by the respective traditions, persons like Toynbee are critical of the socio-political activities of Prophet Muhammad and Indians like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Jadunath Sircar are critical of the militancy of Guru Gobind Singh. In contrast we have already quoted

the eulogy of Muhammad Iqbal in admiration of the lofty religious proclamation Guru Nanak made in India. Similarly, it was Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim Sufi saint, who was so inspired by Guru Gobind Singh that he not only sent his followers and sons to fight for the cause of the Guru, but two of his sons actually sacrificed their lives while fighting in the army of the Guru. The annals of man hardly record another instance of this kind where a saint of a living religion should sacrifice his sons for the cause of a man of God of a different religious faith, especially while his co-religionist should be the ruling emperor of the day. We, therefore, wish to emphasize that scholars drawn from the pacifist cultural background so often fail to understand the Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination, or the doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri* and the saint-soldier, logically following from the ideology of Guru Nanak that combines the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This is exactly the reason that despite the ideological basis explained by the sixth Guru himself, scholars with the pacifist background try to find extraneous but fantastic reasons for militancy on the part of the Sikh Gurus while pursuing a righteous cause. This is what some western scholars write. "The indigenous elements in Sikhism are largely those customs of the tribes of Jats, who made Sikhism their own, and the marginal elements are those of the Nath Yogi tradition, which with Vaisnava Bhakti was primarily responsible for the Sant synthesis.<sup>16</sup> "The teachings of Nanak do not have a direct causal connection with the later growth..... which should be understood largely in terms of the historical events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."<sup>17</sup> Little do these scholars realize that tribal traits of character have never given rise to new religious ideologies. It is a significant fact of modern scholarship that whereas not a single Muslim scholar finds the least discontinuity between the ideology of first Gurus and the later Gurus, it is only some scholars drawn from the pacifist traditions that discern any discordance between the ideology of Guru Nanak and that of Guru Gobind Singh. And, since both in India and the West most of the scholars are drawn from the pacifist background and traditions, this is the second problem concerning Sikh studies.

Partly related to the first two problems is the third issue arising from the increasing secularization of modern life. For the last over two centuries religion has been virtually excluded from the socio-political life of the Western countries. The position in the Communist countries is also the same. Keeping the danger of secularism in view the representatives of North American Churches suggested: "The American view was that there are three realities: Christianity, other religions, and secularism, and that these three realities can be either allies or enemies. It was argued that Christians had to choose whether they were to ally themselves with the other religions against secularism. The Americans, especially the Boston Personalists who were leading the debate at that time, took the view that secularism is a common danger for all religions and, therefore, there must be an alliance of all religions to fight secularism. European theologians, particularly Barth, Brunner, and Kramer took a totally different view. They maintained that secularization, not secularism, is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas."<sup>18</sup>

The rise of modern national state is something which Toynbee laments: "This transfer of allegiance from the Western Christian Church to parochial Western secular states was given a positive form-borrowed from the Graeco-Roman Civilisation-by the Renaissance." "On this political plane the Renaissance revived the Graeco-Roman worship of parochial states as goddesses." "This unavowed worship of parochial states was by far the most prevalent religion in the Western World in A.D. 1956."<sup>19</sup> This has led to a contradiction. For, where there is a war between two national states, the churches of the opposing states pray to God for the victory of their own state, thereby bringing into ridicule the very institution of religion and the Church. We have already stated that in Sikhism the integral combination of the spiritual life and the empirical life of man has led to the doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri*. But, an outsider while reading a paper at an academic conference on Hindu and Sikh religions, views the issue quite differently. He says, "Sikh scholars see the *miri-piri* concept

as an inseparable whole in the religious order. Non-Sikhs have come to see a religion-politics linkage in Sikhism and deduct the root cause of the current crisis in Punjab to this.”<sup>20</sup> Another scholar is critical of the Sikhs for their anxiety to maintain a separate religious identity. He writes: “But when it comes to the Indians belonging to religions which originated within India, such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, many a Hindu regard -them as downright unpatriotic or unspiritual or both, if they wish to maintain their distinct identity from the Hindus.”<sup>21</sup> In a similar strain another scholar questions the relevance- and role of religion in the field of social reform or justice. He writes, “Untouchability has been abolished by political legislation. Government steps are persistently being taken to uplift the castes considered backward so far. As such, the very point against which original Sikhism had reacted no longer remains a point of contention. Moreover, the problem of social inequality and the consequent demand for justice no longer remains a province of religious organization. It is the government agencies who have to look into the problem in order to eradicate social inequality and provide social justice. As such, the problem has shifted its locale from the religious to the political.”<sup>22</sup>

We have given the above examples to indicate that men of religion feel that in view of the growing secularization of modern life and a consequent tendency to encroach on the religious field, it is not only necessary that religion should be studied with the tools of its own discipline, but that the funding and functioning of such academic studies should be kept free from the influences of the modern state and its secular life.

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**SECTION II**  
**IDEOLOGY**



### CHAPTER 3

## SIKHISM, VAISNAVISM, VEDANTA AND NATHISM —A COMPARISON

DALJEET SINGH

### Introduction

The subject of this paper is to understand the uniqueness of the Sikh Religion and why and how Guru Nanak in laying down the principles of his religion and pursuing his mission completely departed from the earlier Indian traditions. In this attempt we shall describe the essentials of Sikhism and briefly compare them with three of his contemporary religious systems.

### Sikhism

The bedrock of every religion is the spiritual experience of its founder. Let us see what is the spiritual experience of the Sikh Gurus and how they define God. Obviously, it is this experience that forms the driving force of the mission of a prophet and determines his goal. Guru Nanak says, "O, Lalo, I speak what the Lord commands me to convey."<sup>1</sup> This means two things. First, that God is both Transcendent and Immanent, and, thus, operates in history. Second, that the Guru had a mission to perform. Guru Nanak calls God: "The Sole One, Self-existent and Immanent, Creator Person, Without Fear and Without Enmity, Timeless Person,<sup>2</sup> Un-incarnated, Self-Created and Gracious Enlightener", "Benevolent", and "Ocean of Virtues". As to the character of spiritual experience, it is recorded, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord, He is All Love. Rest He is Ineffable."<sup>3</sup> It is this definition of God as "Love" and "Ocean of attributes" that governs the entire structure of Sikhism and the growth of its history. It is in this background that Guru Nanak gave for his mission the call, "If you want to play the game of love, Come with your head on your palm."<sup>4</sup> and Guru Gobind Singh declared, "Let all listen to the Truth I proclaim, He who

loves, attains to God.”<sup>5</sup> We have, thus, to see what are the doctrinal implications of the spiritual experience of the Gurus and their definition of God regarding the various issues we seek to understand. The metaphysical position of Sikhism being a monotheism is clear enough, but much more significant is the inference that the world is not only real but also meaningful. For, the Guru says, “True is He, true is His creation.”<sup>6</sup> “God created the world and permeated it with His Light.”<sup>7</sup> “God created the world of life and planted *Naam* in it, making it the place for righteous activity.”<sup>8</sup> Further, apart from the world being meaningful and a place for virtuous living, God has a deep interest in life and man. “God is eyes to the blind, milk to the child, and riches to the poor.”<sup>9</sup> “It is the innermost nature of God to help the erring.”<sup>10</sup> “This religious experience of the Gurus emphatically lays down the direction in which God wants man’s spiritual activity to move. Altruism is, therefore, a direction and the methodology prescribed by the Guru both for the super-man and the seeker. For, “with God it is only the deeds in this world that count.”<sup>11</sup> “Good, righteousness, virtues, and the giving up of vice are the way to realize the essence of God.”<sup>12</sup> “Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (God) to sprout.”<sup>13</sup> God showers His Grace where the lowly are cared for.”<sup>14</sup> “It is by our deeds that we become near or away from God.”<sup>15</sup> And finally, the Guru clinches the issue when he says, “Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living.”<sup>16</sup> “The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk but by treating all alike, and as one’s equal. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation or roaming all over places, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but by remaining God-centred while doing the affairs of the world.”<sup>17</sup> “By despising the world one gets not to God.”<sup>18</sup> In the *Japuji* the Guru pointedly asks a question as to what is the godly way and himself replies to it saying that by carrying out the Will of God one becomes a *Sachiaara* or God-man. And, God’s Will is attributive, God being “All Love” and the “Ocean of Virtues”.

The logic of the above approach of life-affirmation leads to a number of other inferences. Since love can be expressed and virtues

practised only in life or social life, the Gurus clearly lived and recommended a householder's life. Except Guru Harkrishan who died at an early age, all the Gurus were married householders. This inference from the thesis of the Gurus was not just incidental, it was clear and categoric. Because Guru Nanak not only bypassed his son Siri Chand, a pious Udasi, in choosing his successor, but the second and the third Gurus clearly excluded the recluses, ascetics or Sanyasis from the Sikh fold. In short, monasticism, asceticism and other-worldliness were clearly rejected. Instead, the worldly life was accepted as the arena for the practice of virtues for spiritual growth. Similarly, life-affirmation and the rejection of celibacy led to the second inference, namely, that the status of woman should be equal to that of man. The Guru says, "Why call woman impure when without woman there would be none,"<sup>19</sup> and when it was she who gave birth to kings among men. This was the logic of Guru Nanak's path, against the one of celibacy and women being considered sin-born and therefore an impediment in the spiritual path. In Hinduism women were classed with *Sudras*, being generally regarded as unfit for the spiritual path.

Guru Nanak's system leads to a third inference as well, namely, the importance of work and production. He says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or a saint. Look not up to him and touch not his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others."<sup>20</sup> It is significant that after his long tours Guru Nanak worked as a peasant and started a *Langar* (free food for all and service at one platform) till the end of his days. This practice of earning one's own living continued till, after the Fifth Guru, organizational work of the *Panth* and confrontation with the Empire made the carrying out of a private profession impossible. It is important that all these doctrines of their religion were not only scripturally sanctioned but were also actually practised by the Sikh Gurus. This was very essential because, these doctrines being so radically different from, or even opposed to, the earlier religious traditions and trends, their import and importance would have been completely missed or misunderstood if these had not been visibly lived and demonstrated in practice. For example, it is significant that in order to establish the equality of man, and demolish the ugly caste discrimination, Guru

Nanak's first act after his enlightenment was to take a low caste Muslim as his sole companion, emphasizing thereby that anyone who wanted to join his path had completely to shed all caste prejudices. That is also why while organizing local *Sangats* he wanted them to meet together and run *langars* so as to eat together and share their food with the poor. For him this was the path to establish the brotherhood of man. The Guru not only recommended work and sharing of incomes but also deprecated the amassing of wealth. He says, "Riches cannot be gathered without sin but these do not keep company after death."<sup>21</sup> "God's bounty belongs to all but men grab it for themselves."<sup>22</sup> Just as in the Indian religious systems of his times monasticism, asceticism, celibacy and ahimsa went together with the acceptance of the caste ideology in the social field, similarly, in Guru Nanak's system all such ideas and institutions were rejected and instead a concerted effort was made to establish the brotherhood of man and give religious sanction to the life of the householder, the need of work, production and sharing, and the acceptance of all kinds of social responsibility. We have seen that the Gurus' experience of God being "Love" and their description of God being "Protector" (*Raakbaa*), "Just" (*Adli*), "Benevolent", "Helper of the weak", "Shelter of the Shelterless", "Destroyer of the Tyrant" enjoins a clear responsibility on the god-men to toe that line, namely, to live a religious life while accepting full social participation and responsibility. It is in line with this wholly radical religious thesis that the Gurus changed the entire methodology and the direction of the spiritual life. "The God-centred' lives truthfully while a householder."<sup>23</sup> The God-man has to be the instrument or the soldier of God in this world.

The acceptance of full social responsibility has other implications too. Everything that militates against an honest and righteous discharge of a householder's life has to be tackled. It is in this context that Gurus recommended the rejection of asceticism, monasticism and celibacy and the acceptance of a householder's life of work and sharing of wealth, and the elimination

of caste distinctions. But, there is one thing more which most of us have failed to understand. In the life of man there are not only social pressures but there are also what modern life calls political pressures. Evidently, both are problems of living in a society. These societal problems the modern man has artificially divided into three sections, economic, social and political. In actual life these three kinds do not occur separately, nor can these be segregated to be dealt with separately. The religious man is confronted with all of them and it becomes his religious duty and responsibility to tackle them and to resist and react against injustice and evil forces whatever be the quarters from which those should emanate. It is obvious that socio-political problems cannot be solved individually or by mere preaching; these can be dealt with only by a properly and religiously motivated society. It is equally plain that in order to counter and resist evil political pressures it may at sometime become necessary to use force in aid of a righteous cause. Here it is important to note that Guru Nanak as the prophet of this new religious thesis did three things. He laid the foundations of a society that was to be trained and motivated to react against injustice. Wherever he went, he organized local societies with faith in his system. He chose and appointed a successor to carry on the mission he had started. His was not a religion where the object was just personal salvation as an end in itself, or the salvation of a few. His was not a *Math* or *Khankah* for a few seeking only spiritual attainments. Guru Nanak taught, as was exemplified by his own life, that the spiritual man has a social mission as well. For that very reason it was he who clarified another principle of his religion, namely, his stand regarding Ahimsa. He says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating. They do not know what is flesh or non-flesh and what is sin or non-sin."<sup>24</sup> In this and other hymns he exposes the cant of non-meat eating, which was based on the principle of Ahimsa. He adds that there is life in every grain of corn or food we eat. In the context of Indian religions, this explanation was extremely necessary for a society for which he contemplated the course of action as indicated in his hymns. For, resistance to aggression or oppression cannot at times be done without the use of

force. Therefore, for the execution of the religious mission of Guru Nanak it was essential to create a society, appoint a successor, and clearly eliminate the religious sanction to the curb of Ahimsa in the socio-political field. Thirdly, Guru Nanak clearly identified the socio-political problems of his times. The greatest problems were the tyrannical barbarity of the invaders, rapidly of the rulers, the corruption and misrule of the officials,” and the hypocrisy and greed of the Mullahs and priests. On the-issue of cruelty, loot and murder by the invaders, he even criticizes the local rulers for their unpreparedness. Nay, he even complains to God for allowing the weak to be tyrannized by the strong. Very often the logic of this criticism has been missed. Guru’s criticism was not an empty rhetoric. In fact, Guru Nanak was clearly laying down the new ideology for high society and identifying the tasks to be accomplished by it. It is in this light that we have to understand the institutions of succession, its continuing even after the doctrinal base had been finalized and the scripture compiled by the Fifth Guru, and its closure by the Tenth Guru only after the creation of the Khalsa. The Sikh does not pray to God for *Moksha*, but he prays for millions of hands to serve Him. This religious thesis of the Gurus, as well shall see, is entirely different from the earlier Indian religious systems like Vaisnavism, Nathism and Vedantism in vogue in those times. Therefore, the Gurus by their personal examples and martyrdoms established the validity and the practicality of their religious system. In the absence of it, Sikhism could hardly have been understood, much less followed. In fact, Gurus’ spiritual experience of God being all Love involves logically and correspondingly total responsibility towards all beings. In the Gurus’ system it is simply impossible for the religious person and his society to avoid responsible reaction against injustice wherever it may occur. Sikhism accepts the “idea that specifically designated organized bands of men should play a creative part in the political world destroying the established order and reconstructing society according to Word of God.”<sup>25</sup> Guru Nanak, thus, laid the foundations of the doctrines of *Miri* and *Piri* that later fructified in the form of the Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat. This doctrine of *Miri-Piri* or Saint-Soldier is so radical in the Indian context that Sant

Ram Dass of Maharashtra had to be explained by the Sixth Guru himself that he was pursuing the religion of Guru Nanak and that his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. Similarly, the anti-asceticism and the householder's life of Guru Nanak looked so odd to the Naths that they questioned his very claim to be following the religious path. But, the Guru's reply to them is very revealing of his new thesis because he asserted that it is the Naths who did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path.

What we wish to emphasize is that it is not just incidental, but it is the very logic of Guru Nanak's system that involved on the one hand the rejection of monasticism, asceticism, celibacy and Ahimsa and on the other hand led to the creation of an organized and disciplined society that accepted total social responsibility. It is in this context that we should understand and interpret the history of the Guru period. We shall revert to this point at the close of our discussion. At present, let us give a brief outline of the three religious systems, namely, Vaisnavism, Vedantism; and Nathism, that were prevalent in the time of Guru Nanak. These systems, the Guru clearly found incongruous with his spiritual experience and he clearly rejected them and simultaneously started his own *Panth* in pursuance of his mission.

### **Vaisnavism**

It is a generally accepted view that Bhagvatism arose as a non-Vedic cult which was for the first time included in the Hindu Complex as an alternative mode of *Moksha* in the *Bhagvad Gita* which is admittedly an eclectic compilation. The system is ritualistic and involves (i) visit to the temple, (ii) selection of material for worship, (iii) worship of the deity, (iv) muttering of the Mantras, and (v) Yogic meditation. Similarly, the worship of Hari involves (i) remembering and repeating the name of Hari, (ii) constant worship with devotion, (iii) salutation and resorting to the feet of Hari, and (iv) surrender of the soul with devotion. Two things are significant about this Bhakti; it is entirely ritualistic without any reference to socio-moral conduct. Secondly, it was accepted as only an alternative mode of *Moksha* which was given a low priority. In fact, the *Bhagvad Gita* does not prescribe a unified system. Apart from its

different modes of *Moksha* being unintegrated into one unified whole, the metaphysical position is also quite incongruous because the dualism of Yoga and the pantheism of Upanisads exist side by side with the concepts of Vedic ritualism and mysticism. It is, thus, believed that the *Gita* was more concerned in bringing variant systems within the Hindu fold than with their integration into a systematic whole; and that the permission of *Shudras* and women to the path of devotion was allowed because the Buddhist had admitted them to their monasteries without discrimination. This is supported by the fact that the *Gita* gives full sanction to the discriminatory rigidity of the caste system. It says that the Lord created the four Varnas with their separate specified duties and that it was more meritorious to do, even though inefficiently, the duties of one's own caste than to do, even though efficiently, the duties of another caste. "The *Gita* brought about a compromise between the worldly life of allotted duties and the hermit's life of absolute renouncement." "On the one hand we purify our minds by non-attachment and yet, on the other hand, we continue to perform all the ritualistic and other duties belonging to our particular caste or state of life, i.e., the prescribed stages of four ashramas."<sup>26</sup> Both in the *Bhagvad Gita* and the system of Ramanuja, Bhakti meant only *Upasana* or 'just meditation with a contemplative union with God as the goal. This Bhakti does not involve a devotional or personal love as later in the time of Sandilya or the Bhagvat Purana.

Later arose the theory of Avtarhood, namely, that God incarnates Himself in order to save man. This is a Vaisnava contribution to the complex of Hindu systems. It is believed, as in the eclectic character of *Bhagvad Gita*, that the doctrine of Avtarhood is only a way of absorbing heterodox and variant cults by declaring their gods to be the incarnations of Vishnu. Accordingly, founders of even dualistic systems like Sankhya and Jainism were also declared avtaras. In the long run twenty-three avtaras were declared, including Lord Rama, dwarf, man-lion, tortoise, Rsabha, Kapila, and others. While this doctrine enabled the absorption of heterodox creeds, and made the new entrants to accept the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmanical ideology of

caste, it could evidently never make for the development of a coherent or unified religious or metaphysical system prescribing a uniform or integrated methodology or goals.

The next development in the course of Vaisnavism is the period of Sandilya and Bhagvat Purana. Alvar Saints appeared in the South and Saints like Tuka Ram, Ramanand, Chaitanya, Mirabai and others arose in the north, west and the east of India. Dr. Tara Chand believes that this new development which took place, quite often in the lower sections of the Hindu society, followed the influence and impact of Islam which was non-hierarchical.

Though there are other exponents of Vaisnavism like Nimbarka, or Madhva who is a dualist, Ramanuja is considered to be the best of them. His system is pantheistic, Brahman being both manifest and unmanifest. The individual souls and the material world are the body or the attributes of Brahman. He accepts the presence of *ahankara* and explains human activity virtually on the basis of Sankhya. For him *Ishwara* exists in five forms, (i) As Narayana or Paravasudeva, wearing jewels and ornaments, he lives in Vakuntha on a throne surrounded by Sesa (serpent), Garuda and other delivered souls, (ii) As in four forms including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship him, (iii) As in the Avtaras, fish, tortoise, swan and others, (iv) As the soul of each being even when it goes to heaven or hell, (v) As in the idols kept in the houses. Souls are of three kinds, (i) eternal souls like that of Garuda, (ii) the delivered souls, and (iii) the bound ones.

In his system Bhakti is integrated both with ritualism and Jnana Yoga which are also its essential components, It is significant the Ramanuja considers both Vedic ritualism and Brahm Vidya of Upanisads as of equal importance and validity, so much so that ritualistic acts have to be practised even by a Jnani. It is important to note that his Bhakti is open only to the three higher castes. To *Sudras* only the system of surrender or Prapatti is open. The caste ideology and the ideas of pollution are clearly accepted and practised. Brahmans only can be priests for the purpose of idol worship. The concept of pollution is so important that if while cooking or eating one's food another person casts his glance on it, the entire food has to be thrown away. Celibacy

is recommended and women are considered sin-born. They are, therefore, not admitted as Vaisnavas.

In the Bhagvad Purana, nine modes of worship are suggested. These are all formal and ritualistic like listening to the praise of God, repeating the name of God, image worship, etc., without any insistence on socio-moral activity. Padma Purana prescribes seven modes of worship: (i) imprinting of marks on the body and forehead, (ii) repeating mantras, (iii) drinking water used for the feet of the idol, (iv) eating food offered to the idol, (v) service of the devotees, (vi) fasting on designated days of the lunar month, (vii) laying Tulsi leaves at the feet of the idol.

Both Vallabha and Chaitanya accept Bhakti as the sole method of *Moksha*. In the former system the modes of worship are all formal like singing the praises of God, Arti, image Worship, etc. Householder's life is allowed but the devotee visits the temple of the Guru for worship of the idol at fixed intervals. In the case of Chaitanya, Bhakti is an extremely emotional affair, involving ecstatic dancing and singing. While Chaitanya's devotees were from all castes, even Muslims, his followers, except for Bairagis, observed the caste system regarding cooking and other matters. It needs to be clarified that Karam Yoga meant only ritualistic acts and not socio-moral deeds. In fact, because of the general insistence on celibacy, socio-moral activity is virtually excluded. Maitra, who had made a detailed study of the ethics of all Hindu systems writes that a common feature of the doctrine of the ideal life is "the conception of the ideal as a negation or at least as a transcendence of the empirical life proper and that this state is thus a super moral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral idea." It is transcendental state of deliverance from all struggles of life. It is generally and essentially a state of quiescence."<sup>27</sup>

In sum, Vaisnavism has seven fundamentals. Its scriptures, as of all other Hindu systems, are the Vedas and Upanisads. It lays down the doctrine of avtarhood which is a Vaisnava contribution to the Hindu religion. The ideology of caste is accepted fully as also the idea of pollution. Its methodology of worship or devotion is clearly formal, ritualistic, contemplative, or intensely emotional without any reference to socio-moral life. Hooper, who has made a detailed

study of Alvar Saints says that moral character is hardly a strong feature of their Bhakti. The reason for it is obvious. The entire approach is other-worldly and for liberation from the tangles of life. Consequently, this is also the reason that except in the case of Vallabhacharya, celibacy is the rule and the position of women is distinctly downgraded. Ramanuja denies Vedic studies to women. They were not allowed to mix with men for devotion nor allowed to become nuns. Shankradeva, a liberal saint, says, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of her captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this the wise keep away from the company of women."<sup>28</sup> He did not allow women to join even the religious functions of men. For she was deemed to be a temptress. Murti writes about Shankradeva that he was interested only "In establishing religious freedom and fellowship rather than social overhaul. To trouble about the improvement of social conditions, perhaps, deemed to him as little profitable."<sup>29</sup> Sixthly, Ahimsa is prescribed as a cardinal rule for all Vaisnavas. Seventhly, the goal is union with or merger in God or Brahman, though ritualistic duties are prescribed till the end of one's days. There is one more point for mention. In Hinduism the sexual or tantrik method is accepted as an alternative system of *Moksha* and a saint like Rama Krishna also accepts its validity.

## **Vedanta**

Vedantism is a very mixed concept. Basically, Upanisadic thought is the Vedantic thought. This system which is mainly opposed to the earlier Vedic ritualism (*Purva Mimansa*) is in itself very variant. It can form the basis of materialism, atheism, monoism, i.e., of the world being the emanation of Brahman or of the world being just illusory and Brahman alone being real. That is why later philosophers like Shankra, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and others have all given divergent interpretations of the Upanisads. Because of the short space available, it will not be possible to indicate all the diverse views on the subject. We have already stated the views of Ramanuja, Vasisht Advaita. We shall here describe briefly the Upanisadic thought and

the Vedanta of Shankra which is the most popular Vedanisc system.

It is necessary to note that the Upanisadic thoughts were not meant to be a religious system. These comprise teachings meant only for a small section or an elite most of whom had withdrawn themselves to the seclusion of the forest. The search was for an intuitional, blessed and ineffable mystic experience of unity or identity with Brahman. With the knowledge of it, they say, everything becomes known. Similies of a river merging into the sea, of a seed growing into an oak tree and of a whole of which everything is a part are given. This fundamental reality is not personal like God of theists to whom we pray with devotion and love. It is this that has led to the concepts of “That thou art”, “I am Brahman”, and of Katha Upanisad saying, “He who perceives diversity in this world suffers the death of all deaths”, and of Brahman alone being real the rest being all false and illusory. Upanisads, thus, contain divergent and contradictory thoughts without any attempt to reconcile them into a coherent system. As to methodology, it is primarily meditational with the ideal of four ashramas. The last two ashramas of Vanprastha and Sanyasa are basically other-worldly and ascetic, involving disconnection with the delusive secular life. The final achievement is the result of one’s own effort and not the gift of God or his grace. The *Jivan Mukta* has no role to play and is indifferent to all actions whether good or evil. The distinction of good and evil is transcended and it is a liberation from the conditions of worldly existence.

Later the authors of the Upanisads also accepted the validity of Vedic ritualism and its social commands regarding caste. As such, they became a component of the overall Vedic system and gained scriptural sanctity as a limb of the Vedas. Therefore, for any serious consideration of Vedanta, the above-noted factual position about the Upanisads, on which the various types of Vedanta are based, has to be kept in view. Hiriyana writes, “The diversity of teaching noticed in connection with the theoretical teaching of the Upanisads has its reflex in their practical teachings, both in regard to the ideal to be achieved and the means of achieving it.”<sup>30</sup> For example, “one Upanisad alone mentioning three such different means of attaining immortality — devotion to

truth, penance and vedic study and ascribing them to three specific teachers.”<sup>31</sup> Secondly, it is also clear that the Upanisads and the sanctioned social system of the period give clear approval to the caste system. The Chhandogya writes that “the wicked are born again as outcasts, dogs or swine.” “The Brihadaranyaka (VI. 2, 15-16) gives a similar account. The rules of punishment in Grih sutras and Dharama-sutras are grossly discriminatory.”<sup>32</sup> It must be noted that “the rules of punishment are largely based on caste consideration, so that for having committed the same offence, a Brahman may pass unscathed, but a *Shudra* may even receive capital punishment.”<sup>33</sup> “The period of Sutras witnessed the gradual hardening of the caste system in general and the deterioration of the position of Vaishyas and *Shudras* in particular.” “The *Shudra* was denied the privilege of Sanyasa (renunciation).”<sup>34</sup> “We see in the Dharam Sutras the beginning of the formal theory of defilement resulting in the taboo of all contact on the part of a pure man of the upper castes with an impure man, namely, a member of the lowest caste.”<sup>35</sup> “The Dharam Sutras show that the caste distinction has outstripped its proper limits and has even invaded the field of civil and criminal law.”<sup>36</sup> Evidently, the Upanisadic mystic system, though other-worldly and meditational in its approach, accepts the ritualism and the caste ideology of the Vedas.

### **Shankara’s view**

Gaudapada and Shankra pursue that line of thought in the Upanisads which considers world to be just an illusion and Brahman alone to be real. Gaudapada writes, “The manifold universe does not exist as a form of reality nor does it exist of itself.” “Having attained to non-duality one should behave in the world like an insensible object.”<sup>37</sup> All diversity according to Shankra is false (*Mithya*). Therefore, to work while accepting the phenomenal existence of the world is sheer *Avidya*. The goal is to realize the truth of Brahman alone being real and to deny the world. Ishvara and individual souls are parts of Brahman. Man is ignorant since he does not realize that all change in the world is without any meaning or validity, thereby denying the very basis of all socio-moral life. Shankra says, “I am not born how can

there be either birth or death for me? I am neither male nor female, nor am I sexless. I am the Blessed peaceful one, who is the only cause of the origin and dissolution of the world.”<sup>38</sup> All changes in the world are due to *Maya* which is neither real nor unreal nor related to Brahman. All methods of devotion and worship are fruitless, the goal being the Absolute and not *Saguna*, or qualified Brahman, God or *Ishvara* which is a lower stage to be transcended by the *Jnani*. In fact, the path of devotion; he says, is for persons of narrow or poor intellect. Since he cannot deny the scriptural character of the Vedas, he says that the path of ritualism or sacrifices is prescribed out of compassion for persons of low and average intellect and it can gain for them only heaven. As in *Sankhya* Yoga, withdrawal from the illusory adjuncts of *Maya* is suggested. Starting with *Vairagya* and dissociation with the world, the mystic achievement can be made only as a Sanyasin or renouncer of the world, giving up all works good or bad and as one who is unwilling to accept even the grace of God. The method prescribed, as in the *Upanisads*, is of Vedic study, reflection and meditation. The aim is to realize, “I am Brahman (Abam Brabm asm;).” It is an intellectual realization accompanied by Anubhava. But the *Jivan Mukta* has no role to play in life. Swami Sivananda writing about the two modern Jnanis, Kalkot Swami and Mowni Swami, says that they were unconscious of the movement of their bowels and the Sevdar (attendant) had to wash their bottoms.”<sup>39</sup> “Such a Videha Mukta who is absolutely merged in Brahman cannot have the awareness of the world which is non-existent to him. If his body is to be maintained, it has to be fed and cared for by others. The Vidheha Mukta is thus not in a position to engage himself for the good of the world.”<sup>40</sup> For them, self-realization breaks the chain of causation and the world of experience appears false. Even the idea of God being a lower stage has to be transcended finally, for “God” is only the most subtle, most magnificent, most flattering false impression of all in this general spectacle of erroneous self deception.”<sup>41</sup> No wonder Zimmer says that “Such holy megalomania goes past the bounds of sense. With Sankara, the grandeur of the Supreme human experience becomes

intellectualized and reveals its inhuman sterility."<sup>42</sup> Such is Shankra's monoism for which world is *Mithya*.

### NathismNathism

Nathism was one of the prevalent religious cults in North India in the time of Guru Nanak. He criticized it quite severely. Nath Yogis are Saivites and Saivism has the longest religious history, being pre-Vedic. Pasupata is the oldest Saiva system. Nath Yogis are a part of the Lakula group that developed from the Pasupata. Gorakh Nath is the chief historical organizer of the Nath Yogis. He appears between 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The system involves asceticism, renunciation, Yogic methodology with emphasis on Hath and Mantra Yogas, and the worship of male and female deities. The goal is liberation from the misery of the world through Kundalini Yoga and final union with Lord Siva. Though Nathism is a theistic system, its entire approach and methodology are of Yoga where the aim is primarily to gain power. Both before and after the union the Nath has no interest in the world. Nathism is a monastic system. Each Nath is linked to a monastery headed by a Guru, or a Pir if he is a Muslim. Naths are also called Kanpathas. They are initiated into the group in a rigid ritualistic manner. Their ear lobes are split for the wearing of Mundras. The Nath takes three vows: to remain celibate, not to accept any employment or earn his living, and to sustain himself by begging, and to observe Ahimsa. The Nath goes barefooted on pilgrimage to sacred Hindu places and to Nath monasteries where images and pictures of Hindu gods and Siva in the form of Bhairon are worshipped.

The Naths do observe some caste distinctions. In theory, only twice born are initiated but in practice all except a few low castes are accepted. Hindu Naths do not eat with Muslim Naths nor do they go to the houses of Muslims or of lower castes for begging. The worshipping of the deities, the cooking at monasteries is done by Brahmins generally. At Dhinodhar monastery higher castes are given uncooked food. Other castes are fed at the monastery hall except low castes and Muslims who are given food outside in the open. Women, except widows, are not admitted and Naths do not sit or eat with them, even if they were Naths.

The Nath Yogi is a typical ascetic who rubs ashes on his body as a symbol of death to the world from the misery of which he seeks liberation. Secondly, Nathas have faith in ritualism. Certain months are auspicious, Mantras are used at the time of initiation and for daily and other use, because these are considered to have mystic potency for spiritual advancement. Fasting is also considered efficacious. May be because of the black colour of Bhairon, black buck, snakes' and black dogs are venerated. Animal sacrifices at the temple of Bhairon are practised. At the annual fair of Devi Pattan on one day 20 buffaloes, 250 goats and 250 pigs were sacrificed. Blood mark is applied to devotees. At places Linga and Yoni are worshipped. Nathas have belief in Hindu gods and goddesses, good and bad spirits, auspicious and inauspicious days, etc. Nath Yogis mainly use Mantra Yoga and Hathyoga or Kundalini Yoga alongwith Pranayama. Their chief religious texts are Gorakh Sataka, Gorakhsa Paddhati and Hath Yoga pradipika. These prescribe yogic and meditational practices, asanas, repetition of mantras, stages of progress in raising Kundalini through the Nadis, chakras, etc. By the repetition of mantras 21,600 times a day a Yogi could gain liberation in year or so. The goal is to reach through Kundalini Yoga the top of the head as Sahashara achieving thereby blissful union with Siva and eternal release from the world. The Nathas also believe in the combination of male and female energies (Nadi and Bindu) to achieve liberation. For this, sex practices called Vajroli, Sahjoli, or Amroli, conducted in the company of a woman are suggested. About Nathas, Briggs concludes in his book, "The essence of Nath Yoga is physical exercise and manipulation, quite mechanical. If it is charged against the exposition found in the earlier pages that it is overburdened with interpretations on too Iowa plane, it must be said in reply that both the practices and the outlook of the Yogis confirm this point of view... The high religious value to man-woman relations was insisted upon. The first Chaitanya Sahajya movement confirms this point."<sup>43</sup> Even otherwise it is necessary to indicate that the use of the sexual method has been clearly indicated in the ancient Indian literature and materials. Datterya, who is a Hindu deity, is one of the chief deities worshipped by the Nathas. He is considered an

avatara of Visnu, a Jnani and Paramhansaj “Puranic accounts depict him as always in ecstasy, surrounded by women, drinking wine and indulging in sex.”<sup>44</sup> Hindu Tantras are supposed to be a fifth Veda for Kalyuga. Ghurye believes, “Fundamentally the Yogis represent the oldest school of Indian asceticism.”<sup>45</sup> “The Yogis are the residual of the ancient Saivite sects.”<sup>46</sup> The Nath cult, we conclude, is in direct lineage from the oldest pre-Vedic and Vedic traditions through the Saiva system of Pasupata and Kapilkas, with both of which all its essentials are common. It is noteworthy that everywhere asceticism or monasticism, whether Hindu, Saiva, Vaisnava or Buddhist, at some point leads to male and female symbolism and consequent erotic practices which are accepted as a means of salvation. Quite often these degenerate into licentious practices. Where a religious system does not harness creative energies to life-affirming and virtuous deeds and processes the danger of degeneration is obvious.

Nathism is, thus, a life negating and ascetic system which calculatedly avoids social responsibility and prescribes renunciation and withdrawal from the world which is considered a place of misery.

### **Comparison and conclusion**

We have given an outline of Sikhism and of three Hindu systems prevalent in India in the times of Guru Nanak. We have selected the three Hindu systems because scholars ignorant of the Bani and the thesis of Gum Granth Sahib have confused Sikh doctrines with those of these systems. We shall now make a brief comparison of the essentials of Sikhism with the essentials of the three Hindu systems. For the purpose, we regret, some recapitulation will become unavoidable.

The religious experience of the Gurus is that God is Love. He is the Ocean of Virtues and is deeply interested in the world. The world, thus, becomes not only real but also the arena of spiritual expression and development. Fourth, the system is a monotheism. Fifth, virtuous deeds in the world are the sole measure of man’s religious growth and assessment, for, higher than truth is truthful living. Sixth, the householder’s life, in all its social aspects, thus, becomes the forum of religious activity involving

full social responsibility. Seventh, the idea of the brotherhood of man is alone compatible with the idea of the fatherhood of God, logically involving equality between man and man, man and woman, and a fair distribution of God's wealth among His children. Consequently, the need of work, social participation, and reaction and resistance against wrongs, both as an individual and as a society become part of one's religious duties. Therefore, the goal is neither *Moksha*, nor merger in, or blissful union with God as an end in itself, but to be the instrument of His Attributive Will directed toward the creation of the kingdom of God on earth (*Haleemi Raj*). Since there could be occasions when the use of force in pursuit of a righteous cause becomes inevitable, the doctrine of ahimsa as an invariable rule of religious conduct has been rejected. The conclusion is that there can be no socio-moral progress without the spiritual growth of man and there can be no spiritual growth in isolation without its simultaneous expression in life. As a model, the role and life of a *Jivan Mukta*, are epitomized in the lives, deeds, struggles and martyrdoms of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak, we find, was the first man of God in the East to proclaim and found a religion with an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. Hence his radical thesis and its logic involved a clear rejection of asceticism, monasticism, renunciation or withdrawal from life or any segment of it. In pursuit of his mission he also rejected the idea of avatarhood, ritualism, the caste and Ahimsa, both in theory and in practice. And, he positively created and guided a society that should as a religious duty attempt to combat the evils and to solve the social problems of life.

In contrast, Vaisnavism recommends asceticism, renunciation, withdrawal from life and celibacy. It accepts ritualism, Ahimsa, the caste ideology and the idea of a woman or married life being a hurdle in man's spiritual growth. Socio-moral participation and responsibility are recommended neither for the seeker nor for the *Jivan Mukta*, neither as a methodology nor as a goal. Formal and ritualistic image worship, meditation or emotional singing and dancing are the means of attaining *Moksha*, involving union with or merger in Brahman.

The doctrine of avtarhood is fundamental and, may be on this account, the metaphysical or ideological concepts are quite variant and even conflicting. The Vasisht Advaita of Ramanuja is pantheistic. In sum, we find, that the fundamentals of Vaisnavism are opposed to those of Sikhism.

As in Vaisnavism, the ideological concepts in Vendantism are quite variant, this being the position in Upanisads too. The essentials of Shankara's Vedanta, which is the dominant view, are also in contrast with those of Sikhism. Sankara calls Brahman "Sat-Chit-Anand", a quietist concept, against God being love, a dynamic concept, in Sikhism. Against monotheism, Shankara's monoism implies the world being an illusion (*Mithya*) and worldly activity of no spiritual value. The system being life-negating, it recommends celibacy and Sanyasa. Woman has been called the gateway to hell. The final realization of "*aham brahm asmi*" is the result of a contemplative effort and not of any grace of God. These ideas are considered heretical and egoistic in Sikhism. Therefore, Guru Arjan rejected the hymns of Bhagat Kanha who proclaimed, "I am the same, Oh, I am the same". Sankara accepts both the caste ideology and the value of Vedic ritualism because he concedes that the latter can gain heaven for the seeker. Sikhism calls ritualism useless and caste immoral. In Vedanta there is a clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life; in Sikhism such dichotomy is considered a negation of both. The Vedantic Jnani is wholly inactive, but in Sikhism he is the active instrument of God's Will. The contrast between the two systems is conspicuously evident.

The Gurus have criticized no system more severely than Nathism and its ways. This ascetic cult withdraws completely from the world which the Naths call a place of misery. Nath discipline is purely ritualistic, ascetic, Yogic and formal. They make caste distinctions both in the matter of admission to the cult and in the service of food, etc. Some of the Nath practices are quite abhorrent. Their goal, by the raising of Kundalini is a blissful union with Siva. The meanings of "Sahaj" and "Anhand sound" are very different in Nathism, from that in Sikhism. Both Nathism and Vaisnavism accept the validity of the

sexual method for the achievement of liberation. In Sikhism there is not the faintest suggestion of the kind. Guru Nanak's observation that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path, clarifies categorically both the glaring contrast between the two systems and the completely radical nature of his thesis and mission.

Having given a brief outline of the four systems, let us now record the views of some Western and Indian scholars about Sikhism. They write: "the term founder is misleading for it suggests that the Guru (Nanak) originated not merely a group of followers but also a school of thought, or a set of teachings." "It was the influence of Nath doctrines and practice on Vaisnava Bhakti which was primarily responsible for the emergence of Sant synthesis". "This is precisely the doctrine which we find in the works of Guru Nanak."<sup>47</sup> "The indigenous elements in Sikhism are largely those customs of the tribes of Jats, who made Sikhism their own and the marginal elements are there of the Nath Yogi tradition, which with Vaisnavism Bhakti was primarily responsible for the Sant synthesis."<sup>48</sup> "The teachings of Nanak do not have a direct causal connection with the later growth which should be understood, largely in terms of historical events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."<sup>49</sup> "The Sikh Gurus who compiled the *Guru Granth* were marked by the genuinely noble and emancipated trait of appreciating and assimilating all that is valuable in other religions. In this sense, *Guru Granth Sahib* is not a religious text like a holy Bible or Quran but a treatise on human life and righteous living. Guru Nanak did not seek to build a new religion, etc." "Even Sikh scholars see the *Miri* and *Pin* concept as an inseparable whole in the religious order. Non-Sikhs have come to see a basic religion-politics linkage in Sikhism and deduct the root cause of the current crisis in Punjab to this."<sup>50</sup> "To the extent Hinduism has been influenced by Vedanta, either traditionally or in the modern version of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, it has a tendency to subsume all religions as different aspect of one Large Religion...of which Hinduism is a subconscious if not an overt model. And, of course, in this Religion the closer a person or a doctrine is to the Advaita Vedanta closer to Truth is he or

is assumed to be.” “But where it comes to the Indians belonging to religions which originated within India, such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, many a Hindu regard these as downright unpatriotic or unspiritual, or both, if they wish to maintain their distinct identity from the Hindus. Distinctions are just not considered a mark of high enough vision and are mere appearances.”<sup>51</sup> “When dealing with the beliefs, rituals practices of the Sikhs-be they religious or political-it is always worth-while to constantly remind ourselves that we are fundamentally dealing with the peasantry and the world-view of this social class has historically always been very different from the other social classes.”<sup>52</sup>

Seen in the light of our discussion and analysis of Sikhism and the three other systems, we find that the above-noted observations of some scholars display a singular lack of understanding of the essentials of Sikhism and of the other three religious systems. This ignorance, we believe, is primarily due to their failure to understand the fundamental thesis of *Guru Granth Sahib*, namely, an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. Guru Nanak was the first prophet who broke the dichotomy that existed between the two lives in all the Indian religious systems. It has been asserted and accepted that the institutions of asceticism and monasticism are the specific contribution of Indian religions and culture to the world culture. This dichotomy was not only broken ideologically and a contrary ideology embodied in the Sikh scripture, but it was consistently practised and clearly proclaimed. Further, this doctrine was externally symbolized and institutionalized in the close and common location of Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takhat, the installation of two flags at the common compound between Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat, and the two swords worn by the Sixth Guru. The chief fundamentals of Sikhism were not only opposed to those of the earlier Indian traditions but there was really no trace of them in those systems. It is, therefore, evident that this sudden and radical change in the essentials of the Indian religious doctrines as emphatically brought about by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus could only be spiritually revealed. For, there

was nothing new in the environment to cause such a revolutionary response. Such being the thesis of the Gurus, it is sheer naivety to apply evolutionary, materialistic or sociological methodologies in trying to interpret the Sikh religion. Such studies could only suggest self-contradictory inferences. Hence our stress that the study of a religion requires a discipline of its own. Sikhism believes that there is a higher level of Reality which not only reveals itself to man but also operates in history. Without the acceptance of this concept, no revelatory religion or its history can be studied much less understood and correctly interpreted. The study of Sikhism and the three other contemporary systems clearly leads to the above conclusion.

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## CHAPTER 4

### NAAM IN SIKHISM

DALJEET SINGH

#### **Introductory**

Every religion has its world-view on which are based its concepts about Reality, the place of man in the universe, ethics and human goals. All students of Sikhism know that the concept of Naam, is fundamental to the gospel of the Guru Granth and the entire structure of its theology. In fact, Sikhism has often been called the Naam Maarga or the way of Naam. It is in this context that we shall endeavour to trace the salient features and implications of this concept which, we believe, holds the key to the understanding of the message of the Sikh Gurus, their religious and social ideas, and their world-view.

2. At the outset, we should like to make one point clear. This is about the language and the various traditional terms used by the Sikh Gurus. Since they were conveying their message to the mass of the people, both Hindus and Muslims, with a view to evoking a response in the very depths of their hearts, they have, for obvious reasons, used in their hymns the then current words and symbols from Indian languages and Persian and Arabic languages. And yet, one thing is patent even from a cursory study of the Guru Granth that the Gurus have, as was essential for the proper understanding of a new gospel, made the meaning of each concept, symbol and term employed by them unambiguously clear. Many a time the meaning of such words is entirely their own. Accordingly, we have refrained from tracing the meaning of Naam to its traditional usage and background. In fact, such an exercise could be even misleading and wasteful. We shall, therefore, base our arguments and inferences about Naam on the hymns in the Guru Granth and the accepted facts about the lives of the Sikh Gurus.

3. Let us now try broadly to indicate how Naam has been used in the Guru Granth where it appears in a majority of hymns. The Sikh Gurus have given the word Naam, a distinct and significant meaning which is far different from that of mere 'Name' or 'psychic factors' as understood in 'Naam-Roopā' in the traditional literature.<sup>1</sup> The basic definition of Naam is contained in the Sukhmani and in some other quotations from the Guru Granth, given below:

- (i) 'Naam sustains all regions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, all skies and stars, all forces and substances, all continents and spheres. Naam emancipates those who accept it in their heart. He, on whom is His Grace, is yoked to Naam and he reaches the highest state of development.'<sup>2</sup>
- (ii) 'Naam is the Creator of everything. To be divorced from Naam is death.'<sup>3</sup> 'All is created by Naam.'<sup>4</sup> 'Naam gives form to everything and through Naam comes all Wisdom or Light.'<sup>5</sup>
- (iii) 'Naam extends to all creation. There is no place or space where Naam is not.'<sup>6</sup>
- (iv) Naam is the 'Nine Treasures' and Nectar (amrita). It permeates the body.'<sup>7</sup>
- (v) 'Naam, the immaculate, is unfathomable, how can it be known ? Naam is within us, how to get to it ? It is Naam that works everywhere and permeates all space. The perfect Guru awakens your heart to the vision of Naam. It is by the Grace of God that one meets such an Enlightener.'<sup>8</sup>

4. From the above verses it is clear that the Gurus do not use the word Naam in any restrictive sense, of its being a psychic factor or mere consciousness, but refer to it as the Highest Power, creating, informing, supporting and working the entire creation. In short, Naam is the Reality, supporting and directing the created worlds or the entire cosmos. There are numerous verses in the Guru Granth where Naam and God have been described synonymously. Both, Naam and God have been mentioned as "the Creator of the

Cosmos” as “the Sustainer of the Universe”, as “permeating and informing all things, beings, space and interspace” as “the treasure of virtues values”, as “the support of the supportless” as “the giver of Peace and bliss”, as “eternal”, “perfect” and “unfathomable”, as the “Friend”, “Master” and “Emancipator” of man. The highest state of man is mentioned as the one when he lives and works in tune with God or Naam, often called God’s Naam. We, therefore, find that God and Naam, are real, eternal and unfathomable. The Sikh Gurus have repeatedly emphasized, as is also stated in the very opening verse of the Guru Granth, that God is one Ek Oamkaar, and no second entity, as in the case of the Sankhya system, is at all postulated. The Guru says, “My Lord is the only One. He is the only One, (understand) brother, He is the only One”.<sup>9</sup> This unambiguously brings out that God and Naam are one and the same, and the latter may be called the immanent or qualitative aspect of God, since God has been described both as unmanifest (nirguna) and manifest (sarguna).

5. In view of the above, we should define Naam as the Dynamic Immanence of God or the Reality sustaining and working the manifest world of force and form. It is on the basis of these fundamentals that we should like to trace and understand some important concepts and conclusions, ideas and institutions, trends and traditions in Sikhism, and its socio-religious way of life.

6. Naam and Cosmology: The Guru writes, “The Self-existent God manifested Himself into Naam. Second came the Creation of the Universe. He permeated it and reveals in His creation.”<sup>10</sup> “God created the world of life, He planted Naam in it, and made it the place for righteous action.”<sup>11</sup>

7. Thus, according to the concept of Naam and the hymns quoted earlier in this regard, God created the world and in His immanent aspect, as Naam, is informing and working it. Only one entity, namely, God, is envisaged and the world, in time and space, is His creation, the same being supported and directed by Naam. Let us see if this cosmological view is also supported by other verses in the Guru Granth.

8. In the very opening verse of the Guru Granth, God is described as the Sole-One, His Naam as Real, Creator-Lord... Timeless Person, One that is not born, Self-existent.<sup>12</sup> The Gurus have clearly described at a number of places that there was a stage when the Transcendent God was by Himself; and it is later that He started His Creative Activity. In Sidh Gost, in answer to a question as to where was the Transcendent God before the stage of creation,<sup>13</sup> Guru Nanak replied, "To think of the Transcendent Lord in that state is to enter the realm of wonder. Even at that stage of sunn (Void), He permeated all that Void."<sup>14</sup> The Guru, in effect, means that to matters that are beyond the spacio-temporal world, it would be wrong to apply the spacio-temporal logic, and yet man knows of no other logic or language. Perforce, he has to be explained, howsoever inadequately or symbolically only in terms of that language. That is why the Guru has cautioned us against the pitfalls and inadequacy of human logic and language to comprehend the Timeless One. All the same, the Guru has mentioned the state when the Transcendent God was all by Himself and there was no creation. The Gurus say, "When there was no form in sight, how could there be good or bad actions? When God was in the Self-Absorbed state, there could be no enmity or conflict. When God was all by Himself, there could be no attachment or misunderstanding. Himself He starts the Creation. He is the Sole-Creator, there is no second One."<sup>15</sup> "For millions of aeons the Timeless One was by Himself. There was no substance or space, no day or night (i.e. no time), no stars or galaxies; God was in His Trance."<sup>16</sup> "God was by Himself and there Was nothing else... There was no love or devotion, nor was His creative Power in operation...When He willed, He created the Universe."<sup>17</sup> The same idea is expressed in these words, "When He willed, the creation appeared."<sup>18</sup> Again, in answer to the question of the Yogis, "When there was no sign and no form, where was the Word (Logos) and how was He identified with Truth?"<sup>19</sup> The Guru replied, "When there was no form, no sign, no individuation, the Word in its Essence abided in the Transcendent God; when there was no earth, no sky, (Time or Space) the Lord permeated everything. All distinction, all forms, then abided

in the Wondrous Word. No one is pure without Truth. Ineffable is this gospel.”<sup>20</sup>

9. In short, the Gurus say that before He created Form, He was Formless; before He was Immanent, He was Transcendent only; and yet all immanence, expression, creativity, were inherent in Him and so was His Word, in essence.

10. In the jap(u), where a picture of the realm of creativity IS given, the Guru writes, “In the region of Troth is God where He perpetually creates and watches the universe with His benevolent eye, deliberating and directing according as He Wills.”<sup>21</sup> Further, it is stated, “In the region of Creativity (Karam) only God’s Power or Force IS at work.”<sup>22</sup> Again, “Of the region of construction or effort, the medium of expression is form. Here most fantastic forms are fashioned, including consciousness, perception, mind, intellect.”<sup>23</sup> Further still, “Innumerable creations are fashioned, myriads are the forms, myriads are the moons, suns, regions.”<sup>24</sup> These hymns also indicate how the process of creativity, or a becoming world started and is being sustained and directed by a benevolent God.

11. In all the above quotations from the Guru Granth, the same idea is expressed, namely, that God is the Sole Entity; who in His Creative Urge has produced the Cosmos, which He, in His immanent aspect, Naam, is sustaining vigilantly and directing benevolently, according to His Will. In the created world no other entity, like prakriti in Sankhya and other dualistic systems, is assumed. While the world is Real and is directed by Immanent God, at no stage is the separate independent existence of matter accepted directly or by implication.

12. Metaphysical implication of Naam : We have seen that according to the concept of Naam and the hymns already quoted in this regard, God created Himself and Naam, and at the second place was created the universe. Further, that this universe is being sustained and directed by God as Naam or His Immanent aspect. This concept of God being the Sole Entity and being the Creator God (Karta Purakh) is so fundamental in the Sikh theology that it is mentioned in the very opening line (Mool Mantra) of the Guru Granth and in the beginning of almost every section and sub-section of it.

Both the doctrine of Naam and the Mal Mantra clearly point out the theology of Sikhism being monotheistic. Let us, therefore, try to see whether this conclusion of ours is correct, and whether many of those hurriedly-begotten views about Sikhism being pantheistic, Vedantic, Sankhyic, Yogic or Buddhistic have any validity. A few of the reasons supporting our conclusion are as under:

- (i) Throughout the hymns of the Guru Granth, nothing is more significant than the acceptance of Creature-Creator relation between man and God. Invariably, God has been addressed as 'Thou', 'Mother', 'Father', 'Brother', 'Beloved', 'Lord', or 'Husband'. In fact, a majority of the hymns in the Guru Granth are in the form of prayers, addressed to God. In the Sikh tradition, two things are firmly established, having the sanction of the Gurus. First, every ceremony, religious or social, ends with an 'ardaas' or supplication to God, invoking His Grace. Secondly, at the time of initiation ceremony (Amrit ceremony), a Sikh is enjoined upon to recite or hear daily Jap(u), jaap(u), ten Sawayaas, Sodar(u), Rahraas and Sohilaa, besides reading or hearing of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Rahit Maryaada, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1970, p. 35.) We thus see that both in the hymns of Guru Granth, and the Sikh tradition and practice, this Creature-Creator relation is never forgotten. So much so that the Guru calls himself as "the lowliest of the low"<sup>25</sup> and never does he mention another person as 'That is Thou'. According to tradition the fifth Guru declined to include in the Guru Granth a hymn by a contemporary saint, Bhagat Kaanhaa, saying, "I am He, O, I am the same,"<sup>26</sup> because this hymn was felt by the Guru to be evidently contrary to the Sikh thesis that man is not and can never be God though he can be His instrument.
- (ii) The arguments advanced to show the Creature-Creator relation in Sikhism and the importance of Prayer, mutatis mutandis, apply also to God having a Personality. We need

hardly state that this idea of Personality in Theism is not analogous to the idea of limited personality in man, who is a finite being. In the very opening line of Guru Granth, God is mentioned as the Creating Person, the Timeless Person (karta purakh, akaal moorat). In fact, in all devotional and mystic religions the idea of Personality of God is inherent, since devotion involves God and a devotee.

In Sikhism the idea of the Will (hukam, razaa) of God in relation to the created world is as fundamental as in other theistic religions, like Christianity and Islam. In fact, both the words 'hukam' and 'razaa' used in the Guru Granth are Arabic in origin. The idea of Will is inalienably linked with the idea of Personality of God, the Creator, who alone can have a Will. In reality, we know that Will and Naam are virtually synonymous, both being the Immanence of God. While this point will be elaborated later on, it is well-known that in Sikhism the highest ideal for man is to 'carry out the Will of God'<sup>27</sup> or to link oneself with Naam.

Another fundamental characteristic of Sikhism showing the Personality of God is His Grace. One of the chief points made out in the Guru Granth is that nothing happens without God's Grace. While it is stated in the hymn of dharam khand, which lays down man's duties in life, that man's assessment will be entirely according to his deeds<sup>28</sup> it is clearly mentioned that final 'approval will be only by God's Grace'.<sup>29</sup> The idea of Personality, Will and Grace of God, being basic to Sikhism, this too underlines its theistic character.

- (iii) The verses quoted earlier mention Nature as the Creation of God and not His Emanation or Extension. Obviously, nature is a changing or becoming world, limited by space and time and cannot be eternal like God, who is beyond Time (akaal moorat). Whereas God is Self-Existent or Self-created (swai bhang), nature is the creation of God. While everything in nature is changing, i.e., is born and dies, God is never born

(Ajooni). That is the reason that in Sikhism the doctrine of incarnation (avatarhood), or God taking the human form, is strictly denied and is considered heretical; so much so that Guru Gobind Singh described such an idea as an accursed one, he being only a mere servant of God.<sup>30</sup> This is also in line with the hymns in the jap(u) quoted earlier. Here the world is upto the Region of Creativity (karam khand) initiated through the medium of energy or power (jor). As indicated in the hymns of saram khand and gyaan khand, a fantastic multiplicity of forms, shapes and things, including the moulding of consciousness, sense perceptions, mind, intellect, etc., are described. Everyone knows that in Sikh theology the highest form of being is, the mystic (bhagat). In jap(u) the Guru distinctly mentions, or rather limits, the presence of these God-conscious or God-filled beings (jin maih Raam rabiaa bharpoor) only upto the Region of Creativity, but never beyond it, i.e. not in the Region of Truth or God (sach khand vase Nirankaar). The Universe is the creation of God but not identical with God, which is the basic distinction between Monotheism and Indian monism or pantheism.

- (iv) At a number of places in the Guru Granth, the Guru has described symbolically the state of God when the creation was not there. All this indicates that God is Transcendent as well, and that He is not co-terminus or identical with His creation. Not only does the creation not exhaust God, but He is both prior to and Transcendent to His creation. And God's transcendence could be envisaged only under a monotheistic system and never in pantheism.
- (v) An argument has been raised in favour of the supposed pantheistic character of Sikhism because of the Gurus' frequent mention of the immanent character of God in the created world. The Gurus have clearly emphasized the transcendental character of God by saying that the world was

created in time and space and the Transcendent God had been there while the world was uncreated, and, for that matter, God's immanent character was unexpressed. We refer to the hymn quoted earlier in this regard. It is also stated that the Word was in God when there was no Universe or Form. The expression of Naam was prior to the creation of the Universe i.e. 'God manifested into Naam and at the second place the world was created.' As stated already, Naam is mentioned as the Creator and Director of the world. It is true that the Guru quite often mentions God as informing the universe. But in no scripture has the distinction between the Transcendent and the Immanent aspects of God been made more clear than in the Guru Granth, because God's Immanence has been given separate names, i.e. of Naam, Will and Word. Evidently, all immanence can be expressed only in relation to the realm of creation, i.e. when God's immanence as Naam creates, sustains and moves the world of name and form; when God's immanence as His Will controls and directs the becoming world; when His Immanence as His Word informs and supports the created universe. In other words, in the Guru Granth both the transcendent and the immanent aspects of God are clearly specified and distinguished so as to avoid any confusion or hasty conclusion that Sikhism is pantheistic. We have already seen that in Sikhism immanence of God in relation to the becoming world does not exhaust God and that is why God's immanent aspect has almost invariably been called His Naam, His Will, His Word. True, a number of places, the Guru describes God as informing the river, the fish, the boat, and everything. Perhaps, it is such verses as these that have led some to the superficial conclusion of Sikhism being pantheistic. But, all these verses are only a symbolic or another way of expressing the immanence of God. In modern monotheistic theologies including Christian and Islamic, God's Transcendence and His Immanence in the created world are

accepted. Even in Islam, God's Immanence is referred to as, "Is He riot closer (to you) than the vein of thy neck."<sup>31</sup> Such verses as these do not at all indicate anything beyond the immanence of God, or anything contrary to it. Obviously, God's immanence (His Naam and Will) is manifested and exercised only in relation to the created and becoming world. This description of His immanence and its operation, metaphoric as it is, can mislead no one to any erroneous inference, especially because the Gurus have clearly stated that the immanent God in the universe does not exhaust God and He is transcendent too. "He that permeates all hearts (Le. Immanent) is Unmanifest too."<sup>32</sup> "He is pervading everywhere (Immanent) and yet He is beyond everything, beyond pleasure and pain (Transcendent)."<sup>33</sup> "He informs everything and yet is separate too."<sup>34</sup> "Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and yet is separate from it."<sup>35</sup>

- (vi) One of the chief objections to any pantheistic theology in the West is the lack of any ethical content and impact in any such view of the universe. Pantheistic philosophies, whether in the East, as in the case of Upanishads, or in the West, as in the case of Spinoza and Schopenhauer, lead to pessimism and fatalism, and lack of moral effort and responsibility on the part of the individual. The disastrous ethical consequences of pantheistic doctrines, including monism that downgrades the reality of the phenomenal world, are too well-known to be detailed here. In this context, we may like to see what is the ethical content and impact of the doctrine of Naam. In no religious system is the emphasis on ethical conduct greater than in the Guru Granth where "truthful living or conduct has been declared higher than Truth itself".<sup>36</sup> In the Jap(u), the Guru says that man's final assessment and approval before God will depend entirely on his deeds in this world.<sup>37</sup> Further, 'egoistic conduct' has been called 'the opposite of Naam,'<sup>38</sup>

which, as we find, involves selfless and virtuous conduct, Naam being the treasure of all virtues. Similarly, moral living is stressed, since the ideal in life is 'to carry out the Will of God', God's Will and Naam being virtually synonymous. Judged from the emphasis on virtuous life (the matter will be detailed while dealing later with the subject of goal, ethics, etc.) and moral responsibility in Sikhism and its anti-deterministic view, we should evidently conclude that Sikhism is monotheistic and not pantheistic.

- (vii) There is a philosophic controversy whether or not mysticism of all kinds is monotheistic or pantheistic. Sikhism is undeniably based on mystical experience. But so are religions like Christianity and Islam which are fanatically monotheistic. It is well-known that many of the great Christian and Muslim mystics have been dubbed as heretical because their description of their mystical experiences could be misconstrued to support a pantheistic view of God, even though these mystics were devotedly religious and deeply reverential to their respective Prophets. Hence, the controversy hardly affects our argument.

13. True, some symbolic descriptions in the Guru Granth, which when seen out of their context and not seen against the overall background of Sikh theology and the overwhelming scriptural evidence to the contrary, could be misconstrued to suggest pantheistic inferences. But, such a view would obviously be not only far-fetched, but also opposed to the general thesis of the Gurus and the concept of Naam. The metaphysical implication of the doctrine of Naam clearly gives a monotheistic import to Sikhism, which view we find is unmistakably in accordance with the accepted concepts in the Guru Granth.

**14. Naam, and the Reality of the World and Interest in Life:** The greatest implication of the doctrine is in its proclaiming the dynamic reality and authenticity of the world and life. "God created the world of life and planted Naam therein, making it the place of righteous activity."<sup>39</sup> "God created the world and permeated it with

His light.”<sup>40</sup> Since Naam, God’s Immanence, has not only created the world but is also supporting, controlling and directing it, the same cannot be unreal or illusory. In fact, Naam’s immanence in this world guarantees its being a place of righteous activity and not being a fruitless, unwanted or capricious creation. In one form or the other, this idea about the reality of the world gets repeated expression and emphasis in the Guru Granth. “True are thy worlds, true are Thy Universes, true Thy forms, Thou createth. True are Thy doings. This world is the Abode of the True One and He resides in it.”<sup>41</sup> “True is He, True is His Creation.”<sup>42</sup> “Human body is the Temple of God.”<sup>43</sup> “Beauteous, O Farid, are the garden of earth and the human body.”<sup>44</sup> “Deride not the world, it is the creation of God.”<sup>45</sup>

15. It naturally follows from this doctrine that the world is real and God is greatly interested in it, since - He has created it, He ‘revels in His creation,’<sup>46</sup> and is sustaining and directing it. In the *jap(u)* God is described as ‘perpetually creating the world and benevolently nurturing His creation.’<sup>47</sup> ‘God is the one, who works through winds, waters and fire.’<sup>48</sup> This emphatic assertion about the authenticity of the world is a clear departure from the Indian religious tradition, and is, for that matter, radical in its implication. The Gurus were extremely conscious of this fundamental change they were making, and that is why, both in their lives and in their hymns, they have been laying great and repeated stress on this aspect of their spiritual thesis, lest they should be misunderstood on this issue. Living in this world is not a bondage (*bandhan*) for them but a great privilege and opportunity. Not only is God benevolently directing the world in which He is immanent, but each one of us is ‘yoked to His task and each is assigned a duty to perform.’<sup>49</sup> All this clearly indicates God’s or Naam’s plan and purpose in His creative activity.

16. This idea is also clear from the Gurus’ reference, again and again, to God’s Will, working in this becoming universe. The very idea of a God of Will clearly presupposes and implies, a direction, and a goal in the creative movement. The persistent interest of God in the creative movement is also obvious from the fact that the Guru calls Him ‘the Protector’ (*raakhaa*), ‘Father’ (*pitaa*),

'King-emperor' (Padasbah) and a 'Just Administrator' (adlee). In the jap(u) also, the Guru emphasizes the idea that God adjudges each according to his deeds in this world.

17. Naam has been described as the 'Treasure of Virtues and Qualities'. As a loving God with social and other attributes, He has been referred to as 'Father and Mother' (maataa, pitaa), 'Brother' (bharaataa), 'Friend' (mittar), 'Helper of the poor' (gareeb nivaaj), 'Shelter of the shelterless' (nithaaviaan daa thaan), 'Help to the Helpless' (nidhiriaan di dhir), 'Remover of suffering and pain' (dukh bhanjan), 'Merciful' (raheem), etc. God with attributes leads to three inferences. First, qualities have a meaning only in relation to spa do-temporal world, since all perfection is static and all qualities are relative, capable of expression only in a changing universe. We have already seen that when God was by Himself and the world was not there, the question of good or bad, saved or saviour, love or devotion did not arise. Naam, being the source of all virtues, the world becomes an essential and integral part of the plan of Naamj since without a world for expression there could be no Will and no attributive aspect of God. Thus, Naam and the world are conjoint. Secondly, qualities in Naam indicate clearly-and this is the most important aspect-the direction of the progress and the ideal to be pursued by man in this world. Thirdly, all this ensures a logical and deep interest of Naam in the empirical world, since its attributive expression can be made only in it. That is also exactly the reason why the Gurus' call the world real. Consequently, their message and mission also relate to this world, wherein alone these can be fulfilled. For the same reason, the Sikh Gurus' deep interest in all aspects of life, including socio-political aspects, can be directly traced to Naam, whose devotees they were. No feeling or prayer is expressed with greater depth and intensity than the one for the 'gift of Naam'. Now, Naam being the Benevolent Supporter and Director of the world, what can be the gift of Naam to the devotee, except that of an enlightened, loving and creative Interest in the world and in its development. How can one claim to be a devotee of Naam and ask for its gift or link with it, and, yet, decline to toe the line of Naam, namely, of nurturing and furthering the process of

creativity and construction in the world rather than becoming an ascetic or a drop-out. That is why the Gurus have strongly condemned all ascetic and escapist practices. They say, “One reaches not Truth by remaining motionless like trees and stones, nor by being sawn alive.”<sup>50</sup> “In vain are yogic practices, without Naam life is a waste.”<sup>51</sup> “All Yogic austerities, rituals, trance, etc., are in vain; real yoga is in treating alike all beings.”<sup>52</sup> “O Yogi, you are sitting in a trance, but you discriminate and have a sense of duality. You beg from door to door, are you not ashamed of it?”<sup>53</sup> “Jainic asceticism”, or “even if the body is cut into bits, does not efface the dirt of ego.”<sup>54</sup>

18. What kind of life the Gurus recommended, would be detailed while dealing with the subject of goal, but it would be pertinent to quote here the Guru’s dictum that “by despising the world one gets not to God.”<sup>55</sup>

19. In Buddhism, Nirvana and Samsara are opposite entities.<sup>56</sup> In fact, in all Indian traditions, except in the case of the saints of the Bhakti movement, worldly life had normally to be given up in order to pursue the spiritual ideal. But according to the Guru Granth it is not Naam and Samsara that are opposed, but Naam and Haumain (Egoism)<sup>57</sup>, it is not worldly activity, as such, that has to be given up, but it is only egoistic and selfish activities that have to be shed.<sup>58</sup> Otherwise, belief in a God of attributes, which involves expression in the world of man, becomes meaningless.

20. The best understanding of the kind of interest in life the Gurus recommended for their disciples is gained from the lives they lived themselves. We shall revert to this point in a little detail while dealing with the issue of goal. Suffice it to say here that the Gurus, in harmony with the ethics of Naam, went in for full participation in life. For them it would have been incongruous, on the one hand to call life as real and on the other hand to fight shy of taking up the challenges of the socio-political life of their times.

21. All this was an ideological, deliberate and clear departure from the Indian religious tradition and the Gurus gave a firm lead on this new path. While eulogizing the role of Sikh Gurus in this regard,

N. Ray laments the abject surrender to the vicious status-quo on the part of the saints of the Bhakti movement.<sup>59</sup>

**22. Naam and Ethics:** On the one hand, Naam being (a) the Sustainer and Director of the universe, (b) opposed to egoism (haumain) and (c) the treasure of all qualities, lays down the standard of its ethics and, on the other, points out that the universe is the plane and place where the qualities of Naam have to be expressed, so as to counteract and remove the vices of egoism and the practice of a sense of duality. Egoism involves separatism, selfishness, and individualism leading to the vices of greed, anger, pride, passion, conflict, wars, etc. 'The removal of duality is the way to God',<sup>60</sup> Naam being the opposite of ego, the same has been indicated as the only remedy for egoism, pain and frustration.<sup>61</sup> In the same context the Gurus have mentioned two sets of people-one, the self-faced (manmukh) or egoistic, following the ethics of egoism and selfishness, and the other, the supermen or God-faced (gurmukh), following the ethics of Naam, in all phases of human activity. The ethics of Naam chooses its duties, virtues and value-system as consonant with the standard of Naam or a unitary view of life. Following are some of the verses in the Guru Granth condemning egoism and duality and instead recommending the virtues and spirit of Naam so as to avoid and eliminate the vices of egoism:

"In the grip of maya, we grab what belongs to others."<sup>62</sup>

"Man gathers riches by making others miserable."<sup>63</sup>

"Human passions, ego, duality lead us away from God."<sup>64</sup>

"God does not come near a person, hard of heart and with a sense of duality."<sup>65</sup> "Some people shun meat but devour men."<sup>66</sup> "With God, only the deeds that one does in the world are of any avail."<sup>67</sup> "Good, righteousness, virtue and the giving up of vice are the ways to realize the essence of God."<sup>68</sup> "God's riches belong to all and it is the world that makes distinctions."<sup>69</sup>

23. Thus, the entire progress of man is from being an egoist to being a man of Naam by shedding the ethics of egoism and accepting the ethics of Naam, i.e., from being self-centred to being God-centred.

**24. Naam and Human Goal :** It is in the field of human goals that the world-view of Naam and its logic make a basic departure from the traditional Indian view on the subject. On this problem the Gurus' view have not only been made clear and precise in their doctrine of Naam and throughout the Guru Granth, but these have also been emphasized and exemplified by their lives which embody an unambiguous lesson on the issue. We shall, therefore, attempt to consider the subject now from all the three angles, namely, of (a) the doctrine of Naam, (b) other tenets and principles laid in the Guru Granth, and (c) the lives that the Gurus led so as to lay down the ideal for others to follow:

(A) Naam, the Ever-Creative Immanence of God, is engaged in directing the universe, which is real, to become a qualityful world. Every student of Guru Granth knows that the burden of a large number of prayers and hymns therein, is a request for the gift of Naam, or to be linked with Naam, e.g. "I am beholden to Him who enlightens me with Naam."<sup>70</sup> "My Guru makes Naam permeate in me."<sup>71</sup> "Let me not forget Naam, rest is all greed."<sup>72</sup> "I beg from you for the gift of Naam."<sup>73</sup> "He reaches the highest stage whom God benevolently yokes to His Naam."<sup>74</sup> "To ask for any boon other than Naam is to invite pain."<sup>75</sup> "To be imbued with Naam is the essence of true living." "Pray, link me to God."<sup>76</sup>

Accordingly, the highest ideal under the Naam Marga is to be yoked or linked to Naam in order to take the world of man to a qualityful goal. In this context, the significance of a God of attributes has already been explained. Naam being the opposite of egoism, this progressive movement is towards an ideal in which selfishness and egoism disappear and qualities of Naam are practised. And to be linked to Naam only, means being its instrument and sharing the responsibility of this creative and qualityful development in the world. One imbued with Naam not only takes part in the world without a sense of duality and selfishness but also strives to create a beautiful world of harmony and quality. Egoism is supposed to be the cause of all pain, suffering and conflict which hinder development towards the goal. As against it, the practice of Naam and its ethics, namely, the unitary view of

life, is both the ideal and the sovereign remedy for all ills and evils (sarab rag kaa aukhad Naam), and the way to human development. "Destroy evil and you become a perfect man."<sup>77</sup> "Give up evil, do right and you realise the essence of God."<sup>78</sup>

(B) Let us see if the same ideal is prescribed otherwise too in the Guru Granth. In answer to a specific question as to how to remove the wall of falsehood obstructing man's progress to become an ideal or a true man, the Guru gives a categorical reply: "By working according to the Will of God."<sup>79</sup> Again the same ideal of deeds (not of words, rituals, asceticism or even of yogic discipline) is prescribed in the hymns of cosmography, quoted earlier about the role of man on earth. It is pointed out that "all assessment is made in accordance with the deeds and doings of man. By His Grace only the righteous get the insignia of God's approval."<sup>80</sup> In Sikhism, God is the Creator of the Universe and invariably the prayer, and direction is to be of service to Him. "May I have millions of hands to serve Thee. Service is the way to cross the hurdles of life."<sup>81</sup> "Be ever alert in the Service of God. Serve God every moment and relax not."<sup>82</sup> This in effect means to be of service in the universe, which is the authentic creative activity of God, who is directing it towards a goal and with a purpose. This service in the universe is really the selfless and qualityful service of all who have to be looked upon alike.<sup>83</sup> The Guru says, "Where there is egoism, God is not; where there is God, there cannot be any egoism."<sup>84</sup>

In the Sidh Gost, Guru Nanak has very clearly specified his mission and goal and thrown full light on the issue as to how he would lead his followers across. He says, "With the help of other God-conscious persons, I shall help man to remove his alienation from Naam and God and assist him to cross the difficult hurdles in life."<sup>85</sup> Guru Nanak has thus clarified as to what he means by 'carrying out His Will' and executing God's mission of creating a society of God-centred men. The Guru says, "The God-man achieves the goal and makes all others do so."<sup>86</sup> That is exactly the reason why the Gurus have likened themselves to a 'servant of God', a 'soldier in God's Legion', or a 'wrestler in the cause of God'. The world being the authentic creation of God, supported by His immanence, the service

of God means only the service of His creation, namely, this world, this life and man. It is in this light that the Guru's hymns, in the Sidh Gost and elsewhere have to be understood.

Here we may lay stress on two very important and relevant points: (a) The Gurus have repeatedly indicated a continuing process of development, evolution and progress in the empirical world, and (b) They clearly point out that further progress from animal-men or egoistic men to super-men or God-centred men is not only possible, but is also aimed at. In the Hymns of cosmography, already quoted, an ascending order of creation, form, or evolution is indicated. The Gurus have stated that individuation was created by God<sup>87</sup> and 'slowly there has been growth from small organisms, insects, etc., to animals, and finally to the present animal-man, with his subtle sense of perception, discrimination reason introspection' "For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births an insect, for several births a fish, animal, ...after ages have you the glory of being a man."<sup>88</sup> "...after passing through myriads of species, one is blest with the human form."<sup>89</sup> "God created you out of a drop of water and breathed life in you. He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom...From a sinner He made you virtuous and the lord of all beings. And now it is up to you to fulfil or not to fulfil your destiny."<sup>90</sup> Further progress of man or animal-man, as stated in the Hymn of dharam khand depends entirely on the deeds of the individuals. Till man came on the scene, it was not possible for life to outgrow its animal existence and alienation from God. So far, like other animals, man too has been living an animal existence. But, the Guru emphasizes the opportunity available to man to become a super-man, the highest ideal in the world of creation, and thereby be the humble but active agent of the Creative God as indicated in the hymns of Sidh Gost, quoted above. "Man with his egocentric individuality is basically an animal, with all animal limitations"<sup>91</sup> and alienation from Naam or God. But he has the invaluable capacity to come into his own by breaking this alienation and establishing a link with Naam.

The Guru again and again addresses man to give up his egocentric

activity and instead to rise to his full stature and avail himself of this lone opportunity. "After ages, this invaluable opportunity of human birth is obtained, but one loses it for nothing; one loses a ruby in exchange for a piece of broken glass."<sup>92</sup> "Among eighty-four lakhs of species, man is assigned the supreme position, whosoever misses the opportunity, suffers the pain of transmigration."<sup>93</sup> "Human birth is the epitome of fruitful effort, but man loses it for a trite."<sup>94</sup> "Human birth is precious."<sup>95</sup> "You have obtained the privilege of human body, now is your lone opportunity to meet God."<sup>96</sup> This is how we understand Guru Nanak's statements that his mission is, with the help of other God-conscious persons, to assist men to grow into supermen, so as to cross egoistic obstacles in the sea of life, and thereby to help the process of evolution and creativity to supermanship, flowering into a beautiful world. Hence the ideal is not only to be a superman oneself, but with the help of other supermen to convert all men into supermen.<sup>97</sup> And this physico-spiritual ideal, laid in the Guru Granth, can be reached only in this world by removing human alienation caused by the ego (haumain) which is opposed to Naam, and which can be removed only by a creative and altruistic living.

Already we have looked at this issue from another angle and concluded that Naam is conducting a qualityful movement expressible and aimed at fructifying in the world of man. In the background of Indian religions, this is the way to emphasize the importance of creative living in the world, as also of, what one may call this-worldly interest of God. To say that God has moral qualities does not mean an anthropomorphic description of God, but it is a metaphoric way of expressing the essentiality of virtuous conduct which alone secures progress as against the egoistic and individualistic activity of the self-centred man (manmukh), who generates forces of separatism, conflict, war and chaos. That is why the Guru also describes the God-centred men (gurmukh), the ideal in Sikhism, as having qualities of spontaneous beneficence, love, help to the poor, etc., essentially, the same qualities as of God. In short, in the case of God-centred man, his love of God is, in fact, transformed into God's love for man.

It needs to be clarified here whether the ideal in Sikhism is linkage with God or merger in God. According to the Gurus, man, because of his individualism and selfishness, stands alienated from God's Immanence. Instead of serving God of attributes, man, in his ignorance and myopic vision, starts serving his own self and fails to rise to his full height of being a conscious and humble instrument of God's creative functioning in the world. In His Transcendence God's Being is all by Himself in a self-absorbed state, without sign of any visible form, devotion, love or creative activity. In that state God's Will, Naam or Attributes are not expressed since these work only in the created world.

Second is the state when God's Naam and Will are expressed and creative functioning in the universe goes on. To talk of merger in God in this state involves virtually a reversion to the first state of God being Self-absorbed. This is, therefore, a Contradiction in terms because while God is engaged in His Creative Activity, there can be no question of the cessation of this dynamic activity or merger of man in the Self-absorbed State. Besides, such an opposite process would be evidently Counter to the expressed creative Will of God. True, there are some hymns in the Guru Granth where merger with God appears to be indicated, but this merger or joining means only a link, as quoted earlier, with the Creative Immanence of God because merger involves loss of identity and can be possible only in a pantheistic creed and not in a theistic creed like Sikhism.

Below are quoted a few of the hymns which clarify the issue:

- (i) "His body and mind are imbued entirely with the hue of Naam and he lives always in the company of God; as one stream of water intermingles with another, in the same manner his light merges in the light of God."<sup>98</sup>
- (ii) "The gurmukh is all admiration for the attributes of God; and he remains merged in God."<sup>99</sup>
- (iii) "Brahmgyaani looks solely to God for all support." "God lives by the side of brahmgyaani." "Brahmgyaani is himself God."<sup>100</sup>
- (iv) "He devotes himself to God with his whole being and remains merged in his God."<sup>101</sup>

All these and similar other hymns are significant because the idea of the superman's identity being different from that of God appears in the same hymn as containing, side by side, the idea of his apparent merger or merger in God. Evidently, the Gurus would not give two contradictory concepts in the same breath. Therefore, the seeming symbols of merger only signify a link between the superman (gurmukh) and Naam, especially as in all these and other such hymns, the superman has been indicated as a functioning and separate identity.

We further amplify below to show that the interpretation stated above is the only one that can be accepted:

- (i) The Gurus do not lay two kinds of ideals for their disciples i.e. one of link with the Creative Naam or His Will and expressible, only in the created world, and the other of one's merger in the Self-absorbed state of God, even while the created world exists and is being dynamically worked by His Immanence. Nowhere in Sikhism is the least evidence or suggestion of two alternative ideals or duality of goals. Such a thing is contrary to the very fundamentals of Sikhism as expressed profusely in the Guru Granth and in the entire Sikh tradition which is not only anti-ascetic and anti-withdrawal from life, but stands for active participation in the world. Merger in the anonymity of Brahman may be the ideal in other Indian systems or salvation religions, where the world is either an illusion or of a lower category, or where participation in samsara is anti-spiritual, but it cannot be so where God is the Creator of this beautiful world which is the only field of His Will and Creative activity. The goal is not heaven or salvation but love of Naam. "Heaven cannot equal God's Naam. The god-faced has no desire for salvation." "I seek not power, nor salvation; pray, give me the love of God."<sup>102</sup>
- (ii) In the dharam khand the Guru has clearly laid that for everyone on this earth the only ideal is of virtuous activity and deeds which alone meet God's approval. The same direction is given in the Guru's dictum: 'Higher than truth

is truthful conduct or living.’

- (iii) In the Hymn of Cosmography, as discussed earlier, the superman is limited only to the region of creativity. He is not merged in his immanence, much less in his transcendence, where the question of the separate identity of the devotee does not arise. Any such suggested merger would even be contrary to the clear denial of incarnation of God (*avatarhood*) in Sikh theology. For, a corollary of man’s merger in God would be God’s incarnation as man.
- (iv) Merger of the superman with God, without being His creative instrument, would inevitably involve the reabsorption of the Immanence or Will of God. This would virtually be a request for winding up all God’s creative activity. Such an ideal might be logical in religious systems where human existence is not real and authentic, or is a bondage, or in dualistic creeds where the separation of the spiritual element from the material element (*Prakriti*) is sought. That is why in such systems, self-immolating asceticism and calculated other-worldliness or austerities have a logical and recognised spiritual sanction, but not so in Sikhism, where all such practices have not only been considered to be useless and superfluous, but are deemed positively harmful and un-spiritual, especially when Guru’s God is Creative and Attributive and wants His supermen to be the instruments of His Will and of His Progressive Creativity. This makes one point clear. The Guru’s language being symbolic, link, merger, or joining, can never mean fusion, or loss of human identity of the superman, and, thus, cease to be a creative instrument of God’s Will, plan and purpose in the created world. The ideal of simple merger or Nirvana (not Bodhisattvic) would not be the service of God or *Naam* or action according to His Will, but would rather be an anti-creative annihilation or spiritual suicide almost egoistic in its content.
- (v) The ideal of merger in God would be quite foreign to a monotheistic creed like Sikhism which in all its aspects is anti-

pantheistic and casts on the individual, the responsibility of taking up God-centred activity instead of self-centred indulgence. Harmony with the will of God does not mean absorption into it but free cooperation with it. 'Our wills are ours to make them Thine.' In other words, 'Identification with the Divine Will on man's part really signifies an act of faith and freedom by which he makes the Divine End, his own end; it is not the recognition of the actual identity of his will with God's Will', writes Galloway.<sup>1</sup>

We conclude that the superman, towards whom the evolutionary progress is directed, becomes the instrument of, or linked to *Naam*. This is the meaning of the ideal of one's being linked with *Naam* or doing the. Will of God or being given the boon of *Naam*. The role of the God-faced is not only to be ever-creative and altruistic himself, but also to make the entire social fabric creative and virtuous. In Indian religious life it involves a radical shift from personal piety and salvation to man in general, whose uplift becomes the first and the highest love and priority in spiritual endeavour. Everyone is to be raised to the level of the superman and treated as equal. It is in line with this that in the *Guru Granth* the hymns of the Muslim and the Hindu saints are given the same status and sanctity as those of Sikh Gurus. This we have seen is the thesis of the *Guru Granth* and of *Naam*. Since all these ideals can be pursued by the superman only in the spacio-temporal world, it is obvious that any supposed ideal of merger, as in some other religions, is both foreign and contrary to the thesis of *Naam* and the Gurus. Just as in the case of the art of swimming, no training or test of it is possible outside the pool, similarly, whether a person is self-centred or God-centred, qualityful or otherwise, can be tested and authenticated only in this world of ours and that also from one's deeds and activities during his participation. Because the aim is to be the instrument of God and to fulfil the object of evolving supermen and making this world into a beautiful and qualityful place of supermen, i.e. to create God's kingdom on earth.

(C) Having come to the conclusion that according to the concept of *Naam* and the thesis of the *Guru Granth* complete participation in

life is the ideal, we may see what kind of life the Gurus lived. The lives of the ten Gurus are the best pointer to the goal of human life set in the *Guru Granth*, since these constitute the clearest interpretation of their teachings. In the *Guru Granth* all kinds of social and political qualities have been attributed to God and the Superman. Accordingly, it was the demand of the very logic of the doctrine of *Naam* and the thesis of the *Guru Granth* that the Gurus should have taken full share in the life of their times. And we see that this is, as it should have been.

Apart from the eternal problems of man, with which the Gurus dealt in detail, students of history know that in the Gurus' times there were two malignant growths—the caste and the tyrannical political system. The Gurus never bypassed them as being too mundane to concern them. Regarding both these matters, the Gurus' role has been revolutionary. In their hymns they have forcefully condemned these institutions: “The pride of caste leads to multifarious evils.”<sup>2</sup> “Distinction of high and low, caste and colour, hell and heaven introduced by the Vedas are misleading.”<sup>3</sup> “Kings are like tigers and courtiers like dogs and they prey upon peaceful citizens. The Kings' employees tear up innocent persons and the dogs lick up the blood that is shed.”<sup>4</sup> “The Mughals are made the instrument of death. The people have suffered intensely, O God, art thou not moved? . . . If the strong mauls the strong, I grieve not. If the lion attacks the sheep, the master of the flock must answer.”<sup>5</sup> Their protest against these evils did not rest at that. In the social institutions which the Gurus organised, caste had no place. Four of the five Beloved Ones (*Panj Piraaras*) of the Guru, who were to lead the entire community of the Sikhs were from the *Sudras*. After the political execution of the Fifth Guru the Sixth Guru started regular military training and preparations in order to fight out the challenges of the oppressive political system. Execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur intensified the socio-political struggle against Mughal misrule. Two of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed their lives in war, while the remaining two were bricked alive. The Tenth Guru also had to lay down his own life in this struggle. It is not

our object here to go into historical details or to assess the political impact of the Sikh movement. We need only to stress that as the result of their own thesis laid in the *Guru Granth*, the Gurus felt a spontaneous spiritual compulsion to organise and raise a revolt against the oppressive socio-political system.

25. Obviously, the lives of the Gurus fortify the conclusion we have already reached, namely, that the *Guru Granth* stands for complete participation in all creative and constructive aspects of life.

26. Way to *Naam*: Now, we come to the last question as to how to establish link with. *Naam*, how to become God-centred from a self-centred person, and what method of training to adopt on this, path. Just as the attributive God must work in the world, the training and transformation must also be in the world itself and not outside it. In the *Guru Granth* the following five modes of training have been referred to :

- (i) remembering God;
- (ii) keeping good company;
- (iii) developing a sense of discrimination;
- (iv) doing virtuous activities in the sense explained already;  
and
- (v) avoiding vices.

It is not our object here to elaborate on these except (a) to clarify an ambiguity which, we feel, exists about remembering *Naam* and (b) to give a few statements of the Gurus on each of these modes.

- (a) **Remembering *Naam***: There is considerable misunderstanding as to that constitutes the remembering of *Naam*. True, in the *Guru Granth* there is great mention of remembering *Naam* (*Naam japanaa*) and praise of God (*sift saalaah*). Accordingly, it has been said by some that this remembering, or what Trumpp calls “muttering”, is by itself enough for one to link oneself with God. This remembrance is sometimes also understood to mean yogic practices for the achievement of the so-called bliss as an end in themselves. We are not only unaware of any hymns in the *Guru Granth* recommending such yogic practices or any tradition in this

regard, but there are clear hymns against the use of such practices as means to spiritual achievement or as ends in themselves. True, there are numerous lines in the *Guru Granth* eulogizing *Naam* and its remembrance. But there are innumerable verses denying the utility of any mechanical means or mere repetition of words or hymns, e.g. “Everyone repeats God’s name, but by such repetition one gets not to God.”<sup>6</sup> “With guile in heart, he practices guile but mutters God’s name. He is pounding husk and is in darkness and pain.”<sup>7</sup> “One mutters God’s Name, but does evil daily, in this way the heart is not purified.”<sup>8</sup> The important thing is the motivation behind praise and remembrance. Flattery, sycophancy and hypocritical utterances cannot be praised because the motive of such utterances is self-interest. Real praise involves admiration, love and devotion accompanied by an honest desire to follow as an ideal or imbibe the qualities of one who is praised, God in this case. Such praise is a pining for what we are not, with a humble desire to move in the direction of the ideal. Praise, thus, is a spontaneous acknowledgment of the Glory of God and the desire to please Him, not by mere words but by qualityful deeds. Similarly, remembrance or repetitive utterances can be mechanical, magical, or ritualistic in nature. As against it, remembering can be a way to keep in mind one’s basic ideals so that the frail human psyche does not falter or deviate from one’s chosen direction and ideals. That is why, in the hymns of the *Guru Granth*, the reference is not at all to any mechanical repetition but to keep God in mind. Hence, the words used for the purpose are like *Naam* ‘being or living in one’s consciousness’ (*man vasia, or kare nivaas*), ‘enlightening one’s being’ (*kare pargaas*), ‘imbued’ (*ratte*) etc. This remembrance is like keeping the fear of God in one’s mind while embarking on any activity or making any decision. It is not an end in itself and seeks no magical or compulsive effects, but it is a way of

reminding oneself to take heart and courage to do the right. Just as in the case of 'doing the Will of God' and 'being yoked to *Naam*: 'remembering' is also inalienably linked with the subsequent decision to be made and activity to be undertaken. 'By dwelling on the Word, mind flows to serve others.' In short, the praise and remembrance of *Naam*, or keeping '*Naam* in heart' is just the means to recall the lesson and the ideal suggested by Attributive *Naam*. It is an humble attempt to seek the Grace and Light of the Guiding Star of *Naam*, to show to the weak and wavering psyche the path one has to tread and the direction in which one has to move in life. The conclusion is the same, namely, that all deeds and activities have to be in life which is the sole test of the earlier training, remembrance and preparation.

- (b) **Company of God-faced Men:** The Guru writes: "Just as castor plant imbibes the scent of the adjacent sandalwood, similarly, even the fallen are emancipated by the company of true ones."<sup>9</sup> "In good company we become true and develop love for *Naam*."<sup>10</sup> In good company one becomes good."<sup>11</sup>
- (c) **Use of Reason and Sense of Discrimination:** In the Gurus' system, use of human rationality and sense of discrimination have a distinct and important place. Man's faculty of reason is without doubt an asset which other animals do not possess. Sikh theology being non-deterministic, man has a distinct moral freedom and responsibility in the choice of his actions and thereby to bring about his transformation. The Guru writes, "By use of discrimination or intellect one serves God. By discrimination one is honoured. By discrimination and study one understands things. It is sense of discrimination that makes one charitable. This is the right way, rest is all wrong."<sup>12</sup> "Man is blessed with the light of reason and discrimination."<sup>13</sup> "One, in fear of God and discriminating between good and bad, appears sweet to God."<sup>14</sup> "We know right from wrong and yet fall into the well with torch in hand."<sup>15</sup>

(d) Ethical and Creative Activities: We have concluded already that only moral deeds in all fields of human activity are acceptable to God. God's interest in this development of man can be gauged from the fact that "He takes cognizance of and rewards even an iota of good deed,"<sup>16</sup> it being 'His innermost nature to help the erring.'<sup>17</sup> A few of the Guru's hymns on the issue are: "Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (vision of basic unity" and reality) to sprout."<sup>18</sup> "With self-control and discipline, we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God."<sup>19</sup> "Drive out lust and anger, be the servant of all, and see the Lord in all hearts."<sup>20</sup> "Control your evil propensities and you become a perfect man."<sup>21</sup> "Good, righteousness, virtue and giving up of vice are the way to realize the essence of God."<sup>22</sup> "Control cravings and the light of wisdom into deeds."<sup>23</sup>

27. We need hardly amplify the point except to say that the entire approach and the method of training have to be interconnected and simultaneous. The remembrance of God, good company and use of human rationality have to be the means to help man to undertake and do right kind of action and deeds, involving productive work, sharing of profits and looking upon and treating all alike. "The man incapable of earning a living gets his ears split (for wearing Yogic-Ear-rings) or one becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or Saint but begs for food from door to door. Never look upto such a person or touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living by hard work and shares his income with others,"<sup>24</sup> i.e. the training of man has to be in life and for life. "My whole being, body and consciousness, are imbued with *Naam*. True living is living God in life."<sup>25</sup> In the Guru's system the entire development has to be integrated, good actions leading to change in emotions and attitudes, and change in motives and approach resulting in good reactions and deeds. According to the Guru "without good deeds no worship is possible."<sup>26</sup>

28. Here is an important word of caution. We are not at all denying the basic sanctity of the mystic approach and experience, or that the ultimate link with *Naam* involving the highest spiritual or suprasensory experience is an act of God's Grace. All we suggest is that according to the Sikh Gurus the seeker's way to seek God's Grace is through virtuous and non-egoistic deeds in life and that after the mystic experience, the compulsion for such deeds is even greater than before since one has to be the creative instrument of the Attributive *Naam*, dynamically directing and sustaining the world.

29. Conclusion: We have now come to the close of our discussion and recapitulate briefly our conclusions:

- (i) The Transcendent God expressed Himself in *Naam* that created the world.
- (ii) *Naam* is the Creative and Dynamic Immanence of God, supporting and directing the becoming universe towards (a) a qualityful goal and (b) the emergence of a society of supermen.
- (iii) Gurus' system is monotheistic, since God is both Transcendent and Immanent and the world is His creation.
- (iv) The world is proclaimed as authentic and the sole sphere of *Naam's* deep interest and activity. It is not illusory or of a lower category of reality.
- (v) Accordingly, all human actions have a reality and validity and are immoral or moral, destructive or constructive, self-centred or God-centred to the extent they contribute or not to the ethics of *Naam* or a unitary view of life.
- (vi) The superman is both the knower and the executor of God's Will. After enlightenment, his duties and responsibilities, as the agent of *Naam*, increase and become more purposeful. He cannot be a silent spectator of this world, or a mere enjoyer of bliss; but his bliss lies in being yoked to God's purpose, giving meaning to life and hope and optimism to man i.e. in Sikhism the test, expression and goal of all mystic and spiritual endeavour is life and life alone.

- (vii) The way to establish link with *Naam* is through virtuous participation and deeds in all aspects of life which is the sole arena and test of spiritual and mystic activity both for men and supermen. It is not possible to have link with God by ritualistic, ascetic or escapist practices or even so called salvation or merger.

30. The doctrine of *Naam* gives a clear clue to the understanding of the Sikh Theology and Sikh History. It also explains vividly the ten Gurus' attack on the socio-political institutions of their times, their martyrdoms and military preparations and struggle with a view to creating new socio-political organisations and institutions and how all these were the logical consequence of a single spiritual thesis and the continuous unfolding of a planned process, uninfluenced by local, social or political circumstances or the exigencies or accidents of history.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCEPT OF HAUMAIN**

**DALJEET SINGH**

The concept of Haumain is central to Sikhism and its theology. No understanding of Sikhism is possible without knowing fully the significance and implications of this concept both in its theoretical and practical aspects. The idea of Haumain is so important that it appears in one form or the other in most of the hymns of the Gurus.

Let us see what the Gurus mean by this word. Haumain is the sense of individuality or of one's consciousness of separateness from other beings which everyone of us feels. The sense of Haumain would probably be best conveyed by 'ego' or 'I-am-ness', or awareness of one's self-existence. Since the time of Descartes, it is accepted as the subject of our individuality. This sense of self-awareness as a separate being is the character of our psychic centre in the body. But, Haumain does not mean Ahankara, as in the dualist Sankhya system in which it is a transformed part of the eternal Prakriti. The Sikh Gurus categorically deny dualism or the eternal character of Prakriti. In sum, Haumain or ego represents one's self, or the sense of one's individual being controlling and directing the physical body. Whatever be the psychic nature of this center, it is in regard to effecting a change in this center of individual consciousness that the Gurus address man in a large part of their hymns. The change contemplated is qualitative in nature.

The Guru says that Haumain or the sense of individual consciousness is God-created. Infact, the world came into being by individuation, or by the creation of beings that feel their separateness from other beings. The Gurus clearly assume a process or change and evolution in the world; they do not consider it to be a determined

world, or a closed block of events. There-fore, to start with, this sense of individuality was essential. For, there could be no sustained life, much less any progress or evolution, without there being in each unit of life a centre of consciousness which was both its controller and guardian. It is this ego or Haumain which has enabled the smallest unit of life to evolve ultimately into the most complicated structure of man, consisting of a highly developed and self-maintaining system of organs and nerve cells capable of consciousness, perception, thinking and also self-awareness of one's own thinking. Over millions of years the 'ego' has been deeply committed to the interests and progress of the concerned individual to the exclusion of every other being. Without this self-centered commitment of the ego, life could never survive the hard battle against challenges from the physical and the other environment. Undoubtedly, it is this sense of individual consciousness and commitment that has enabled the amoeba not only to survive against all odds but also to become man.

Let us now see what is man's fundamental problem today, what are his potentialities and what has the future in store for him. The Gurus say, "For several births (you) were a worm, for several births an insect, for several births a fish and animal,"<sup>1</sup> "after passing through myriads of species one is blest with the human form,"<sup>2</sup> "after ages you have the glory of becoming a man,"<sup>3</sup> These statements of the Gurus make it clear how from the smallest speck of life man has evolved after millions of years and myriads of births. Secondly, though man is still partly an animal, he is distinctly superior to other animals because of his sense of discrimination, i.e. his awareness of his own thinking process and his capacity to deliberate over his thinking. What is significant is Guru's clear statement that man has, apart from his potentialities, mental capabilities which are superior to those of other animals. "God created you out of a drop of water, and breathed life into you. He endowed you with the light of reason, sense of discrimination and wisdom." It would, therefore, be basically wrong, as modern psychology is doing, to try to understand him purely as an animal or virtually as a determined being. Man's 'sense of discrimination' means that he has the capacity to weigh, to make an

assessment, and finally to make a decision one way or the other. In short, he has the freedom of choice and therefore, a moral life, which is beyond the ken of an animal. The Gurus do not accept Skinner's view about human behaviour or that all 'moral life is just a defence mechanism or a reaction formation' against the impacts of the environment.

And, yet, man has a major problem. Haumain or the sense of individuation which in the past has been the greatest asset of life to secure man's progress, has now become his greatest malady; what has steered life from the dark dungeons of oblivion into the sunshine of man's present glory as an intelligent being, has become man's greatest disease. The Guru says, "The sense of egoism is the greatest malady of man,"<sup>5</sup> The struggle against the elements and the environment having largely been won, man finds himself incapable of dealing with his own species. Whatever be the acuteness of man's capacities and talents they are still the equipment of the egoistic man. As such, these capabilities, even at their best, are used for egoistic purposes. Just as one man's liver, howsoever healthy it be, cannot digest food for another person, the same way whatever be the intellectual capacities of man, those by their very constitution and logic cannot be used for the benefit of another person or individual. Man's brain, his rational faculty or his reason being just a limb or organ of the egoist psyche, it cannot but be self-centred in its operation and direction. It is this constitutional or organic condition of man which is the problem. It is, therefore, as difficult for man to shed or by-pass self-centredness as to jump out of the orbit of gravity. So long as this basic constitutional malady of man continues, the problems of conflict-ing nationalism, wars and poverty, and conflict between societies, man and man, man and woman, will continue. The organic condition of man being what it is, it holds no hope that in this state man can ever rationally rectify his condition or disability and solve his problems of conflict, poverty and war.

It is true that during the period of man's civilized life certain cultural conditioning for moral ends has taken place. But the change is very superficial. The moment there are pressures threatening man's entity or living, his basic self-centredness is unmasked to operate with

un-abashed vehemence. This is the spectacle we witness every day in dealings between man and man, one society and the other, and one nation and the other. And this despite all pretensions to the contrary. It is this state of affairs that made the learned authors of the 'Limits to Growth' give the warning, "The outcome can only be disasterous, whether due to the selfishness of individual countries that continue to act purely in their own interest, or to a power struggle between the developing and developed nations. The world system is simply not ample enough nor generous enough to accommodate much longer such ego-centric and conflictive behaviour by its inhabitants."6

It is in this context that we have to see what the Gurus say and whether or not they hold out any hope for man. They say, "you have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your opportunity to meet God."7 "O man, you are superior in God's creation, now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."8 The Gurus say two things very clearly. Not only is there hope for man, but it is also his destiny to rise above his egoistic condition so as to become a superman or Gurmukh. For the egoist psyche there is no hope of its being in harmony with his human environment unless man develops the higher stage of God or Naam- consciousness, i.e. unless from Manmukh (ego-conscious), he becomes Gurmukh (God-conscious). There is no midway between ego-consciousness and Naam consciousness. "There is conflict between Naam and Haumian, the two cannot be at one place."9

The Gurus have emphasized two points. First, that man is different from and superior to other animals not only in his greater capabilities but also in his mental equipment. He is not merely a 'naked ape'. He has a thinking or moral dimension which is capable of discriminating between different options open to him. He is qualitatively different from the animals. The Gurus repudiate all systems of thinking or ethics which deny man the freedom of will and yet hope that .in due course the 'naked ape' will develop an enlightened sense of rationality- and dispel the present atmosphere of conflict and clash. It would, indeed, be a bold man who, despite our experience of the current century, in which more persons have been killed in wars

and otherwise than the number in all the earlier centuries put together, pins his hope on man's developed or enlightened intellect. The point to understand is that man's rational equipment is tied or subservient to his egoistic consciousness, and, as such, by the very nature of its organic or biologic constitution it is incapable of rising above its egoistic personality. Therefore, altruism is beyond the capacities of the present-day man. True, some moral and ethical considerations are operative in the working of the socio-political life of the modern man, but that is the result of cultural conditioning that has taken place during periods of man's civilized life. The biologic or the rational history of man has not given rise to the present conditioning. It is due to the fact that over the centuries super-men or God-conscious men have appeared leading to the moral conditioning mentioned above. Schweitzer who has surveyed the entire field of Western thought finds no trace of the ethical therein.<sup>10</sup> Bergson too feels the same way.<sup>11</sup> Schumacher observes that no field of thought 'is so much in disarray as that of ethics.'<sup>12</sup> What we are logically offered is either selfishness, utilitarian ethics, or any other expedient without a higher purpose or a clear sense of direction. The Gurus, however, state that despite his egotism, man has, unlike the animals, the freedom of will which has enabled him to tread the moral or the spiritual path. By the very definition of God, He is completely Free. His Will is not determined, nor is He governed by the laws and logic of the empirical world. Hence all path to godliness is through the medium of morality or by the free exercise of human will. That is why in Sikhism the greatest emphasis is on moral life or good deeds. While man is by his nature egoistic, and to that extent determined, God is the Ocean of virtues and Free. His Will is altruistic. Hence spiritual progress has to be through moral life, or by the increasingly free exercise of one's will or sense of discrimination so as to fall in line with God's Altruistic Will. If man were totally determined without any free will, all Gurus' exhortations to man to be moral could have no meaning or significance. This implies that man has a dimension of freedom or sense of discrimination, which is superior to the equipment of the other animals. The Guru says, "Love, contentment, truth,

humility and other virtues enable the seed of Naam to sprout," 13 "with self-control and discipline we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God." 14 The second point stressed by the Guru is that, apart from having the dimension of the freedom of will *or* a sense of discrimination, man has also the potentialities of developing a higher level of consciousness, called God-consciousness, *or* universal consciousness which is different from the ego-consciousness, which is the chief disability of the present-day man. That is why the Guru says that only man has the opportunity or the destiny to meet God and become free, creative, *or* the instrument of God's Attributive Will *or* Sachara. A modern thinker writes, "The "inner world", seen as fields of knowledge (...), is the world of freedom; the "outer world" (...) is the world of necessity." "It is "dying to oneself", to one's likes and dislikes, to all one's egocentric preoccupations. To the extent one succeeds in this, *one* ceases to be directed *from* outside, and also ceases to be self-directed. One has gained freedom or one might say, *one* is then God-directed."<sup>15</sup>

In the Guru Granth Sahib the Guru uses two terms, one of Manmukh (man in his egoistic state) and the other of Gurmukh (the God-conscious man with a universal consciousness). The Gurmukh is entirely a new level of being, he is a superman. The difference between the Manmukh (present-day man) and Gurmukh (superman) is more than between an ape and man.

It is Haumain and its manifestations that plague the entire life of man. The Guru mentions five principal vices of Haumain, namely, lust (Kaam), anger (Krodh), greed and covetousness (Lobh), attachment (Moh), and pride (Hankar). The Guru prays, "I seek Thy Grace, dispel my lust, anger, attachment, greed and pride."<sup>16</sup> Pride is probably the most insatiable and subtle of human vices. It is the irony of human culture that most of the anti-human and anti-social institutions and problems like slavery, property, class, caste and national divisions, political dominance and territorial aggrandisement, and inequality of status and sexes have resulted from the manifestation of Haumain as their cause. Because otherwise all these institutions violate the basic principle of the brotherhood of man. We have amplified this

point for two reasons. First, to show that the present constitutional state of man and consequently his moral weakness have enormous socio-political implications. Therefore, unless this state of man is rectified there is no hope for the human society to bring about any major improvement in the socio-political sphere. It shows the bankruptcy of man's present organic condition and its limits. The second conclusion is that there is an intimate connection between the religion of man, i.e. his spiritual life and his socio-political life. So long as religion remains a question of personal salvation divorced *from* social responsibility, the socio-political life of man will continue to be in the grip of Haumain, and, for that reason, barren and in self-defeating conflict. Because it is the spiritual life of man that alone can attack the problem of Haumain.

In their thesis the Sikh Gurus not only hold *out* hope *for* man but they repeatedly exhort man to fulfil his destiny indicated in the following hymn. "God created first Himself, then Haumain (or sense of individuation), third Maya (multifarious beings and entities) and at the fourth place Gurmukh who always lives truthfully." 17 The Gurus clearly lay down a thesis of meaning and hope for man. The superman is God's instrument and expresses in his life God's love for man. The Gurus describe in detail the qualities of the Gurmukh, two of them being that he has a higher sense of perception that keeps him in touch with the Universal Consciousness; and, secondly, for that reason, he is spontaneously and actively altruistic, being in line with God's Altruistic Will. Therefore, in the world-view of the Gurus there is an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. As the instrument of God, the Gurmukh accepts total social responsibility and dynamically seeks to solve all problems of man; no field of life is taboo for him. Because, there is no hope for man unless he gains God or Universal Consciousness and knows that he is just a part, a cell, or a link in the world of God, and not an isolated being following Hobbes' law of everyone working against everyone else. Just as there is a qualitative difference between the ape and man, the Gurus contemplate the next higher jump to be equally qualitative, in nature

and content.

The above views of the Gurus suggest one more inference. For the Gurus there is no problem of evil, and for that reason, they assume no Evil Force or Satan as in some other religions. For the Gurus the entire problem is one of the imperfection of man. At the third stage of development, the stage of Manmukh, the problems of conflict and disharmony will appear. These are the problems of the imperfection of man. These do not suggest any morbid fatalism, nor the contending force of Evil. In fact, without imperfection there can be no change, evolution, or life, since all perfection is static. The concept of Haumain is, thus, the key to the understanding of the Gurus' thesis of love, meaning, hope and evolution, making it incumbent for the spiritual man, Gurmukh, to accept total participation and total responsibility in life so that according to the plan of God man reaches the final level of his being.

**Conclusion:** In sum, the concept of Haumain means that man's present problems of conflict, war, aggression and poverty are due to his consciousness being egoistic and self-centred. This failing of his is organic. By the very nature of his present constitutional make-up, he is incapable of rising above his egoism, he being at the lower or the Manmukh stage of the development of life. But, man has, according to the Gurus, the capacity and the opportunity to rise to the next stage of evolution i.e. from Manmukh to the stage of Gurmukh, this being his destiny. The entire effort of the Gurus is to exhort man to rise from his present chiefly mechanical life to a life of freedom and creativeness. The path prescribed by the Gurus is that of the remembrance of God, prayer and altruism, because God's Will is altruistic. And, because every act of altruism involves a conscious and free exercise of the will of man to fall in line with the Free and Altruistic Will of God. Hence the major emphasis in Sikhism is on moral deeds which prepare the soil that enables 'the seed of Naam to sprout'.

This explains why, unlike the assumption of Satan or Devil in some of the Semetic or other religions, in Sikhism there is no such assumption of an Evil Force operating in the affairs of man. That is

also the reason why the concept of atonement or redemption for sins, or the concept of the appeasement of gods by sacrifices is completely absent in Sikhism. In fact, this is also one of the reasons that the mediatory role of the Brahmins or the priests stands entirely eliminated in the religious life of the Sikhs. Consequently in Sikhism there is neither a morbid sense of guilt or evil at the imperfections and the problems of man, nor is there a sense of hopelessness at the failure of human reason or moral sense to bring about peace and amity in the world. The Sikh Gurus clearly state that at the present stage of human development, man is not equipped enough to meet the challenges facing him. But, they have distinctly led and pointed out the path of hope and happiness and what they proclaim to be man's chartered destiny.

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## CHAPTER 6

### CONSTANT UNITY OF SIKH THOUGHT

**S. S. KOHLI**

1. It has often been expressed by various scholars and historians that with the passage of time, even in the lives of the Sikh Gurus, a great change occurred in the Sikh Movement. From Guru Nanak Dev to the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, the movement was peaceful, but the change occurred when the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind became the Pontiff, after the martyrdom of his father. He wore not only one sword, but two swords, those of *miri* (worldly authority) and *piri* (spiritual authority). He fought several battles with the Mughal army. The seventh, eighth, and ninth Gurus were peaceful, but the tenth Guru, not only wielded the sword, after the martyrdom of his father, but also created the Khalsa, a brotherhood of Saint-soldiers. These scholars' argue that Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the faith never thought of anything else than the purity and saintliness in life, but with the sword-wielding Gurus and the Khalsa, the movement turned into a brotherhood of warriors and soldiers.

2. Sir Jadunath Sarkar in his book "History of Aurangzeb" asserts that the Sikhs were organised by Guru Gobind Singh "to suit special purpose". He is of the view that the Guru made the human energy of the Sikhs flow from all sides into one particular channel only, so much so that the Sikhs ceased to be full, freemen. Their spiritual unity was converted into a means of worldly success. The Guru "dwarfed the unity of a religious sect into an instrument of political advancement." As a consequence, according to Sarkar, the Sikhs who had been advancing for centuries to be true men, suddenly stopped short and became mere soldiers.

3. Toynbee, the celebrated modern historian, in his book "A study of History" (vol. VII) says that an outstanding example of self-

stultification through resort to force was presented in Hindu history by Sikhism. According to him Sikhism had started by practising fraternity as a corollary to its preaching of monotheism, but it went astray through allowing itself to become the sectarian faith of militant founders of a successor state of the Mughal Raj. He adds further that it had come eventually to be little more than the distinctive mark of a community that had virtually become another Hindu Caste.

4. In his book "Man's Religion", John B. Noss remarks that Nanak's creed and practice were distinctly quietistic, and yet it was the singular faith of the religion he established to change with the years into a vigorously activist political faith. According to him various influences were to provide a notable modification of this code of philanthropy, honesty, and holiness, and introduce in full strength a military ardour, a self-dedication to the arbitrament of the sword, that is a unique and in some respects a distressing story.

5. Dr. Trumpp in his "Introduction to the Adi Granth" says, "Guru Arjan's path is the great turning point in the development of the Sikh Community, as from that time the struggle commenced that changed the entire character of the reformatory religious movement."

6. In his entry on *Sikhism* in "A Dictionary of Islam", edited by T.P. Hughes, Frederic Pineott has made the following remarks about Guru Gobind Singh, "He was brought up under Hindu guidance, and became a staunch devotee of the goddess Durga; and by his pronounced preference for Hinduism, he caused a division in the Sikh Community. He introduced several important changes into the constitution of Sikh society. The chief among these was the establishment of the Khalsa, by which he bound his disciples into an army, conferred upon each of them the name Singh, or lion. He freely admitted all castes to the ranks of his army and laboured more earnestly over their military than over their religious discipline. The nature of the changes which Govind Singh effected in the fraternity is best known by the fact that the special followers of Nanak personally separated themselves from him, and formed a community of their own, rejecting the title of Singh. In other

words, they preferred the religious to the military idea.”

7. Most recently, Dr. W.H. Mcleod has discerned the change taking place in the Sikh Movement from the time of the third Guru, Guru Amar Das. He has drawn our attention to the declaration of Guru Nanak Dev that there was only one *tirath* (Pilgrim-station) for the true devotee and that was within his Own heart. According to Mcleod, this declaration has been spurned by Guru Amar Das by providing a new pilgrim-centre to the community. In the words of Mcleod, “Not only did he provide this new pilgrimage centre, but also distinctive festival days, distinctive rituals, and a collection of sacred writings. Guru Nanak had rejected all of these. Guru Amar Das, in different and more difficult circumstances, is compelled to return to them.”

According to Mcleod, the militancy in the Sikh Movement from the time of Guru Hargobind was due to the Jat influx in the community. He feels that the penetration of the Jats within the Sikh fold began very early, because the area in which the first five Gurus lived was particularly a Jat area. In his Views, the Jat incursion was of considerable importance in the evolution of the community, particularly for the developments which took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He has commented further that the growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patters and to economic problems which prompted a militant response.

8. The thoughts of a few, historians and scholars, given above, contain the following important points:

1. The spiritual unity was converted by Guru Gobind Singh into a means of worldly success. He dwarfed the unity into an instrument of political advancement.
2. The Sikh Movement went astray by allowing itself to become the sectarian faith of militant founders.
3. The faith of Guru Nanak changed with the years into a vigorously activist political faith. There was a notable modification in the code of philanthropy, honesty and holiness.
4. After the death of Guru Arjan Dev, the struggle commenced, which changed the entire character of the reformatory religious movement.

5. As a consequence of the changes effected by Guru Gobind Singh, the special followers of Guru Nanak Dev personally separated themselves from him and formed a community of their own, rejecting the title of Singh.
6. The change in the Sikh Movement took place from the time of, Guru Amar Das. He provided a new pilgrim-centre, distinctive festival days, distinctive rituals and a collection of sacred writings, which had been rejected by Guru Nanak Dev.
7. The militancy in the Sikh Movement from the time of Guru Hargobind was due to the Jat Influx in the Community.

The above statements of historians and scholars expressing a great change in the Sikh Movement, need thorough investigation. There is a great misrepresentation of facts. The evolution of the Sikh community has been misinterpreted. This shows the lack of understanding of the Sikh thought, which could not be visualised in the right perspective. In this short essay it is our endeavour to clarify the above-mentioned mis-statements.

9. The fact is that the spiritual unity had never been impaired. The spirit of the founder Guru worked within all the successive Gurus. It is recorded in the Var of Satta and Balwand in the *Guru Granth* that with each Guru, Guru Nanak changed his body. The spirit of Guru Nanak Dev worked in each Guru, therefore each succeeding Guru was Guru Nanak himself and as a proof he bore the seal of "Nanak". Do we not find the name of "Nanak" in the verses of the second, third, fourth, fifth and ninth Guru in the *Guru Granth*? Balwand says, "Guru Nanak bestowed the mark of Guruship on Lehna, who had the same light and the same method; it was the primal Guru who had changed the body." In the same poem, it is written about the third Guru Amar Das and the fourth Guru Ram Das, "Guru Nanak, the Enlightener, appeared in the form of Amar Das...The following was astoni-shed to see Guru Nanak Dev's canopy over the head of Guru Amar Das. The third Guru obtained the same throne and the same court...Hail, hail, O Guru Ram Das, the Lord who has created you,

has decked you... You are Nanak, you are Lehna and you are Amar Das.” Thus all the Sikh Gurus are one, there is no difference between them. The same fact has been conveyed by Bhai Gurdas in his first Var. He says, “It was during his lifetime that Guru Nanak Dev bestowed Guruship on Lehna. Guru Nanak transformed himself into Angad by infusing his light in him...Guru Angad Dev had the same mark, the same canopy over his head and sat on the same throne, on which Guru Nanak Dev had sat earlier. He had the same seal of Guru Nanak Dev in his hand and in this way the sovereignty of Guru Angad Dev was proclaimed...The gift obtained by Lehna from Guru Nanak Dev had to be given to Amar Das. The bestowal of the gift and light depends on the blessings of the Lord. The gift to be given is predestined; it comes to the house of one to whom it belongs. There sat the Sodhi king Ram Das, addressed as the True Guru...Then the Guruship came in the house of Arjan, who was called Guru, though he was the real son (of the previous Pontiff)... Then Arjan transformed himself and decked in the form of Hargobind...”.

10. The oneness and the unity of the Gurus has also been highlighted by Guru Gobind Singh in his autobiography entitled *Bachittar Natak*. He says, “Nanak transformed himself to Angad and spread Dharma in the world. He was called Amar Das in the next transformation. A lamp was lighted from the lamp when the opportune time came for the boon, then the Guru was called Ram Das. He was bestowed upon the old boon, when Amar Das departed for the heavens. Sri Nanak was recognised in Angad and Angad in Amar Das. Amar Das was called Ram Das; only the saints knew it and the fools did not. The people on the whole considered them as separate ones, but there were few who recognised them as one and the same. Those who recognised them as One, they were successful on the spiritual plane. Without this recognition, there could be no success. When Ram Das was merged in the Lord, the Guruship was bestowed upon Arjan. When he left for the abode of the Lord, Hargobind was seated on his throne.’ When Hargobind left for the abode of the Lord, Har Rai was seated in his place. Har Krishan (the next Guru) was his son. After him, Tegh

Bahadur became the Guru. He protected the forehead mark and the sacred thread (of the Hindus) which marked a great event in the Iron age. For the sake of saints, he laid down his head without even a sigh. For the sake of Dharma, he sacrificed himself; he laid down his head, but not his creed...”.

11. This fact of oneness and unity permeated in the hearts of the Sikhs with such intensity that it was mentioned in the famous Muslim chronicle “Dabistan-i-Mazahib” in the following words: “The Sikhs say that when Nanak left his body, he absorbed himself in Guru Angad, who was his most devoted disciple, and that Guru Angad is Nanak himself. After that, at the time of his death, Guru Angad entered into the body of Amar Das. He in the same manner occupied a place in the body of Ram Das, and Ram Das in the same way got united with Arjun...They say that whoever does not acknowledge Guru Arjan to be the very self of Baba Nanak becomes a non-believer...”. This Persian book was written about a century after Guru Nanak Dev.

12. This oneness and the unity of spirit can be further elaborated in the unity of thought on the basis of the compositions of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak Dev considered our earth as the abode of *Dharma*, wherein the initiate or the devotee has to practise *Dharma*. *Dharma*, according to the Sanskrit lexicon, connotes religious or moral discipline of piety and righteousness. *Dharma* is the foundation, on which the spiritual excellence can be achieved. Guru Nanak Dev said, “One should remain firm on truth”, the only Dharma (p. 1188, Basant M. 1). The Guru has, thus, identified Dharma with Truth. The same idea has been given by Guru Arjan Dev, when he said, “One should destroy the falsehood and remain firm on Dharma” (p. 518, var Gujri M.5). He also said, “Do not delay the acts of Dharma, let there be delay III sinful act” (p. 1354, Sehaskriti Shlokas M.5). Guru Gobind Singh categorically says that he had been sent by the Lord in the world for the spread of Dharma. He says, “I have come for this Work in the world and my Gurudeva has sent me to propagate Dharma. The Lord has asked me to spread Dharma and vanquish the tyrants and evil-minded persons. The saints should comprehend this in their minds that I have taken birth to spread Dharma, protect saints

and root out tyrants and evil-minded persons” (Bachittar Natak, Section VI). These words of the tenth Guru amply prove that his whole struggle was aimed at the spread of piety and righteousness. The Lord whom he cherished in word and spirit appeared to him as a deadly weapon for tyrants and evil-minded persons. He considered the sword as a symbol of Almighty, therefore he bowed to it in reverence. The use of the sword was made only to protect the lowly and weak and punish the unjust. His “Zafarnama” (Epistle of Victory), written to Aurangzeb, will always inspire his followers. The sword was meant to defend and not to offend. He said, “If all the other methods fail for reconciliation, it is appropriate to take up the sword in hand.” Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru wore the two swords of *miri* and *piri*, symbolising the worldly and spiritual authority respectively. The swords passed on through his son Guru Tegh Bahadur to his grandson Guru Gobind Singh. Both these swords arose from both the ends of Dharma. The sword of *Piri* (spirituality) was apparent in the House of Guru Nanak Dev and his successors, but the sword of *Miri*, though latent in earlier Gurus, became manifest after the martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev and became doubly sharp and lustrous with the birth of the Khalsa. The Khalsa was latent in the *Sat Sangat* founded by Guru Nanak Dev. Its bravery and chivalry was latent in Guru Arjan Dev’s mace of humility and the double-edged sword of modesty (p. 628, Sorath M. 5). Guru Nanak Dev had said, “If God Wills, He brandishes the Sword to the cut head of the enemy” (p. 145, Var Majh M. 1). That Sword of Dharma was put in the hands of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. Having been ignorant of the Sikh thought, modern historians and scholars have misunderstood the implication of the use of sword by the Sikh Gurus and the Khalsa.

13. Bhai Gurdas wrote about Guru Hargobind : “He, the warrior Guru, is the destroyer of the armies, a great hero and a great philanthropist.” (Var 1). Bhai Gurdas Singh, a contemporary poet, wrote about Guru Gobind Singh : “A unique person was born, the unparalleled hero. Hail, hail, O Gobind Singh, You are the Guru as well as the disciple”. (Var 41). How could such immaculate personalities be said to have turned away from the path of purity and

philanthropy? Whereas a couplet in the Shlokas of Kabir presents the crux of Guru Nanak's thought in the following words: "Do all the work with your hands and feet, but keep the mind absorbed in the Lord" (p. 1376, Shalok Kabir). The following thought of Guru Gobind Singh is quite identical with the above thought: "Blessed is his life in the world, who has the Name of the Lord in his mouth and thinks of the battle (of righteousness) in his heart. The mortal body will not last long. He should embark the raft of the Lord's Praises in order to be crossed across the ocean of the world. One should make this body the abode of forbearance, illumining his intellect like a lamp. He should take the broom-stick of knowledge in his hand and sweep away the rubbish of cowardice."

14. The religion of Guru Nanak Dev is the religion of love. Guru Nanak Dev said, "Valueless is the pride of caste and name. The Lord gives protection to all" (p. 83, Var Sri Rag M. 4, Shalok M. 1). The Guru had firm belief in universal brotherhood. Love is a godly quality and with Love one feels the nearness, of God. Guru Amar Das said, "The world is burning, Save it, O, Lord, Be Merciful on it. Emancipate it through any way it can be saved" (p. 853, Var Bilawal M. 4, Shalok M. 3). The Guru focusses his attention on the humanity as a whole. Guru Arjan Dev said, "I have befriended all, none is inimical towards me" (p. 671, Dhanasari M. 5). And Guru Gobind Singh said, "Recognise the unity in all the humanity... All the humans have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body, the same nature and the same combination of air, earth, fire and water" (Akal Ustat-Dasam Granth). The Guru firmly believed in equality and frater-nity. Without the knowledge of the tenets and hymns of the Sikh Gurus, the historians and scholars have not been able to consider their lives and doctrines in right perspective. The Gurus had no political ambition and no worldly aspirations. They were religious leaders. Religion was the foundation of all their activities. They wanted the spiritual development of the populace and any movement that stood in the way of spiritual development was not liked by them. The ferocious and mad tyrants, pouncing on the helpless populace, had to be dealt with in a befitting manner by the sword of Dharma,

In the words of Guru Nanak Dev :

There can be no displeasure, if a powerful person kills a powerful person,

But if a powerful lion falls upon a flock of sheep, or a herd of cattle, then the Master must answer.

(p. 360, Asa M. 1)

15. Mcleod discerns the change coming in the Sikh Movement from the time of the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das. This, according to him, is based on two factors. The first is regarding the *tirtha* (pilgrim station) built by the Guru in violation of the sayings of the first Guru, who had said, “My *tirtha* is the Name of the Lord” (p. 687, Dhanasari M. 1). We do not know how McLeod has concluded that the *tirtha* of Guru Amar Das was Baoli Sahib and not the Name of the Lord? The Guru himself says, “That is the true place of pilgrimage, where one bathes in the pool of Truth; the Lord Himself makes the *Gurmukh* (the disciplined devotee) realise this. The word of the Guru awards the merit of bathing at the sixty-eight *Tirthas* in which the dirt is washed off.” (p. 753, Suhi M. 3). Thus for Guru Amar Das also, like Guru Nanak Dev, the real *Tirtha* is the Word of the Guru or the Name of the Lord. How can a foreign missionary, who boasts of using the most scientific methodology for his conclusions, know the real spirit of Sikhism, without delving deep into the compositions of the Gurus? Another factor which he mentions for the change in the Sikh Movement is the Jat influx in the community. Mcleod knows full well that Sikhism is antagonistic towards caste system. None of the castes attracted any of the Gurus. Guru Nanak Dev had said, “In the House of the Lord (Truth), no one will ask you about your caste or birth. The deeds done by a person constitute his caste and merit” (p. 1330, prabhati M.I). Undoubtedly, the first five Gurus lived in an area where the Jats were in majority, but the following of the Gurus was not limited to these areas. Their Sikhs were spread far and wide, not only in India, but in foreign countries as well, because Guru Nanak Dev had made extensive journeys in and out of India. Mcleod has very cleverly manipulated

the issue of Khatri culture and Jat culture, which has no relevance in the evolution of the Sikh Movement. The missionary zeal lurking in his mind seems to be the cause of raking up the above issue, with the secret design of creating a cleavage among the Sikhs on caste basis. All the Sikhs were ready to sacrifice their lives for their Gurus, whether they were Khatri or Jats, whether they were Udasis or house-holders, whether they were men or women. The service of the Guru is dear to the Sikhs of all shades. The following statement of Mcleod is totally a misrepresentation of facts: "The growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems, which prompted a militant response" (The Evolution of the Sikh Community, pp. 12-13). In ordinary course of life, the individual may falter, but in the collective will of the community, which may manifest itself in the form of the holy congregation or the common kitchen, a Sikh is a Sikh and nothing else, and everything in his possession, I his body, mind and wealth, all belong to the Guru.

16. The Sikh society is a society of householders, a society of the saints, soldiers and scholars. Each Sikh is an amalgam of *Gyan* (knowledge), *Karma* (action) and *Bhakti* (devotion). *Bhakti* makes him a saint, *karma* a soldier and *Gyan* a scholar. Three jewels of *kirt karna* (doing work), *wand chhakna* (sharing one's earning with the deserving and needy) and *Namjapna* (remembrance of the Name of the Lord) enlighten the path of his life. He faithfully practices the precept and discipline ordained by the Gurus. The discipline of the Gurus is one and the same." For him the discipline ordained by Guru Gobind Singh is not different from that of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder Guru. The discipline, in reality, concerns the inner self. In this respect, there is no difference between a Sahajdhari Sikh and the Khalsa. The outer garb of the Khalsa is a manifestation of the inner discipline. The Khalsa wields the sword of Dharma and retains the Complete Image of the Lord. The Khalsa are the Saint Soldiers created to fight against injustice and to protect the oppressed and suppressed ones, i.e. to live and fight for the cause of Dharma or righteousness.

17. Summing up the thought-content of this article, I wish to quote a passage from the article entitled "Guru Nanak and His Age", published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, in its book "Guru Nanak-A Homage" and written by Shri A.R. Deshpande :

"Though, historically speaking, the age of Guru Nanak seems to have extended only till the tenth Guru Gobind Singh, its ideological influence continues till this day. Some historians seem to opine that Guru Nanak's original high concepts of religion were set on decline when the later Gurus introduced militarism into it, and led the Sikh to ambitions of a political nature. It is difficult to agree wholly with such view. The course of Guru Nanak's Sikhism was turned that way by the need of survival in a wholly hostile atmosphere and not by political opportunism. Taking stock of the situations before and after Guru Nanak, one can say with a sense of pride and confidence that the age of Guru Nanak restored religion to its pristine simplicity and brought amelioration to the followers of contending religions. It built up confidence in the people and made it possible for them to live a valorous life of dignity and honour. This the age of Guru Nanak accomplished, not only in Punjab, but in the whole of India."

## CHAPTER 7

### UNITY OF SIKH THOUGHT

INDARJIT SINGH

Introduction: Many will be familiar with the poem of the six blind men of Hindustan who, 'to learning much inclined, went to see an elephant, though each of them were blind'. These early academics touched the first part of the elephant that came to hand and described the elephant in terms of what they' felt. One touched the elephant's side and concluded 'the beast was like a wall.' His colleagues touched other parts of the animal's anatomy and were equally' dogmatic in their individual pronouncements-that an elephant most closely resembled a spear (tusk), snake (trunk), tree (leg), fan (ear), or rope (tail). The poem concludes that 'though each was partly in the right, all were wholly in the wrong'.

Those who study religion rather than *live it*, often exhibit blindness similar to that described. This partial vision often arises from the academic approach of dividing a subject into its component parts for ease of study.

All too often, many academics, including many learned Sikhs, in their pre-occupation with one aspect of Sikhism, totally fail to see the whole. This is the most charitable explanation for the thesis put forward by those who write of the different teachings of different Sikh Gurus. It is as if an art critic, dazzled by breath-taking brilliance of a master painting, finds himself unable to describe it except in terms of what he feels to be are its' consti-tuent parts.

It is clear from even a cursory study that such partial vision does not do justice to the total life-embracing message of Sikhism. My aim in this task is to reiterate the essential unity of Sikh thought in a religion that is both an explanation of life and creation, and a guide to living in conformity with God's will.

**Origin of the Sikh Faith:** In order to understand the relevance and thrust of Sikh teachings, and why Guru Nanak decided to institute a system of succession, it is important to look briefly at the background in which the Guru put forward the message of Sikhism.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh way of life, was born at a particularly difficult time in Indian history-when religion for the Hindu masses had been reduced to ritual and idol worship in a society compartmentalised by the cruel rigidity of caste. At the same time the Moghul conquerors were convinced that their way of life was *the one and only way*, and it was right, just and *religious* to force others to their narrow view of Islam.

Guru Nanak was appalled by the narrowness of vision and bigotry around him and in his very first sermon declared:

‘Na koi Hindu, Na koi Mussalman’

That is, ‘On God’s eyes, there was neither Hindu nor Muslim, only man’.

The Guru taught that God was not interested in labels but in purity of belief and action. A basic principle of Sikhism, that no one religion has a monopoly of truth, clearly follows from this view of God and religion. Equally it follows that if God is not concerned with man-made labels, we too should judge people by actions rather than on arbitrary distinctions based on caste, class or birth. Guru Nanak, looking at the distorted religious scene around him, in which ‘kings were butchers and no moon of truth was seen to rise’, clearly felt the ‘need to spell out in clear unambiguous language, the main principles of religion as revealed to him through communion with God.

**The Teachings of Guru Nanak:** Guru Nanak preached not in little understood Sanskrit, but in the language of the day, describing both the attributes of God, and the meaning and purpose of life. In doing so he attacked the very basis of the caste system in which the highest caste, the Brahmins, using Sanskrit for religious discourse, taught that they alone could interpret religion, and should be accepted as intercessors between God and man.

Guru Nanak’s life was characterised by his clear logical mind,

and in putting forward his message, he started at the beginning- – with the Sikh concept of God. In the Mool Mantar, the opening lines of the Japji Sahib, he writes:

There is *one* God  
 Who is the true and ultimate reality He is the Creator,  
 Without fear, without enmity  
 He is beyond time and immortal  
 His spirit pervades the universe  
 He is not born  
 Nor does he die to be born again  
 He is self-existent  
 By His grace revealed.

The strict monotheism of Sikhism is stressed in the very first line, and we also learn how the Sikh concept of God, 'He is not born, nor does He die to be born again', differs from the Christian concept in which God is reputed to take birth, and from that in Judaism which talks of a favoured nation. God is not personal' or exclusive to anyone religion. If He is without enmity, it must logically follow that He is without favourites or favoured nations. This is not said to denigrate any religion or system of belief, but to show clearly the particular path of Sikhism.

In order to promote clarity of thought and openness of discussion, the Guru, with characteristic courage and with his unique blend of tact, humour and open criticism, attacked superstition and fanaticism and outright tyranny around him. Let us look at a few examples of his teaching as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib:

Social Concern: Looking at the leaders of religion, he wrote:  
 With sacred marks on their foreheads  
 And loin cloths tucked behind,  
 They are the butchers of the world  
 Carrying daggers in their hands.

(GGS,P. 471)

Caste: In a society in which even the shadow of a lower caste was said to pollute we ate taught:

God is not concerned with caste

Learn the ways of truthful living  
For one's deeds proclaim one's true status.

(GGS, P. 1330.)

Equality of all human beings:  
Call everyone high, none low  
God the one potter has fashioned all alike  
His light alone pervades all creation.

(GGS, P. 62.)

Ritual Bathing:

True religious bathing consists of constant  
Immersion in God's name.

(GGS, P. 358.)

Astrology and Auspicious Days: At a time when people were  
afraid to do anything affecting themselves or their families without  
superstitiously consulting an astrologer, he taught:

The astrologer calculating this and that  
Prepares our horoscope without perceiving  
The reality of the Real  
Contemplation of the Guru's word

Far surpasses such speculation. (GGS, P. 904.)

And, in contra-distinction with Christianity and Judaism with  
their emphasis on the Sabbath or Holy Days, we are reminded that  
every minute of every day is holy:

Blessed are the twelve months, the seasons,  
The lunar and the solar days  
The hours, the minutes, the seconds

When we are in communion with the Lord. (GGS, P. 1109.)

Ritual Practices: At a time when people indulged in pilgrimages,  
penances and ritual acts of charity to appease God, Guru Nanak taught:

Pilgrimages, penances, ritual acts of compassion or charity are  
not worth even a grain of sesame seeds. (GGS, P. 4.)

Conduct: Guru Nanak was not interested in mere academic  
discussion of religion. He wanted to change the way people lived and  
emphasised that abstract contemplation of truth is not enough. In a  
verse that puts his mission in its true perspective, he taught:

Truth is high  
But higher still is truthful living. (GGS, P. 62.)

I have mentioned a few brief examples of Guru Nanak's teachings  
to give a flavour of his message. To sum up, the Guru's vision was

nothing less than that of converting a weak, superstitious and cowardly society into an upright people with their own dignity, ideals, and social imperatives.

As we have seen, he gave a clear unambiguous view of the nature of God and systematically attacked the superstition and rituals that obscured the path of truth. He taught that the commonly accepted view of religion, in which people deserted their families to seek God in the wilderness, to be nothing less than selfish escapism. 'Live detached amid attachments, like the lotus in the water' (GGS, P. 1281)

He taught we should live in society, work constantly for its improvement and yet always be above its meanness and pettiness.

In putting his teachings into practice, the Guru instituted the practice of 'Langar', eating together in the Gurdwara to break down the barriers of caste and to emphasise the importance of service and the dignity of labour.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that Guru Nanak's concept of service goes far, far beyond the service in the Langar, or simple charity in the wider society. A Sikh *must* also be dedicated to opposing injustice and working for the uplift of humanity; to working for tolerance and actively opposing evil, risking torture and death in the process and yet preserving a love for all humanity.

Guru Nanak referred to this difficult path of Sikhism in which love for and service to humanity were mandatory, when he taught:

Those who would play this game of love  
Should come fearless of death  
As if with their head on the palm of their hands  
Having set foot on this path  
Tread it boldly without fear for your life.

(GGS, P. 1422)

Guru Nanak's teachings can be summed up in the injunction:  
Naam Japo, Kirt Karo, Waand Chakho  
Meditate on God, earn by your own effort, and share your earnings with the less fortunate.

We should meditate on God and godly ideals to get our bearings on life, to distinguish between the important and the trivial and to lose our ego in the wonder of God's creation.

To conclude this brief look at Guru Nanak's teachings, It is important to emphasise that the Guru required his Sikhs to live in these three dimensions of communion with God, meeting personal family and material needs, and service to society, at one and the same time. The Guru's teachings were not meant for a particular time of the day, or day of the week, but are clearly intended to permeate the very fibre of our being, to determine our action and behaviour every minute of every day.

Succession: Guru Nanak was practical enough to realise that such fundamental changes to society could not be brought about in a single life-span, so he instituted a system of succession. In all there were nine successor Gurus, each was charged with the task of emphasising the practicality of Guru Nanak's teachings in a variety of different circumstances, as well as helping the new community to gain confidence and strength. To emphasise the unity of Sikh thought and the paramountcy of Guru Nanak's teachings, the Gurus referred to themselves as the second Nanak, the third Nanak and so on.

Unity of Sikh Thought: "Those who would criticize Sikhism look for differences between the teachings of the ten Gurus not understanding that the message was one and the same, it was only the social and political environment that differed.

Each successor Guru not only continued to highlight the totality of Guru Nanak's vision, but also, true to the teaching of Guru Nanak that 'Truth is high but higher still is truthful living', *lived* according to these teachings. And it was not always easy. Two of the Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Teg Bahadur, were martyred in the cause of religious freedom. Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred upholding the right of Hindus, those of another faith, to worship in the manner of their choice in the face of intense Mogul persecution. The manner of Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom was a stark reminder of the Guru's commitment, fearless of death, to the 'game of love' for humanity.

The unity of Sikh thought is underlined in the lives and teachings of the Gurus e. g. by their emphasis on opposition to caste, and Guru Nanak's teaching of the oneness of all humanity.

Some call themselves Hindus

Others call themselves Muslims  
 Among these are the Shias  
 There are the Sunnis also  
 And yet man is one race in all the world.  
 (Guru Gobind Singh, Akal Ustat)

Again, Guru Gobind Singh emphasised the balanced life of a householder taught by Guru Nanak, as opposed to the widespread practice of selfish asceticism, he wrote:

O my soul practice renunciation in this way:  
 Consider thy house as a forest  
 And yourself as an ascetic  
 Let continence be your matted hair  
 And communion with God thy ablution  
 (Guru Gobind Singh, Hazare Sabad)

We have already seen how two of the Gurus suffered martyr-dom upholding Guru Nanak's teaching of tolerance; and evidence of the successor Gurus being entirely true to Guru Nanak's teachings on a life dedicated to service of humanity, can be found again and again in the pages of the Guru Granth Sahib and in the pages of Sikh history.

It is true that later Gurus had to defend themselves in the face of intense persecution. But is this defence inconsistent with the teachings of Guru Nanak and the first five Gurus? It was Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, who compiled the Holy Granth to reflect the fullness of Sikh teachings. In doing so he underlined the basic unity of true religion by including writings of non-Sikh saints whose views coincided with Sikh teachings. One of these, the Saint Kabir, wrote:

He alone is recognised a warrior  
 Who fights for the sake of his faith  
 He dies cut piece by piece  
 But never deserts the battlefield.

(GGS, p. 1105)

Kabir later comments on the use of force:  
 Says Kabir, to use force is tyranny  
 And the Lord shall call thee to account  
 When the account is produced  
 Thou shall suffer strokes on thy face and mouth.

Kabir continues significantly,  
 It is easy to render such an account  
 If there is purity in the mind.

(GGS, P. 1375)

Let us examine these two quotations. The first quotation does not say he is warrior who *dies* for his faith as might happen in a non-violent response. The emphasis is clearly on one who *fights* for his faith. The second clearly refers to circumstances in which the use of force can be justified. Taken together, the two verses underline Guru Gobind Singh's later dictum that in certain circumstances, it is both right and proper to turn to the sword.

One should also reflect on the fact that while Guru Arjan Dev gave his own life in a demonstration of the importance of non-violent resistance, he also encouraged his Sikhs to purchase horses and become adept at horsemanship. Why would he do this other than to inculcate a martial spirit in the Sikh community ?

There is absolutely nothing in Guru Nanak's teaching to support a suggestion that he accepted the doctrine of Ahinsa which gave Hindu society a cowardly excuse to be silent witnesses to the persecution and humiliation of their womenfolk. On the contrary, the Guru was fiercely critical of the Lodhi rulers who failed to protect their subjects. In the wake of the Mogul Babar's invasion, he wrote:

O Father, the Creator of all  
 When the strong strike the strong  
 The mind does not grieve  
 But when a powerful tiger  
 Falls on a herd of cattle  
 The herdsman must show his manliness  
 The dog-like rulers  
 Have allowed a jewel-like country  
 To be laid to waste  
 And in their death, none shall remember them.

(GGS, p. 360)

Guru Nanak also made clear that prayer alone was not sufficient to halt evil :

On hearing of the invasion of Babur  
 Millions of Muslim divines prayed for his halt

But they failed to stop him  
 Babur rushed to burn houses, resting places  
 And age-old temples  
 Princes were cut to pieces and thrown to the wind  
 Despite all the prayers  
 Not a single Mogul became blind  
 And no one wrought any miracle  
 To save the people from disaster.

(GGS, P. 418)

Guru Nanak praised those who lose their lives in living the truths taught by religion:

Blessed are those who die in the service of the Lord  
 Such heroes will be honoured in God's court.

(GGS, P. 579)

Some of Sikhism's detractors say Guru Nanak did not intend Sikhism to develop into a distinct religion—a distinct path to God. If this were so, why did he then institute a system of succession? Who builds a foundation other than to contain a superstructure? It is clear that he wanted the distinctive message of Sikhism to be conveyed to succeeding generations, and as his own extensive travels showed, to a far wider audience. It is entirely consistent with this logic that his teachings should have been collected to form the core of the Guru Granth Sahib for future guidance to the Sikhs. It is logical that the system of living Gurus continued until the infant Sikh society had been tested and had shown itself able to stand on its own—as it was on that historic Basakhi of 1699. It is entirely consistent with Guru Nanak's message that Guru Gobind Singh should have identified constraints on the use of force to right injustice, by emphasising that *only* when all other means of resisting tyranny had been tried and failed, was it righteous to resort to the sword. It is entirely consistent with Guru Nanak's teaching that Guru Gobind Singh should have given 'a distinct Identity to all Sikhs, male and female, so that we can be measured against the high ideals taught by the Gurus.

To sum up, the unity of Sikh thought is all too evident from even this very brief examination of Sikhism. Just as an Olympic torch is carried by different athletes to the site of the Olympic Games, Guru Nanak's message was the torch carried by successor Gurus through

difficult and changing social and political terrain. It is this message that is now preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib as a permanent guidance not only to the Sikh community, but also as a beacon of hope to an increasingly disillusioned world.

These teachings were not dogmatic pronouncements on particular social issues of the day, but guiding principles relevant to all peoples, at all times. All the Gurus were true to these basic teachings of Sikhism and we can no more separate their individual Contributions than we, as Sikhs, can separate a life of prayer and contemplation, from an active life dedicated to the service and uplift of all humanity. All are delicately entwined in the unified and balanced guidance that is Sikhism. It is an integrated system that has been lived and exemplified by the Gurus themselves.

*Note:* All quotations are from the Guru Granth Sahib unless otherwise stated.

SECTION III

**GURU GRANTH SAHIB**



## CHAPTER 8

### THE GURUSHIP AND SUCCESSION OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB

MADANJIT KAUR

**Introductory:** The purpose of this paper is to explore W.H. McLeod's thesis, put forward in his *Evolution of the Sikh Community* whereby he rejects the tradition of the vesting of the authority of Guruship in the Holy Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib* by the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. McLeod has supported his view on the authority of J.S. Grewal.<sup>2</sup> According to McLeod the "tradition which conferred his (Guru Gobind Singh's) personal authority upon the sacred scripture and the corporate *Panth* may perhaps be a retrospective interpretation, a tradition which owes its origin not to an actual pronouncement of the Guru but to an insistent need for maintaining the *Panth*'s cohesion during the later period."<sup>3</sup> McLeod asserts his conclusion in no less emphatic terms by suggesting that "The slate must be wiped clean and must not be reinforced until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century."<sup>4</sup>

McLeod's conjectures seek to cloud the historical interpretation of the events related to the religious history of the Sikhs. In fact, McLeod is primarily interested in the political history of the Sikhs and the role played by the Jat community therein. In order to consolidate his so called Jat thesis, McLeod concentrates on the development of the events in the history of the Sikh community in the eighteenth century and tries to coordinate historical development with the motivation of the Jat leadership emerging out of political exigencies. However, he totally ignores the legacy and the heritage of the Guru period. It seems, McLeod is neither familiar with the social process of the evolution of Sikhism, nor of the nature of Sikh ethos. Besides, McLeod has not

brought any historical evidence to substantiate his thesis for rejecting the succession of *Guru Granth Sahib* as declared by Guru Gobind Singh. On the other hand, we find solid evidence encompassed in the doctrine of Guruship as revealed in *Guru Granth Sahib*, later reiterated by Guru Gobind Singh when he hailed the *Granth* as the *Guru*. Besides, it has also been authenticated by contemporary and near contemporary sources, documents and records that Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint any person to succeed him as Guru and that he had invested the *Guru Granth Sahib* with guruship and had commanded the Sikhs to accept it as their Guru.

The theme of this article is in the form of a poser that calls for an answer to the issues like the Sikh concept of the *Guru*, the doctrine of *Guru Granth Sahib* as visible body of the Guru, the closing of personal *guruship* and the succession of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

**The Guru in Sikhism:** The Tenth Guru Gobind Singh brought to an end the line of human *gurus* by conferring *guruship* upon the collection of hymns which his followers used in their personal and corporate devotion and as guide. So a movement, whose focal point was a series of Masters, became centred upon a Holy Book, henceforth known by the name of *Guru Granth*. This was the final culmination of the Sikh concept of Guruship, capable of resisting the temptation to deify the line of human *gurus*. Yet this is not itself the whole of the story of Sikh Guruship.

The Sikh doctrine of *guruship* is rooted in Indian religious tradition. But it is dynamic and distinct in form and structure. In fact, Guruship is a distinctive concept of Sikhism. It is a legacy of the founder Master, Guru Nanak. The Tenth Master while maintaining the concept of Shabad as Guru also made the *Panth* distinctive by introducing corporate *Guruship*.<sup>5</sup> Though the concept of *guruship* continued to be the core of Sikhism, the role of the human *gurus* was transferred to the *Guru Panth* and that of the revealed word to *Guru Granth Sahib*. This has made Sikhism a distinctive modern religion. Any other interpretation of the decision of Tenth Master to introduce the system of Guru Granth and Guru Panth would be contrary to the

Sikh thesis as amplified by Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh.<sup>6</sup>

The meaning of *guruship* in Sikhism is the manifest form which God takes as preceptor of mankind. The nature of guru-ship in the *Guru Granth Sahib* states that the Supreme Being is Himself the Guru, whose chosen channel for communication to humanity is the institution of the *Guru*. The Sikh *gurus* have taken considerable pain to emphasize the point that the *bani* (the holy Scripture) and not the body (the personal *guru*) is the *guru*.<sup>7</sup> “Theologically, Guru Nanak had always made a distinction between himself, and, as God’s bard, conveying the message entrusted to him. The declaration, ‘I spoke only when you, O God, inspired me to speak,’<sup>8</sup> is characteristic of his view of himself as God’s messenger. There is no reason to believe that his successors differed from him in this view.”<sup>9</sup> It must always be remembered that the guru of whom Guru Nanak spoke is God, self-manifested in order to reveal Himself, so that by His grace man may reach the realm of truth which is his destiny. The words ‘*gur prasadi*’ in the *Mool Mantra* must be regarded as testimony to this belief.<sup>10</sup> This statement is crucial to an understanding of the concept of Guru.<sup>11</sup>

The testimony of God as Guru which began with Guru Nanak is reaffirmed by his successor gurus.<sup>12</sup> However, to give this institution greater permanence and prevent future alterations, Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs, refused to appoint any human successor and bade the Sikhs to consider the *Granth* as their Guru.<sup>13</sup>

Before his death at Nanded in Deccan in AD 1708, Guru Gobind Singh, terminated human succession to the office of the Guru and established instead, the condominium of the *Granth*, and the *Panth*, which ever since is recited at the conclusion of every congregational prayer, morning and evening, and on all occasions of public worship by the Sikhs:

The order of the *Khalsa* was established as was the command of the Timeless (Almighty); This is now the commandment for all the Sikhs: Accept the *Granth* as the *Guru*; Know *Guru Grauth* as the visible body of the *Guru*. He who hath a properly trained mind, shall find

confirmation thereof in the contents of the *Sabad* (the Holy Book) itself.<sup>14</sup>

Ever since, the Sikh community has recognised no human successor to guruship, they consider *Khalsa Panth* and *Guru Granth* to be a twin institution, in whom rests the joint sovereignty of the Sikh world.<sup>15</sup>

Henceforth, the identity of the *guru* has been incorporated in the doctrines of *Guru Granth* and the *Khalsa* was to provide leadership to the community (*Panth*), not in supersession of the previous gurus, but as an authority to work in their names. It was invariably to guide itself by the teachings of the *gurus* as found in the *Holy Granth*. For the Sikhs, this double aspect of guruship solved the most serious problem of accepting authority of prophet as absolute and final for all times.

**Guru Granth — The Visible Body of the Guru:** What is the meaning of the declaration that the *Granth* is the *Guru*?

The pronouncement of Guru Gobind Singh was not any new innovation in the Sikh doctrine. The seed idea of the doctrine of *Guru Granth* is clearly discernible in the *bani* of the *Granth* itself. It is repeatedly stressed in various hymns that the ‘Revelation is the *guru* and the *Guru* is the Revelation’, and that ‘whosoever shall accept the Revelation of the *Guru* shall behold the *guru* himself.’<sup>16</sup>

It is the injunction of the *Granth* that the Sikhs are bidden to ‘accept the Revelation of *Guru* as true for ever, for, it is the revelation of God that maketh the *Guru* to utter it.’<sup>17</sup> Further, it is ordained that, ‘the Revelation of the *Guru* is the Light of the World, through it God’s grace descendeth into human soul.’<sup>18</sup> The message of the *Holy Granth* is that ‘the *guru*’s word abideth with the soul as the water drowneth it not, and the fire consumeth it not.’<sup>19</sup> Again it is stressed that as ‘the *guru*’s revelation pervadeth in the world, it redeemeth man through the Name of God.’<sup>20</sup>

The direction in which the idea of guruship evolved is implicit in the *bani* of the Sikh gurus. According to Guru Nanak the *Guru* is one who had first realised the Lord and His word.<sup>21</sup> The Divine Message had to go to the world through the *Guru* for the emancipation of

mankind.<sup>22</sup> The true *guru* must be the guide for conveying the Lord's message as given to him in the truest form.<sup>23</sup> According to Guru Amar Das, 'there is guru, through whom the True Word had come, ponder always on the True Word of the Guru for guidance in life.'<sup>24</sup>

After explaining the Guru's Revelation, the Holy *Granth* identifies it with the *Sabad* (or the Word of the Guru) that comes through human agency : the *guru*. The term *Sabad* literally means the word and was intended to represent God's command. "The *Sabad* in the sense of eternal and self-existent sound, conceived as the eternal Veda, is an old Indian notion, rather an Ancient Aryan notion, for it is found in Zoroastrianism where the *Menchra Spenta*, the holy Word, is said to be the soul of God."<sup>25</sup> The *Guru Granth Sahib* identifies *Sabad* with Divine Wisdom which forms itself as God's Light in the conscience of man. It avers that *Sabad* is the essence of things by understanding which man comprehends truth and thus becomes one with Truth.<sup>26</sup>

The *Sabad* is dormant in the heart of every human being and it can be made manifest through the discipline of self-control and spiritual orientation.<sup>27</sup> The mortal human body is not to be deemed as the Guru; it is Light within, that is the Guru. It is the *Sabad* that is the guru and the guide. The absence of it results in spiritual confusion.<sup>28</sup> This *Sabad* is not variegated, it is one, for God is One and all that there is, proceeds from God.<sup>29</sup> The search and discernment of this *Sabad* is an effort worth making for man in this world, all else is waste and weariness.<sup>30</sup>

It was made clear by Guru Hargobind that the Immortal frame of the Guru had no peculiar entity and that the *Sabad* as revealed by the Guru, is the only authentic portrait of the guru.<sup>31</sup> It is inferred from the above narration that Guru's Revelation is recorded in the *Guru Granth* as *Sabad* or Testament. According to Sikh doctrine this Testament is the *Guru*. The same principle was followed by Guru Gobind Singh when he established the condominium of the *Guru Panth* and the *Guru Granth*. Instead of appointing an individual successor to himself, he appointed the collective order of the *Khalsa* and formally recognised the status of the *Granth*, which was - to be conceded as the

*Guru Granth*.<sup>32</sup> This status of *Guru Granth* or *Bani* had remained unaffected throughout,<sup>33</sup> only the temporal direction of human affairs was given a collectively religious basis by Guru Gobind Singh.

This was the process by which the *Granth* has been institution-alised as the *Guru Granth*. The basic idea of the peculiar institution of guruship of the Sikhs has remained unchanged. The *Granth*, stands for two things; revelation of Truth through the Word, and the interpretation and practice of the Truth through the personal lives of the *Gurus*. The Truth as revealed in the *Sabad*, incorporates fundamental Truths, that is, belief in the one-ness of God and approach to Him through love (*nam*) and service (*sewa*). As truth never gets old, so the Guru in Sikhism never becomes a back number. He is ever new and whole.<sup>34</sup> He is ever alive in the collective personality of the Sikhs working with a sense of the presence of *Guru* in them. That is why for the Sikhs, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, does not belong to the sixteenth century but is a dynamic personality guiding them personally through the organisation of the *Panth*. The initiation ceremony, *Amrit*, the *Khande di pahul* introduced by Guru Gobind Singh, was made the basis of this reorganisation. It is evident from the above analysis that the doctrine laid down in the *Guru Granth* by the earlier Sikh gurus, was reiterated by Guru Gobind Singh, when he hailed the *Granth* as the *Guru Granth*.<sup>35</sup>

The *Guru Granth* contains perennial philosophy, uncontaminated by temporal and secular considerations. It is not a code of ethical conduct or social organisation like semitic scriptures, though it strictly postulates a social context for practice of religion and enjoins a strict ethical conduct. It is not sectarian, and lays down no metaphysical propositions in support of the practices of a religion. It has a universal import. It is the perceivable record of the Transcendental Wisdom. The *Guru Granth* is a divinity, not a deity, though extreme reverence is shown to it by the Sikhs. It is regarded as the visible body of the True Guru and is symbolic of the Sikh doctrine of sovereignty both temporal and spiritual.

It is on account of their reverence for *Guru Granth Sahib* that Sikhism has maintained its integrity despite observances resulting

from popular piety and the fact that for much of its time it has retained its separate religio-cultural entity in a society dominated by Hinduism.

If there is any way in which Sikhism may be described as unique, it is in its elevation of a holy book to the status of guru-ship. Guru Gobind Singh's reason for elevating the *Adi Granth* to the status of *Guru* must be linked with his creation of the *Khalsa* in 1699. But the more immediate reason may probably be 'found in the awareness of the Guru that the circumstances of his time required some radical change in the mode of Sikh leadership. Politically and socially this took the form of the *Khalsa Panth* which was invested with the temporal authority (*miri*), and the spiritual authority (*piri*) remained with the *gurbani*, the scripture *Granth*.

**Closing of Personal Guruship and the Succession of the Guru Granth Sahib:** The fact that Guru Gobind Singh, Tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, died at Nanded in Deccan, now in Maharashtra, on October 6-7, 1708, has been substantiated by contemporary and semi-contemporary sources. It has also been authenticated beyond doubt that Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint any of his followers to succeed him as *Guru* and that he had commanded his followers to look upon the Holy scripture, the *Granth Sahib* as their Guru, thenceforth known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*.<sup>36</sup> During his life time, Guru Gobind Singh had created the distinctive order of the *Khalsa*, with uncommon form and symbols that helped to impart them distinct identity. Towards, the end of his life, the Guru had to face extremely adverse circumstances. But he knew no despondency and did not give way to frustration. He had lost all his four sons, mother and a large number of devoted followers. He left Punjab and spent his last days in the Deccan.

At the creation of the *Khalsa* on the Baisakhi day of 1699, he had not only presented himself to be formally initiated into the fraternity of the *Khalsa* but had also submitted himself to the discipline which had been prescribed by him for the new order of the *Khalsa*. This virtually meant the surrender of the office of guruship to the will of the *Khalsa* and its merger into the body politic of the new order.

This was re-affirmed by the message he delivered to his followers from his death bed. This fact is affirmed by the testimony of Sainapat, who was not only a contemporary of the Guru but was also one of his *darbari Kavis* (court poets) at Anand-pur.<sup>37</sup> His work *Gur Sobha*, composed in AD 1711, within three years of Guru's death, records:

“A day before his death, the Singhs asked him about the form he was adopting (or the person whom he was nominating to succeed him). In reply he said that the *Khalsa* was his very self and that to them he had granted his robe-his physical self, and that the Eternal and the Limitless Word uttered with the Lord's light is the Supreme Master.”<sup>38</sup>

Sainapat, thus, tells us that a day before the event the Guru had said that he had bestowed his physical form upon the *Khalsa*<sup>39</sup> and that the limitless and Eternal Word was the Satguru.<sup>40</sup> This was Guru Gobind Singh's last message and his final commandment saying in unmistakable language and clear words that he was not appointing any particular individual as the succeeding Guru and that the *Khalsa* under the guidance of the Divine Word – the *Gurbani* – was to be the future physical and spiritual representative of the Guru. This has since become the accepted creed of the Sikhs.

The account of Sainapat is supported by Bhai Nandlal, a devoted disciple, who was present at Nanded at the time of the Guru's death. He tells us in his *Rahitnama* that the Guru told him that his one form is the Formless Supreme Spirit and the other *Granth Ji – Guru Sabda*, the Word of the great gurus incorporated in the holy *Granth Sahib*. ‘Have no doubt about it’, he said, ‘the visible form is the Sikhs, the *Khalsa* should remain absorbed in the *gurbani* day and night.’<sup>41</sup>

Bhai Prahlad, another associate of Guru Gobind Singh also corroborates the above mentioned Guru's commandment in his *Rahitnama* as following:

With the order of the Eternal Lord has been established the Panth.

All the Sikhs are hereby commanded to obey the *Granth* as the *Guru*.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly Bhai Chaupa Singh, another associate of Guru Gobind Singh, had also mentioned this commandment in his *Rahitnama*.<sup>43</sup>

It is evident from the above mentioned contemporary evidence that Guru Gobind Singh had abolished for all time to come the nomination of anyone person as the Guru of the Sikhs. After him the *Khalsa*, with *Guru Granth Sahib* as their eternal *Guru*, became the *Guru Panth*. With this the personal line of guruship came to an end. This historical fact has been rejected by McLeod. But there is abundant contemporary and near-contemporary evidence available for the comparative study of different versions of the events, for sifting fact from fiction and for authenticating the tradition recorded in the Sikh sources regarding the abolition of the personal guruship and succession of *Guru Granth Sahib* as the living *Guru* of the Sikhs.

Koer Singh, the author of *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (composed in AD 1751) has not only supplied more details of this historical event, but has also provided clarity to the tradition. The author has accounted *Granth* as *Guru Granth*<sup>44</sup> and reminds one of the Guru's commandment to the Sikhs to regard *Guru Granth* as Divinity.<sup>45</sup> He tells us in explicit terms that Guru Gobind Singh discontinued the line of personal guruship and did not appoint anyone to succeed him as *Guru*. In fact, he had surrendered his personality to the *Khalsa* when he had become one of them at the baptismal ceremony. He publicly declared this merger on many occasions afterwards, and especially a little before his death at Nander. Koer Singh also narrates at length the formal installation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the *Guru*.<sup>46</sup> The author records that the Guru addressed his Sikhs before his demise and instructed them that there would be no successor to him, the *Sarbat Sangat* and the *Khalsa* should deem *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* as Supreme. Koer Singh further states that with five paise and a coconut in his hand the Guru paid homage to the Holy *Granth* and declared its succession as the *Guru*.<sup>47</sup> Koer Singh had been in close association with Bhai Mani Singh who was a contemporary and a close associate of Guru Gobind Singh. Bhai Mani Singh was the first person to act as the *Granthi* (reader of Holy *Granth Sahib*) in the Harmandir at

Amritsar after the Guru's death. Therefore, the information passed on from Bhai Mani Singh to Koer Singh is believed to be fully reliable.

Another work, which we may refer to here, is *Bansavalinama* of Kesar Singh Chibbar (completed in AD 1770). Kesar Singh's ancestors had been in the service of Guru Gobind Singh as *dewans*. He claims to have seen and consulted in his early days a *behi* (account book) of the house of the Guru. The tenth chapter of *Bansavalinama* deals with the life of Guru Gobind Singh. In stanzas 678-83, the author mentions the death of the Guru and his last commandment in reply to the question of the Sikhs:

“The *Granth* is the guru; you hold the garment (seek the protection) of the Timeless God.”<sup>48</sup> Two hours later the Guru went to heaven; his light blended with Light. The same night he was cremated after he had been bathed in the rose water,<sup>49</sup>

Further, the account of the death of Guru Gobind Singh as given in *Mahima Prakash* by Sraup Das Bhalla may be accepted as historical and objective.<sup>50</sup> This account was completed in AD 1801. He was a descendant of Guru Amar Das, the third guru of the Sikhs. The account given in *Mahima Prakash* is objective and without any poetic embellishments and supernatural elements. Therefore, the evidence of this author can be accepted as historically correct. According to *Mahima Prakash*, before his death, Guru Gobind Singh called his Sikhs to his presence and said, “Our ten forms have come to an end. Now recognize the *Guru Granth Sahib* in my place. He who wishes to talk to me should read the *Granth Sahib*. I have entrusted you to the lap of the Almighty”. Then follows the account of the death of the Guru. The author concludes the narration by recording that the Guru's body was then cremated and the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* was recognized in place of the *Guru*.

This simple account of the death of the Guru and the succession of *Guru Granth Sahib* agrees in all its essentials with the contemporary and the later accounts.

Dr. Ganda Singh has referred to another reliable authority, Munshi Sant Singh's *Bayan-i-Khandan-i-Nishan-i-Bedian* (account of the Bedi family of the Una). According to it when Guru

Gobind Singh was about to die at Nander in the Deccan (Katik Sudi 5, 1765 Bikrami), all the Singhs and disciples asked him as to who would be the future Guru. The Guru replied; '*Guru Khalsa, Khalsa guru*'. Then the Guru, with five paise and a coconut in his hand, bowed before the *Guru Granth Sahib* and said, 'Ye all community should recognize the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the Guru after me and obey the commandments contained therein'. And then he uttered the following couplet:

"Recognize the *Guru Granth* as the visible body of the *Guru*". By this statement the author of *Bayan* has reiterated the last commandment of Guru Gobind Singh in the words of Bhai Nand Lal who was present at Nander at the time of the Guru's death.<sup>51</sup> The other details are identical to the tradition recorded in *Gurbijas Patshahi 10* by Koer Singh.

The tradition incorporated in the Sikh sources is also found in historical works in Persian and English. The Persian works are written both by Muslim and Hindu scholars belonging to the Punjab or its neighbourhood. As most of them had first-hand knowledge of the tradition, beliefs, practices and ceremonies of the Sikhs, they cannot be ignored by students of history.

The news of the death of Guru Gobind Singh has been mentioned in Royal Court News of the *Mughals-Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla* of October-November 1708 and the *Bahadur Shah Nama*.<sup>52</sup>

Contemporary Persian accounts of Mirza Muhammad's *Harisi-Ibrat Nameh* (1705-19 AD) and Sayyad Muhammad Qasim

Hussain Lahauri's *Ibrat Nama* (1722 AD) and *Ibrat Maqal* (1731 AD) written within couple of years of the death of Guru Gobind Singh, respectively record the usual account of Guru's death at Nander.<sup>53</sup>

Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari, the author of *Tarikh-i-Mazaffari* (1810 AD) and *Tarikh-i-Bahr-ul-Mawwaj*, carries the history of the Mughals to the beginning of the reign of Akbar Shah. These Works deal extensively with the struggle of the Sikhs against the Mughals and the Afghans. They are considered to be important sources on the history of the Punjab during the eighteenth century. Before the end of

## Guru Gobind Singh's account, Muhammad Ali

Khan writes that 'after him (Guru Gobind Singh), according to the faith of these people (the Sikhs), the descending of Guruship and of internal spiritual line came to end and the book, the Granth, was established in place of the Guru.'<sup>54</sup>

Besides, Ahmad bin Muhammad Ali's *Mirat-ul-Ahwal-Jahan Numa* (AD 1731) also mentions, 'the sons of Guru Gobind Singh had been killed in the battle of Alamgir. After him there is no Khalifah (successor guru)'.<sup>55</sup>

The conventional version is also supported by Hindu authors of Persian works. Rai Chatarman, the author of the *Chahar Guls/zan Akhbar-un-Nawadir* (also known as the *Chatar Gulshan or Khulasat-un-Nawadir*) (compiled in AD 1759) writes in this context that "there are Ten persons (to be recognized). These ten *Khalifahs* (gurus) are called *Das Mahal*. Anyone else sitting on the *gaddi* after them is not acceptable to them (the Sikhs)."<sup>56</sup>

Harsukh Rai, the author of *Maima-ul-Akhbar* (AD 1799) says about Guru Gobind Singh that 'He is the Tenth Mahal and is the last *Zahur* (successor) of Guru Nanak.'<sup>57</sup>

The traditional version accounted in Sikh and Persian sources is also incorporated in European accounts. George Forster has also referred to the Gurus in his letter No. XI of 1783 in his *A Journey From Bengal to England* and says that 'Govind died in 1708 at the town of Nander without leaving any male issue and a tradition delivered to the sicques, limiting their priests to the number of ten, inducing them to appoint no successors to Govind Singh.'<sup>58</sup> Talking about the change in the inscription on the Sikh coinage, Major James Browne (1787.88) has casually referred to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh as the first and the last Gurus of the Sikhs and has indirectly given us confirmation of the belief of the Sikhs.<sup>59</sup>

Indian historians of the nineteenth century who compiled their accounts at the instance of Europeans are supposed to have recorded correct and reliable information because their purpose was to make the English rulers acquainted with the Sikhs with whom they (English) expected to come in close. political contact in the future.

Khushwaqt Rai's *Tarikh-i-Sikhan*, also called the *kitab-i-Tawarikh-*

*i-Panjab* (written in AD 1811) says that Guru Gobind Singh died at Abchal Nagar, Nander. 'This event, that is his death, took place of *Kartik Sudi* 5, 1765 Bikrami. The generation (of Gurus) of Guru Nanak up to Guru Gobind Singh came to end.'<sup>60</sup>

Ahmad Shah Batalia, author of *Tawarikh-i-Hind: Bayan-i-Ahwal-i-Mulk-i-Hind wa Maluk-i-an az zaman-i-qadim ta* (1233 Hijri) has devoted a part of his account to the Sikhs. This section *zikar-i-Gurwan wa ibtida-i-Singhan wa Mazhab-i-eshan*, forms an appendix to *Daftar* I and II of the *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* by Munshi Sohan Lal Suri (the court historian of Maharaja Ranjit Singh). Ahmad Shah Batalia writes that Guru Gobind Singh, who had accompanied Emperor Bahadur Shah to the Deccan, died at Nander in 1755 Bikrami (AD 1708) and this place was known as Abchal Nagar. Some Sikhs lived there. The Nizam of Hyderabad had fixed a daily allowance for them. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also made big donation for the upkeep of the sanctuary and the maintenance of its custodians.<sup>61</sup>

Sohan Lal Suri tells us that during the last moments of Guru Gobind Singh's life a disciple of his asked him as to whom he had appointed as *Guru* after him. Thereupon the Guru replied that, '*the Guru is Granthji*. There is no difference between the *Granth* and the *Guru*. From the *dershan* of *Granth Ji* one shall have the happy *dars/zan* of the *Guru Sahib*'.<sup>62</sup>

This version is also confirmed by the Muslim historian of the nineteenth century. Ghulam Muhy-ud-Din alias Bute Shah in his *Tarikh-i-Panjab* (1848)<sup>63</sup> and Mufti Ali-ud-Din in his *[brat Namah* (1854)<sup>64</sup> have both recorded the death of Guru Gobind Singh as an historical fact. Bute Shah in his abridged recension of the *Tarikh-i-Panjab* (preserved in the Panjab Public Library Lahore) has followed Lala Sohan Lal's *Umdat-ul-Tawarikh* in recording the last commandment of the Guru regarding the *Granth* being the *Guru* after his death and that 'there is no difference between the *Guru* and the *Granth*.'<sup>65</sup>

Kanhaiya Lal Hindi's *Zafar Namah-i-Ranjit Singh* is another study. He writes, Guru Gobind Singh died at Abchal Nagar in 1765 and that no one (of his disciples) succeeded him to the *gaddi* (guruship). With

him ended the *gaddi* of leadership (*masand-i-sarwari*) and with him came to end the custom of the succession of Gurus (*Shewa-i-rahbari*).<sup>66</sup>

All the European historians of the nineteenth century who have written on the Sikhs like John Malcolm, W.G. Osborne, W.L.M' Greger, Joseph David Cunningham and others, have accepted' the above version regarding the death of Guru Gobind Singh, abolition of the personal Guruship and the succession of *Guru Granth Sahib* as the Guru of the Sikhs.

Even Ernest Trumpp, whose observations are very negative on various aspects of the religious literature of the Sikhs, has adopted this tradition. In this context, he writes that at the time of his death, Guru Gobind Singh told his followers, 'I have entrusted the whole society (of the disciples) to the timeless. After me you shall everywhere mind the Book of the *Granth Sflhib* as your Guru, Whatever you shall ask, it will show to you. Whoever be my disciple, he shall consider the *Granth* as the form of the Guru. Having uttered these verses he closed his eyes and expired (AD 1708)'.<sup>67</sup> Muslim historian of the nineteenth century have also accepted this version. Syed Muhammed Latif, author of the *History of the Panjab* also records that some time before the death of Guru Gobind Singh when Sikhs asked him as to who would be the Guru after him, the dying Guru replied, 'I entrust my *Khalsa* to the Divine Being... The *Granth* shall support you under all your trouble and adversities in the world, and be alone guide to you hereafter. The Guru shall dwell with the society of disciples, the *Khalsa*, and wherever there shall be five Sikhs gathered together, there shall the guru be also present. The Guru also ordered them that they must have belief in one God and look on the *Granth* as His inspired law.. He then closed his eyes and began to pray, and expired in the performance of His devotion.'<sup>68</sup>

Conclusions: It is concluded from the above analytical study of the various historical sources at our disposal that:

(i) The institution of Guruship of the Sikhs follows a planned process and a theological concept fundamental to Sikhims from the times of Guru Nanak.

(ii) Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint any mortal successor

to succeed him as *Guru*.

(iii) The tenth Guru had invested the *Guru Granth* with guruship, and commanded the Sikhs to accept it as their future *Guru*.

(iv) The closing of personal guruship and the succession of *Guru Granth Sahib* was not an innovation, but only a doctrine of Guruship as revealed in *Guru Granth Sahib*.

## NOTES

1. W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford University Press, Delhi. 1975.
2. J.S. Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1982, Ch XIV, pp. 100-105.
3. McLeod. op. cit., p. 17.
4. McLeod, op. cit., p. 16.
5. W Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism*, London, 1982, pp. 37-38.
6. Ganda Singh pages 183 to 210; and Harbans Singh pages 211-227, *Perspectives on Sikh Tradition* Edited by Gurdev Singh.
7. Taran Singh, 'The nature of Guruship in the *Guru Granth*' in *The Natured Guruship* (ed. Clarence O. McMullen), ISPCK, 1976, pp. 27-8.
8. *Guru Granth Sahib*, pp. 507-508.
9. W. Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism*, p. 55. 10. Ibid, p. 73. 11. There are explicit statements in the *bani* of Guru Nanak which indicate that God is the *Guru*. See *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1226.
12. Ibid., pp. 307,308, 317.
13. See Part IV of this article.
14. *Dasam Granth* (ed. Giani Mohinder Singh), Amritsar, 1952, Vol. I, p.248.
15. The *Guru Granth* is installed in the Sikh places of worship. It is symbolic of the visible body of the Guru. All the ceremonial paraphernalia associated with the keeping, opening, and closing of the Holy Book represent manifestation of royalty and sovereignty, both temporal and spiritual.
16. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 982.
17. Ibid., p. 308.
18. Ibid., p. 67.
19. Ibid., p. 679.
20. Ibid., p. 1066.
21. Ibid., p. 1279.
22. Ibid., p. 466.
23. Ibid., p. 722.

24. Ibid., p. 646.
25. Kapur Singh, *Parasaraprasna*, (Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh), Revised Edition (eds. Piar Singh and Madanjit Kaur), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1988, p. 172.
26. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1353.
27. Ibid., pp. 8 and 1264.
28. Ibid., p. 635.
29. Ibid., p. 1334.
30. Ibid.: p. 1342.
31. Bhai Gurdas, *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, ed. Bhai Vir Singh, Khalsa Samachar Amritsar, 1972, Var 24; 11, p. 396.
32. Kapur Singh, op. cit., p. 177.
33. The Sikh tradition consider the Holy *Granth*, as the real corpus of the Transcendental Wisdom. And in this the Sikh tradition follows the Buddhist principle of the identity of the Buddha's word with the essence of Buddha.
34. Teja Singh, *Sikhism, Its Ideals and Institutions*, Khalsa Brothers, Amritsar, 1970, p. 26.
35. *Guru Granth Sahib*. p. 515.
36. Ganda Singh, 'Guru Gobind Singh Designates Guru Granth Sahib to be the Guru' in *Perspective on the Sikh Tradition* (ed. Gurdev Singh), Pub. Academy of Sikh Religion & Culture, Patiala. 1986, p. 183.
37. Sainapat, *Gursohha* (ed. Ganda Singh), Punjabi University, Patiala, 1965, Ch. XVIII, 40-44-805-809.
38. Ibid.
39. *Gursohha*, Ch. XVIII, 41, p. 132.
40. Ibid., p. 43.
41. Bhai Nand Lal, 'Sakhi Rahit Patshahi 10', *Gur Khalse de Rahitname*, ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok, Sikh History Research Board, Amritsar, 1979, p. SI.
42. Bhai Prahlad, *Rahitnama, Bhai Prahlad Singh Ka*, op. cit., p. 58.
43. Ibid.,
44. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok), Punjabi University, Patiala. 1968, Ch. IX, p. 130.
45. Ibid., Ch. XXI, p. 283.
46. Ibid., p. 284.
47. Ibid.
48. Kesar Singh Chibbar, *Bansavalinama Dasam Patshian ka* (ed. R. S. Jaggi) Pub. in *Parakh*. Research Bulletin of Panjabi Language and Literature, Punjab University, Chandigarh, Vol. II, 1972, Ch. 10, Stanza 679, p. 163.
49. Ibid., Stanza 628, p. 164.
50. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, II, Ch. 'Sakhian Patsbabi Das,' Sakhi 27, pp. 891-93.

52. William Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Calcutta, 1992, Vol. I, p.90; also Ganda Singh, op. cit., p. 189.
53. Ganda Singh, op. cit., pp. 200-201.
54. *Tarikh-i-Muzafferi*, p. 152, also *Bahrul-Mawwaj*, p. 208.
55. As quoted by Ganda Singh, op. cit., p.201.
56. Rai Chatarman, *Chahar Gulshan Akhbar-uu Nawadar*, pp. 35-36 as quoted by Ganda Singh, op. cit., p. 201.
57. Har Sukh Rai, *Maima-ul-Akhbar*, p.481 as quoted by Ganda Singh, op. cit., p 201.
58. George Forster, *A Journey From Bengal to England*, London, 1798, Vol. I, p.263.
59. James Browne, *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks (India Tracts)*- London, 1788, pp. vi, viii.
60. Khushwaqt Rai, *Tawarikh-i-Sikhan*, (MS, 1869 BK), pp. 366,379.
61. Ahmad Shah Batalia, *Tawarikh-i-Hind*, (MS. 1233 All). Appendix p. 11.
62. *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Arya Press, Lahore, 1885, Vol. I, pp. 64-65.
63. See Bute Shah, *Tarikh-i-Panjab* (MS, AD 1848), p. 206.
64. See Ali-ud-Din, *Ibrat Namah*, (MS, AD 1845), Vol. I, p. 178.
65. Bute Shah, *Tarikh-i-Panjab*, (Abridged recension), p. 62.
66. Kanhaya Lal Hindi, *Zafar Namah-i-Ranjit Singh*, Lahore, 1876, p. 52.
67. Ernest Trumpp, *The Adi Granth*, (Eng. Tr.), London, 1877, pp. XC vi.
68. Syad Muhammed Latif, *History of the Punjab*, Calcutta, 1891, p. 269.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **AUTHENTICITY OF THE KARTARPURI BIR**

**DALJEET SINGH**

Introduction: It is Guru Arjan Dev who made the important and sagacious decision to compile the Adi Granth as the Sikh scripture so that the spiritual and ideological identity of the Sikh Religion and Panth is established. An additional reason for the Guru to undertake the task was that it had come to his notice that persons outside the Panth were writing devotional hymns and giving them currency as the production of the Gurus. It is a settled and accepted tradition that the Fifth Guru compiled the Adi Granth with Bhai Gurdas as the scribe; and that the original Adi Granth has been present with the Sodhis at Kartarpur. After the study of this Bir by Dr. Jodh Singh and the publication of his book, *Kartarpuri Bir De Darshan*, it was considered that the authenticity of the Bir had been firmly established; but some oblique but incorrect observations by McLeod tended to throw doubt on its authenticity. It was, therefore, considered necessary to make a detailed study of the issue after a close examination of the Bir at Kartarpur. This paper comprises the result of that examination.

Custody: After its preparation, the Bir was installed at Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, on Bhadon Sudhi 1st Samat 1661. The tradition and historical writings are unanimous that from Amritsar the Adi Granth was shifted to Kartarpur when the family of the Sixth Guru moved to that place. It is accepted that the original Adi Granth remained with the family of Dhirmal, the great grandson of the Guru, and his descendants at Kartarpur, even after the Gurus had shifted from there. Historical writings are also clear that during the time of the ninth and the tenth Gurus, the Adi Granth was with the successors of Dhirmal.

For, many copies of the Adi Granth, in which the Bani (hymns) of the ninth Guru had been recorded in the time of the ninth or the tenth Guru, show that those had been corrected by comparison with the Granth of the Fifth Guru.<sup>1</sup> It is not in doubt that all through the subsequent period, the Adi Granth at Kartarpur remained the Granth of reference for authenticating the Bani of the Gurus and the Bhagats.<sup>2</sup> And, it remained in the custody of the Sodhis of Kartarpur. After 1708 A.D., the Sikhs passed through an extremely difficult time. In that period, the question of the change of the custody of the Adi Granth could not arise. After Ranjit Singh came into power, he procured this Granth for himself and kept it with him as a national treasure of the Sikhs. After the British conquest of the Punjab, this Bir passed into the hands of the Indian Government. Thereafter, this Bir became the subject of a civil suit and it was restored to the descendants of Dhirmal. Therefore, its custody first with the Sodhis of Kartarpur, then with Ranjit Singh, and again with the Kartarpur family, is an important piece of evidence. Because, the presence and recovery of manuscript, document, or book from its natural and proper custody and environment is a relevant and weighty factor in showing its originality.

**Claim of Originality Undisputed:** We are not aware of any other copy of the Adi Granth on behalf of which any claim of originality has ever been made. In India where there is an unfortunate tendency to make false claims about the presence of sacred places, scriptures, documents, manuscripts, etc., the singular absence of any claim of originality for any other Bir is a very remarkable fact to show that the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir has never been in doubt. Before we record the internal evidence showing the authenticity of the Bir, we shall indicate the method adopted in writing the Kartarpuri Bir.

**Method of Writing:** The knowledge of this method is necessary for understanding why the original Adi Granth has certain unusual features and incongruities and why those could never occur in a Granth which had been copied from the original or another Granth. The Bani of the Adi Granth has been classified Rag wise, and in each Rag the Bani has been recorded Guruwise, Bhagat

Bani being at the end. A particular sequence in regard to Shabads Saloks, Ashtpadis, Chhants, Vars has been observed. In Bhagat bani, the Bani of Kabirji comes first, then of Namdev Ji, and thereafter of Bhagat Ravi Dass and others. In order to eliminate any chance of interpolation the couplets or verses (*padas*) have been numbered. In addition, the Sabads, Saloks, etc., of a particular Guru or Rag have also been numbered serially. Further, reference of these numbers of Sabads is given in the table of contents, along with the quotation of the first words of each hymn. Hence, there cannot be any chance of interpolation without its being detected. The scribe had also to devise a method by which the task could be accomplished easily and speedily. It is important to understand that while the Bani was being recorded in the Granth, the work of the collection of Bani of the first four Gurus and the Bhagats was also going on simultaneously. There-fore, the scribe had to take care of two things, first, that an adequate number of leaves was allotted to a particular Rag, and within a Rag to each Guru or Bhagat, so as to enable the scribe to write within the allotted space the related Bani anticipated to be available. Secondly, the Bani under each Rag was being written simultaneously, and, while the Bani of one Guru, Bhagat, or author was being collected, it was also being sorted out and recorded separately at appropriate places under each Rag in accordance with the set scheme that had been devised. There being a single scribe for this gigantic task, some times this anticipation went wrong and many of the incongruities, as we shall see, are due to wrong anticipation, or the late collection of the Bani. We also find that the numbering of the leaves of the book had been done in advance. The pages of the Kartarpuri Bir show two things. If the book is opened, the number of the page stands given only to the page on the left hand side; the page facing on the right hand side is deemed to be a part of it. We might call the page on the left 15/1, and one on the right 15/2. However, in the Kartarpuri Bir, the number given to the page on the left is 15 and not 15/1. Secondly, after making a rough guess about the Bani likely to be available for each section or Rag, one or more clusters or bunches of eight or sixteen leaves each, numbered in advance, were allotted for each Rag or section of the

Bani. And, as and when the Bani, or part of it, of a particular Rag, section, Guru, or Bhagat was available it was sorted out and copied out at the appropriate place in the concerned packets or sections, in proper sequence. In addition, totals of Padas, Shabads, or Shaloks of each Guru or the totals of the Sabads of each Rag are also serially given. We shall hereafter record pieces of internal evidence into two parts: (i) those that are individually conclusive, and (ii) those that are, coupled with other evidence, conclusive in showing the authenticity of the Bir.

**Individually Conclusive Factors:** (1) The Japu of Guru Nanak was recorded by the fourth Guru. In all the handwritten Birs the practice was to record either the words “Japu Nisan”, or “Copy of the Copy of the Japu recorded by Guru Ram Das”, If the Bir was a third copy of the original Bir of the fifth Guru it would say “Copy of the copy of the copy of the copy of the Japu recorded by Guru Ram Das.” As the fourth Guru was the person who collected and wrote the Japu, and the Fifth Guru was the first person to compile the Adi Granth and copy Japu therein, in the Kartarpuri Bir alone it is written “Copy of the Japu recorded in the hand of Guru Ram Dass”. No other Bir records these words, for, Bhai Gurdas was the first person to copy the Japu from the collection and writing by the fourth Guru.

(2) Secondly, in this Bir at page 45 the dates of the demise of the first four Gurus alone are with the same pen and ink and in the hand of the original scribe of the Bir. The date of the demise of the fifth Guru is in the hand of the original scribe but with a different pen and shade of ink. No other Bir fulfils this test. It is also very significant that while writing the dates of the demise of the first four Gurus, the day of the week is not mentioned. But in the case of the Fifth Guru, apart from the date, the day of the week is also mentioned though the scribe is the same. This shows clearly that the date of the demise of the Fifth Guru was written by Bhai Gurdas on a later day, otherwise had all the five dates been written at one time, either the day would have been mentioned in all the cases or been absent from all the five entries.

(3) Thirdly, the words “Sudh” or “Sudh Keeche” (“It is correct”

or “correct it”) appear at so many places in the Bir. These are supposed to be in the hand of the Fifth Guru since these are in a different hand and not in the hand of the scribe of the Bir, and the handwriting of these marginal observations resembles the hand-writing of the Nishan of the Fifth Guru in the Bir. These words appear in other handwritten Birs as well. But those are in the same hand as of the scribe of the concerned Bir, showing that the Bir is a copy and not the original.

(4) The historical writings of Bhai Santokh Singh, Bhai Gurdas, Gur Bilas Chhevin Patshahi and others,<sup>3</sup> and the tradition assert that the Fifth Guru completed the Adi Granth in Bhadon Samat 1661. The Kartarpuri Bir is the only Bir which records that it was completed in Bhadon 1661 “Samat 1661 Miti Bhadon Vadi ekam 1 pothi likh pouhnche”. There is no handwritten Bir the record of which claims the same to have been completed on Bhadon Samat 1661 or near about. In fact, this dated volume being the earliest, it is a good piece of evidence not only to show the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir but also to fix the date of the preparation of the Bir by the Fifth Guru.

(5) We have explained the method of allotment of clusters of paper for a Rag or a proposed section of the Granth. For the expeditious completion of the work the adoption of this method was natural and necessary, especially when the work of copying the collection of Bani from different sources was going on side by side. This prior allotment of pages for a section had to be very liberal, so as to ensure that the available Bani should not exceed the allotted space, nor thereby upset the entire system and sequence of Rags and sections. But, evidently, this liberal allotment of leaves, based on rough anticipation of the Bani likely to be available, was, in practice, bound to lead to a large number of pages remaining blank between different sections of the Adi Granth. And, this is what has exactly happened in the case of the Kartarpuri Bir. The total numbered leaves of the Kartarpur Granth are 974, comprising 1948 pages. Of these pages, 453 are entirely blank, hundreds of other pages are partly blank, and, considering that a fully utilized page accommodates 24 lines, the total space available on these partly blank pages comes up to another 133 full pages. Thus, of the

total 1948 pages of this volume the space of 586 of them remained unused. It is evident that this state of affairs could arise only in the originally written Adi Granth; it could never happen in an Adi Granth which had been copied from the original. It is a fact that none of the writers like Jodh Singh, Harbhajan Singh and others, who have seen numerous handwritten Birs, state that any of the old handwritten Birs contains any blank pages or spaces. Obviously, in a copy, the very question of hundreds of pages being left blank does not arise, especially when it is copied by a single scribe. Because, in such a case the copyist has the entire material, ready and in proper sequence, before him for being copied out. The Banno Bir which is supposed to be a copy of it, has only 467 folios. It is therefore, out of the question that the Kartarpuri Bir with 974 folies could be a copy of a Granth which had material that could be accommodated in about 467 folios. Generally, all the old handwritten Birs, including the Kartarpuri Bir, are in one hand. Therefore, this internal evidence in the Kartarpuri Bir is both incontrovertible and singly conclusive to show its originality .

(6) There are many Sabads of Bani which have been originally written twice, but later this duplication has either been erased by "Hartal" (a chemical used in those days to remove the writing), or scored out with the observation in the margin that the Sabad was a duplication. In a copied Bir this duplication could never arise. This could happen only in the original in which case either the scribe himself or the compiler has on revision found the error and got the same removed by scoring out the duplicate Sabad or Salok. This duplication has happened at pages 96/2, 186/2, 483/1, 511/1, 550/2, 836/1, 943/2, etc. Thus these duplications too are conclusive to prove its authenticity.

(7) There is another set of corrected incongruities which shows conclusively the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir. At page 778/1 there is a marginal note that Salok No. 22 of Maihla 1 Which is recorded at p. 799 and is correct should be read there at that page after Salok No. 21. It is also indicated at this page 778/1 that Sholak "Maru Maihla 3" "Agam Agochar Veparwahe" which is there on

this page should be read at page 788. Further at page 788 there is a corresponding note that the 23rd Solak of Maihla 3 “Agam Agochar Ve Parwahe” which is at page 778 should be read there. At page 799/2 Maru Maihla 1, the Salok of which the correct place is at page 778, after Salok No. 21 of Maihla 1, stands recorded. Now, these inadvertent inconguities are such as could not be rectified except by cross-references, especially as Salok of Mahila 3 is long and could not be accommo-dated in the margin at page 788, nor could Maru Maihla 1 at page 799/2 be accomodated at page 778 and scored out at page 799/2. In the Tatkara (contents of Saloks and Sabads) too these incongru-ities are reflected but rectified. At page 16/1 of the Tatkara (table of contents), the first lines of all the Saloks of Maihla are written with their serial numbers 1 to 21. But in the margin, against Salok No. 21 of Mahila 1, the first line of Salok “Kudrat Karnekar Aparā” of Maihla 1, is vertically recorded, Its number is noted as No. 22 and page as 799.

Further, at page 16/1 of the Tatkara, since in the text Salok of Mahila 3 “Agam Agochar Veparwahe”, actually but incon-gruously, starts at page 778 immediately after Salok No. 21 of Mahila 1, its reference number and the first line of the Sabad are recorded in the beginning, but its number is correctly given as Salok No. 23 of Maihla 3. Again, at this page 16/1 after the number and the first line of Salok No. 22 of Mahila 3, the number and line is of Salok 24 of Mahila 3. This is so because in the actual text Salok No. 23 of Mahila 3 comes between Salok 21 of Mahila 1 and Salok No. 1 of Mahila 3 at page 778 and not between Salok Nos. 22 and 24 of Maihla 3 at page 788. Another impor-tant feature of this page 16/1 of the Tatkara is that the original Salok numberings of the first 23 Saloks of Maihla 3 on this page have been rubbed with Hartal and thereafter these very 23 Saloks have been renumbered, the first one as 23 and the remaining 22 numbers as 1 to 22. This clearly shows that originally the incongruity in the placement of Saloks 23 of Mahila 3 and Salok No. 22 of Maihla 1 that occurred in the text was actually reflected in the Tatkara by the scribe. But, when the out-of-sequence placements of these Saloks were later detected at the time of supervision or otherwise, the

incongruities in the text were rectified by giving cross-references in the margin of the text at the appropriate pages, and, the errors in the Tatkara were corrected by rubbing with Hartal the numbers of the first 23 Saloks of Maihla 3 and renumbering them as numbers 23 and 1 to 22 of Maihla 3, and, in the case of, Salok no. 22 of Maihla 1, by writing its page and number correctly in the margin of page 16/1.

We have detailed these connected sets of corrections in the text and the Tatkara because these incongruities could happen only at the time of the original writing and never in the case of copying from the original text compiled by the Fifth Guru. It is also important to mention that on examination no other Bir has revealed this set of incongruities at pages 778, 788 and 799 of the text and in the corresponding portions of Tatkara. By itself this set of corrections alone is conclusive in proving the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir.

(8) . Here we shall record a number of other corrected mis-takes which in their character, implication, and importance are similar to the ones described under item (7) above.

- (a) At page 804/2 it is recorded in the margin that instead of the 21st Pauri, 22nd has been written. Correspondingly on page 805/1 there is a note in the margin that the Pauri there should be sung and written as 21st Pauri. This error of sequence could never occur in a copy.
- (b) There are numerous instances where Sabads, Saloks and a part of the Bani have been written in the margin, evidently, because in each case the Bani appears to have been found or collected later on and there being no place on the relevant page it had to be recorded in the margin. In some cases the Bani has been given the proper serial number and the numbers of the subsequent Bani renumbered. But, in some cases numbers following them have remained uncorrected and the Bani in the margin has been given the same number as to the Salok or Sabad after which it has to be read. These incongruities are so large in number and the Bani has been written in

the margin at so many places that all this could happen only in the original, because either of the late collection of the Bani or the scribe, Bhai Gurdas, having omitted to record it in its right sequence or place. For example, at pages 154/2, 252/1, 364/1, 694/1, 945, 182, 946/1, 148/2, 374/2, etc. additional Bani has been written in the margins. At pages 940/1, 940/2, etc., the Bani recorded in the margins has been given the same number as borne by one of the Sabads on the page. Again, on pages 251/1, 265/2, 266/2, 399/2, 252/1, 499/2, 689/2, 690/1, 842/2, 841/2, etc., portions of the Bani have been written in the margin and a mark given at the relevant place on the page to show where the marginal portion should be read.

- (c) We know that at the end of each Sabad or Salok the total of Pads, the total of Sabads of each Guru, total of Sabads of each Rag, etc., have been recorded. The number of Maihla is also invariably given in addition. But, in the Kartarpuri Bir in scores of cases the number, totals, etc. were missed originally but were written later in small letters either in between or above the lines or in the margins, e.g. this has happened at pages 154/2, 164/2, 174/1, 240/2, 257/1, 267/1, 269/1, 270/1, 270/2, 399/1, 455/2, 802, etc. Apart from Jhat, in quite a large number of cases, these totals have not been given or given incompletely. This incongruity and its rectification as mentioned above are very common. There is a very clear reason for this feature of the Kartarpuri Bir. As the job of the collection of Bani and its recording was being done simultaneously, the scribe was never sure whether more Sabads or the Bani of a Guru, requiring precedence of sequence over the Sabads of Bani already written, would or would not be available. As such, he had, as a necessary precaution and in order to avoid repeated scoring out and alterations of the totals, to leave the work of totalling to a later date. Therefore, this task of recording the totals had to

be done as one of the last jobs to be completed. Perforce, the totals had to be squeezed in between or above the lines in small sized figures or in the margins. But such a position too could never arise in a copied Granth where the numbering would be complete and form a part of the line itself. The scribe could never fail to copy or record them in appropriate lines, even if in the original the numberings had been missing or been recorded in between or above the lines. In the other handwritten Birs these incongruities do not occur. Even in the Banno Bir totals are given in the lines themselves. Hence this feature of the Kartarpuri Bir, especially the large number in which these incongruities or omissions appear, prove its authenticity and originality.

- (d) There is another kind of discrepancies in serial-wise numbering. On a number of pages the Bani or the Sabad has been scored out or removed by the use of Hartal. But, the old serial numbering has remained uncorrected, e.g. this has happened at pages 186/2, 970/1. In some cases, the incongruity even stands reflected in the Tatkara, because as the numbering has remained uncorrected in the Granth, it could evidently not be corrected in the Tatkara which records only the state of numbering or sequence in the Granth, e.g. mention of Salok number 94/1 in the Tatkara at page 7 has been scored out, and the numbering of subsequent references stands uncorrected. The large number of cancellations and uncorrected numberings in this Bir prove its originality since such a state could never occur in a copy.
- (e) As noted already, within the Bani of a Rag or section, the sequence of Sabads or Saloks is Guruwise. After it, normally comes the Bani of Kabirji, Namdev Ji, Ravidas Ji and then of other Bhagats. But, the sources of the Bani of Bhagat Kabir and other Bhagats being quite scattered, its collection and selection for incorporation in the Granth must have taken quite long, since the same involved in the case of each part a

scrutiny and decision by the Guru himself. The result was that in many instances the Bani of Bhagat Kabir, appears in between, and that also not at one place, or after the recorded Bani of Bhagat Namdev. It might be argued that such an abnormal sequence being in the original, it would also be there in a copy of it; therefore, the Kartarpuri Bir cannot claim any originality on this account. But, it is significant that the Bani of Bhagat Kabir, which is not in proper sequence has, evidently, been written on different occasions. This is clear from the fact that though the writing of these hymns is by the same scribe, in each case the writing differs in the size and shape of letters and the shade of ink. Had the Kartarpuri Bir been a copy, these differences in the shades of ink and the size of the letters that are there, could not have occurred, even though the break in sequence would have been there, because of the corresponding break being present in the original, e.g. at pages 842/2, 810/1 and 863/2 though the scribe is the same the shades of ink and size of writing are different even in the case of the Bani of the same Bhagat or Guru. Therefore, while variations in sequence can be explained, variations in pens, shades of ink, and size of letters of the Bani of the same Bhagat cannot be explained in a continuous writing, except on the assumption that the Kartarpuri Bir is the original and these variations occurred because of the variant timings of collection, selection and recording of the Bani of a particular Bhagat. Besides, because of this non-continuous writing of Bhagat Bani, the totals of the Sabads of a Bhagat have not been given as has been done in other cases. The fact is that in the Kartarpuri Bir, the Bani of Bhagat Kabir, and even some other Bani, when found and selected later on have not at many places been recorded in the normal serial sequence of the Bir. But, these hymns have been written wherever space was available and even in the margin or between the Bani of other

Bhagats, e.g. at pages 885/2, 945/1. But, the shades of ink and pens used for such Bani are different showing clearly variant times of its original collection and recording in the Kartarpuri Bir.

- (f) Another feature of the Kartarpuri Bir is the scores of pages where the original writing has been obliterated by Hartal and later at those very places Bani has been written. Sometimes the space accommodating a whole Sabad or hymn has been cleaned with Hartal and new Bani rewritten at the place, e.g. at pages 840/1, 870/2, 966/1, 966/2. Had the Kartarpuri Bir been a copy of the original, such a large number of places requiring the need of scoring out or rubbing or cleaning with Hartal could never have arisen.
- (g) Another significant feature of the Kartarpuri Bir is that at numerous places the headings and words like “Ek Onkar” or the “Maihla”, or name of the Rag are written, but below these headings there is no Bani or Sabad and the place is blank. This is there at pages 279/2, 297/2, 248/1, 528/1, 520/2, 348/1, 468/2, 607/2, 617/1, 621/2. This writing of the heading like Maihla, Rag, etc., by the scribe clearly indicates that it was thought that the Bani of that Guru or Bhagat would be available for being written there, but actually it was either not available or not approved by the Fifth Guru. In a mere copy of Adi Granth, such a thing could never happen, because where the original has no Bani the question of recording the heading of a Sabad or Bani could never arise. Such recording of headings only, without being followed by related Bani, is not present in any other handwritten Bir. It is also significant to mention that almost all these headings relate to the Fifth Guru who was alive at that time, e.g. pages 297/2, 248/1, 348/1, 418/2, 469/2, 528/1, 530/2, 607/2, 610/2, 617/1 and 621/2. Presumably, Bhai Gurdas’ anticipation was that more Sabads of the Guru were likely to be available under those Rags. This is also an important feature

to suggest the originality of the Kartarpuri Bir. Because in a copy the coincidence of all these extra or lone headings, involving wrong anticipation, relating mostly to the Fifth or the living Guru could not arise.

### **(9) Other Important Factors**

- (a) The originality of the Kartarpuri Bir is also established by the Nishan or mark of the Fifth Guru. This mark in those days meant, according to the accepted practice and tradition, the writing of the Mool Mantra of the Japuji in the hand of the Guru, the Fifth Guru in this case. This Nishan appears at page 29/1 of the Bir. As a mark of adoration the page has been profusely decorated. The presence of the Nishan of the Fifth Guru is also noted in the Tatkara.
- (b) At page 415/1 in the margin are written the words “The Sabad is right. “ This Sabad does not find mention in the Tatkara. But, this observation in the margin shows that for this Bir, there was a supervisor or editor, other than the scribe, who alone could record such an observation of approval regarding the Sabad on the page. This observation shows the original character of the Kartarpuri Bir. Otherwise, if the Bir had been copied from another Bir, the question of such an observation by the scribe or some other person would not arise.
- (c) In the Tatkara of Sabads only the references of Sabads 1 to 58 of Ramkali Maihla 5 are given. But on page 681/2 of the Bir, which starts with Sabad 59 of Ramkali Maihla 5 and ends with Sabad 60 of Ramkali Maihla 5, two additional Sabads of the Fifth Guru are written. Both these Sabads are in a different hand from that of the scribe and their reference in the Tatkara of Sabads is missing. This means that these two Sabads were added or got added there by the editor or the compiler. Here again, the absence of the reference of these two Sabads in the Tatkara and their text being in a

different hand than that of the original scribe suggest that this feature could probably be only in the original and not in a copy. Because in the copy all the 1 to 60 Sabads would normally be in the same hand. Similarly, Ramkali Maihla 5 Chhand No. 21 has no reference in the Tatkara, but the Chhand is present at its proper place, though it is in a different hand. This too supports the earlier inference drawn in the case of Sabads 59 and 60. In both cases, the Bani being of the Fifth Guru, it is very likely that he created it after 1604 A.D. and got it added at the appropriate places in the Adi Granth later on. The position is similar in the case of Basant ki Var composed by the Fifth Guru. This Var is recorded on page 854/2 in the middle of this page. But, there is no reference of this Var in the Tatkara, showing that the Fifth Guru composed it and got it included after Bhadon 1604 A.D. Hence, it could not find mention in the Tatkara that stood already completed. It is significant that in all other handwritten Birs, including the Banno Bir, reference of the Var is present in the Tatkara.

- (d) At page 540 of the Bir the Nishan of the Sixth Guru is present. Its presence is also mentioned in the Tatkara. In the circumstances of the case, this is a very significant and natural thing to do. During the time of the Fifth Guru it had become abundantly clear that Guru Hargobind would succeed him. In fact, from the very start the Sixth Guru was associated with the task of the collection of the Bani and preparation of the scripture. Some writers have even suggested that some of the Dhunnies were got recorded by the Sixth Guru. They derive this inference from the fact that it is in the Kartarpuri Bir alone that we observed that the Dhunnies of some Vars are recorded in a different hand or in small letters in between or above 'the normal written lines. In other copies of the Granth, including the Banno Bir, these

have been written in the lines and in the same manner as the Bani itself. It evidently suggests that in the Kartarpuri Bir the Dhunnies were written on some later data, and presumably at the instance of the Sixth Guru.

**(10) Conclusion from Internal' Evidence:** We have 'detailed above the various pieces and types of internal evidence most of which are individually and incontrovertibly conclusive in proving that the Kartarpuri Bir is the original Adi Granth compiled by the Fifth Guru in 1604 A.D. The other pieces of evidence, we have recorded are cumulatively, or coupled with the other evidence, equally conclusive in proving the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir to be the original production of Fifth Guru.

**Examination of Criticism by Dr. Mcleod :** ,Before we deal with the criticism of Dr. Mcleod let us record the present position and academic findings about the Banno Bir. This Bir is at present with the successors of Bhai Bauno at Kanpur. It has been carefully seen by Bhai Mahan Singh, who examined the Kartarpuri Bir as well, a team of scholars from the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Prof. Pritam Singh, who has written a paper on the subject, and Principal Harbhajan Singh of Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar. All of them have concluded that this Bir was recorded in Samat 1699 (thirty eight years after the preparation of the Bir by the Fifth Guru) and this is the year written in the Bir itself. Secondly, in this Bir the controversial Sabad, "Ranjhunara gao Sakhi", is clearly a later interpolation because it is written in very small letters in a different shade of ink from the original writing of the Bir. These two conclusions about the Banno Bir are academically accepted and are not in doubt.

We now record the criticism by Dr. Mcleod. He writes: "First, there is the universal agreement that the important differences distinguishing the Kartarpur manuscript from the Banno version consist exclusively of material included in the latter which is not to be found in the former. Secondly, there is the testimony of those who have inspected the Kartarpuri manuscript concerning the obliteration of portions of its text."

“A third factor is the presence in the standard printed editions of two fragments, corresponding to two of the three additional Banno hymns. In Ramkali rag there occurs a single couplet where there should apparently be a complete hymn. The remainder of the hymns in the same section indicate that the couplet must be either the first two lines of a chhant, or a Shalok introducing a chhant. The second fragment corresponds to the Sur Das hymn in Sarang rag. In this instance the standard printed text contains only the first line. There seemed to be only one possible reason for the appearance of these two fragments. The bulk of the hymn in each case must have been deleted, leaving a small remainder which was faithfully copied into the standard printed text.”

“A fourth point seemed to clinch the issue. The Banno text of the missing portions indicated good reasons for later deletion, particularly in the case of the Ramkali hymn by Guru Arjun. This hymn describes the puberty rites conducted by Guru Arjun at the initiation of his son Hargobind. The rites follow a standard Hindu pattern and in the third stanza there is a reference to the manner in which the boy’s head was shaved. This feature is an obvious contradiction to the later prohibition of hair cutting. When the prohibition became mandatory, not merely for Jat Sikhs but also those of other castes, the reference in the hymn could only be regarded as intolerable.”

“Finally, there was ample evidence that others had already formed the same suspicions concerning the Kartarpur manuscript and were seeking alternative explanations. One writer has declared that the present Kartarpur manuscript is Banno version, adding that the original manuscript of the Adi Granth must have been lost. Another has suggested that the present manuscript must be a first draft, subsequently amended by the Guru himself. Their evident uneasiness strengthened a hypothesis which already seemed firmly founded.”

“By this time the hypothesis will have become obvious. The conclusion which seemed to be emerging with increasing assurance was that the widely disseminated Banno version must represent the original text; and that the Kartarpur manuscript must be a shortened

version of the same text. A few portions must have been deleted because they could not be reconciled with beliefs subsequently accepted by the Panth. This much appeared to be well established and another point could be added as a possibility. It seemed likely that the amendments had originally been made by omitting the problem passages from later manuscripts rather than by deleting them from the Kartarpur manuscript. These later manuscripts reflected the distinctive pattern of Khalsa belief. The omission of the problem passages together with the addition of compositions by Guru Tegh Bahadur constituted the Damdama version of the Adi Granth. Later still, portions of the Kartarpur manuscript (the original manuscript written by Bhai Gurdas) were rather ineptly obliterated in order to bring the two versions into line. <sup>4</sup>

It appears Mcleod is unaware of the work of Sahib Singh who disbelieves the Banno story and the statements of Mahan Singh and others who have recorded the two findings mentioned earlier. For, had he known of them, he would certainly have tried to verify the factual position by an examination of the Banno Bir. And this, evidently, he never did. Nor has he, it appears, examined the Kartarpuri Bir, except, may be, for a few minutes. Whether or not Mcleod was aware of the views of Sahib Singh about the Banno story and of Mahan Singh and others about the year of completion of the Banno Bir, is not our present concern. It is now well established that the Banno Bir was prepared not earlier than 1699 and the Banno story is a myth. As such, the very basis of the argument about the Kartarpuri Bir being a copy of the Banno Bir is knocked out. Mcleod's argument that the additional Bani of Surd as and Ramkali Maihla 5 that was present in the Banno Bir, had been copied in the Kartarpuri Bir, but deleted later on is equally baseless. For, we have seen that in both these cases the additional Bani in the Banno Bir is either an interpolation or a later writing; and these verses, which are not present in the Kartarpuri Bir, had neither been copied there nor deleted. Therefore, Mcleod's other arguments that the Kartarpuri Bir, which according to him had been copied from the Banno Bir, contained the so called puberty hymn (additional 8 verses), but being incongruous with the later Khalsa belief was deleted, is also factually incorrect and fallacious. Kartarpuri Bir

which was prepared in 1604 A.D. could not be copied from the Banno Bir prepared in 1642 A.D.; nor was the puberty hymn originally present even in the Banno Bir of Samat 1699, it being a clear later interpolation. In fact, it was never recorded in the Kartarpuri Bir. Therefore, the question of its deletion from the Kartarpuri Bir could not arise. Every student of Kartarpuri Bir knows that it has the largest number of blank pages and deletions. These two facts are one of the strongest points in favour of its originality. Apart from the fact that the Banno Bir was prepared 38 years after the Kartarpuri Bir, it is ridiculous that a copyist given the task of copying the Banno Bir comprising 467 folios, or any Bir with such material as could be accommodated on about 465 leaves, would copy it out on 974 folios. Mcleod knows, since he is aware of the work of Jodh Singh, and has even quoted it, that in the case of the puberty hymn and Bhagat Surdas's verses, there is no deletion in the Kartarpuri Bir (as also seen by us). Yet, knowing all this, he has, on the one hand, tried to build the argument about deletion on the basis of the use of Hartal elsewhere, and, on the other hand, has made the equally misleading argument of the deletion of the puberty hymn from the Kartarpuri Bir because of the later Khalsa beliefs.

Here it is also pertinent to state that Mcleod's suggestion that the so-called Ramkali hymn was deleted from the Kartarpuri Bir because of later Khalsa beliefs displays his ignorance both of the history of the Sikhs and of the Dhirmalias. The latter became a splinter group and they went to the extent of making a murderous assault on the Ninth Guru. They never recognized him or the Tenth Master as a Guru. As such, there was no love lost between the Khalsa, a creation of the Tenth Guru whom the Moghuls wanted to destroy, and the Dhirmalias who were Pro-Establishment. Therefore, there is not the remotest possibility that the Dhirmalias would ever tamper with the Bir in their possession in order to oblige the Khalsa, and bring it in accord with the "Reht" or symbols prescribed by the Tenth Guru. Rather, their avowed hostility towards the Khalsa would prompt them

to highlight the hymn if it had ever existed in that Bir. On the other hand, the Banno people formed a part of the main stream of the Sikhs and if any Sikh would have been interested in a deletion, they might have done that in their Bir. But, nothing of the sort happened in that Bir. Mcleod's conjecture about the deletion of the so-called puberty hymn because of the Khalsa beliefs is, thus, not only impossible, but is also controverted even by the very facts and circumstances of the situation as it existed then.

Besides, we find that Principal Harbhajan Singh who made a detailed survey of the handwritten Birs in the Sikh Reference Library, Golden Temple, Amritsar, (since destroyed in the Blue Star Operation) and some other Birs writes that in numerous of the old handwritten Birs he examined, this additional Bani was no where there. He gives detail of it in his book: "Gurbani Sampadan Nirne". A statement about some of them is as follows:

"1. Bir No. 97 in the Sikh Reference Library: It was produced in Samat 1739 (1682 AD) some two decades before the creation of the Khalsa, and bears the Nishan of the ninth Guru. It has no additional Bani as is contained in the Banno Bir. 2. Pindi Lala (Gujrat) Wali Bir: It was produced in Samat 1732 (1675 A.D.). It bears the Nishan of Ninth Guru, but, unlike the Banno Bir, it contains no additional Bani. 3. Bir No. 14 in the Sikh Reference Library: It was completed in Samat 1748 (1691 A.D.). It contains no additional Bani as is present in the Banno Bir. 4. Bir written by Pakhar Mal Dhillon, grandson of Chaudhri Langahia Dhillon, a known devout Sikh of the Fifth Guru: It was written, in Samat 1745 (1668 A.D.). Unlike the Banno Bir, it contains no additional Bani."<sup>5</sup>

At Berkeley, Mcleod raised two points: "One is the obscurity which envelops a significant period of the text's actual history. The other is the presence within the manuscript of numerous deletions."<sup>6</sup> On the issue of deletions we have already found that these large number of deletions are a good proof of its originality especially when in no other Bir there are deletions in such a large number and when at most of those places Bani has been rewritten by the same scribe, showing thereby that the writing rubbed off was not correct or approved by the Guru. Actually, It stands established that not only

the Banno Bir was prepared in Samat 1699, but the puberty hymn itself was clearly a later interpolation even in the Banno Bir of 1699. McLeod has been lamenting his frustration in not being able to serve academic interests because he was not allowed necessary access to the Kartarpuri Bir. He even went to the extent of recording that non-availability of Kartarpuri Bir to them suggested that there was something to conceal therein.<sup>7</sup> But one wonders why his academic keenness never led him to see the Banno Bir even though the same was all these years available for the examination of any serious scholar. Had he cared to see, he would have found that the year of its production was Samat 1699.

In view of the above, it is clear that the suggestion about the Kartarpuri Bir being non-authentic or its being a copy of the Banno Bir is both baseless and untenable.

On the second issue about the custody of the Kartarpuri Bir the doubts of McLeod are equally without any basis. Here too, the position had been made clear by Mahan Singh. The historical writings show that Bidhi Chand and other Sikhs were very well aware of the great value of the Bir. They held it in the highest esteem. Actually, this was the real reason that Bidhi Chand and others, despite the wishes of the Guru, initially failed to return the Bir to the Dhirmalias towards whom they were hostile for their having attacked the Ninth Guru to kill him. Therefore, for understandable reasons, when again directed by the Guru to return the Bir they were reluctant to meet the Dhirmalias face to face. And all they did was that they kept the Bir safely at a place, and sent a message to the Dhirmalias to pick it up, and this they did.<sup>8</sup> Further, there is little doubt that when the Tenth Guru wanted at Anandpur Sahib to prepare the Damdami version it was to the Dhirmalias that he sent the message for loan of this Bir of the Fifth Guru.<sup>9</sup> So, whatever be the facts of the earlier part of the story, at the time of the Tenth Guru, the original authentic Bir was certainly with the Dhirmalias. After that the Bir always remained in safe hands. Had the Bir been lost it is impossible to imagine that Ranjit Singh who had

waged a war for obtaining a horse, would not be aware of its treasure, or that he would be satisfied with the original Bir.

Here it is not our purpose to ascertain whether Mcleod made his observations out of sheer ignorance of the available facts and materials, or of his anxiety to suppress known but awkward facts, or of his conscious or unconscious bias because of his thirteen years of working and association with a Christian Mission in Punjab. But in either case, it does little credit to his credibility as a scholar to suggest tempering with a Scripture without having examined it or the connected literature on the issue. In view of the above, we conclude that Mcleod's criticism is factually incorrect, and untenable.

An observation was made by Mcleod that in order to remove scholarly doubts, access to the Kartarpuri Bir would need to be allowed and "the alternative may well be a growing conviction that there is something to hide." The Kartarpuri Bir is private property and we do not hold any brief for its custodians. True, the Sodhis of Kartarpur while they do not permit access to every person who claims to be a scholar, yet, by all standards, their policy to allow access to the Kartarpuri Bir has been very liberal. In fact, during the current century there has been an extremely profuse exposure of the Kartarpuri Bir before genuine scholars and theologians. In the twenties Master Isher Singh of the Sikh Vidyala, Tarn Taran, sent a team of scholars who for many months made a detailed page by page and line by line study in order to prepare a standard version of the Adi Granth. Second, is an equally major attempt of the SGPC to prepare a meticulously accurate version of the Guru Granth Sahib from the Kartarpur Bir. This team consisting of two scholars, namely, Giani Piara Singh Sukhi and Sant Harbhajan Singh Nirmla worked from day to day for six months at Kartarpur. In addition, other scholars also regularly visited Kartarpur so as to supervise the work of the team. Leaf by leaf comparison of an unbound Bir of the Guru Granth was made with the Kartarpuri Bir. Every variation in the unbound Bir was corrected

in accordance with the Kartarpuri Bir Thereafter, calligraphists prepared another faultless copy of the Granth. This having been done, printing blocks of this new version were made. A committee of scholars was again appointed to verify and approve the corrected version. Actually, about 733 variations, major or minor, were found in the old printed version and these were all corrected. Finally, a faultlessly accurate version of the Guru Granth copied from the Kartarpuri Bir was approved and printed through the Punjabi Press, Hall Bazar, Amritsar. These versions have been printed a number of times and these printed copies of the Kartarpuri Bir are there for every scholar to see and study. Dr. Jodh Singh's rejoinder recorded after the publication of Mcleod's lectures states that the printed version today tallies completely with the Kartarpuri Bir. Apart from that, many times groups of scholars, individual scholars, both foreign and Indian, have been allowed access to the Kartarpuri Bir. Many reports of the committees of scholars who examined the Kartarpuri Bir for general and specific purposes are available. Jodh Singh's "Kartarpuri Bir De Darshan" is a detailed page by page record of the Kartarpuri Bir giving an account of every feature on each page, including variations in words, spellings, "lagmatras", use of Hartal, blank spaces, size of margins, obliteration by use of Hartal, over-writing on Hartal, scoring-out, writing in-between lines, above the lines and in the margins, variations in the size of letters, handwriting, ink, etc., etc. Among individual records of examination these notes by Jodh Singh (recorded by Giani Mahan Singh) are the most detailed and give a scrupulously accurate picture of the Kartarpuri Bir. In this background it would be both unfair and incorrect to blame the custodians of the Bir that they have barred scholarly study by or exposure to genuine scholars. The difficulty is that wild conjectures of some scholars like G.B. Singh and others have raised the suspicions of the custodians of the Bir. At present the Kartarpuri Bir is the property of the Dhir Mal family, and no one can be blamed if the custodians want to be sure of the bonafides of a scholar before allowing him access to it for a study of the Kartarpuri Bir. Their exercise of such discretion is natural, understandable and unobjectionable.

**Conclusion:** In sum, our analysis and examination of the Bir, the available material on the subject, and the statements of various authors lead us to the conclusion that the Kartarpuri Bir is incontrovertibly the authentic Adi Granth prepared by the Fifth Guru.

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SECTION IV

**SIKH ETHICS**



**CHAPTER 10****SIKH IDENTITY AND CONTINUITY-  
A PERSPECTIVE FROM ETHICS****AVTAR SINGH**

One of the most difficult areas of human knowledge relates to the comparative studies. There is a significant increase in the quantum of tension when this happens to be the area of contemporary religions and history of the societies where such religions have emerged. The questions about Sikhism are, in a way, not very different in this respect from the identical questions about the historical identities of Christianity, Islam, or the faiths of the Aryans before and after their entry into the land, now known as India. Buddhism and Jainism have experienced no less confusions about their identities at the hands of the lay and somewhat over-zealous interpreters. We are, therefore, approaching the subject matter of our present paper without any illusion of its final acceptance. The debate shall, perhaps, continue.

We may notice an important aspect of the comparative study before we proceed any further in this direction. There are two broad aspects of the work to be done in this area. We may name them as the micro approach or the macro approach to the subject matter. In terms of ease, the macro approach is to be preferred and is, in fact, preferred by many people. The macro approach is generally visible in the work of some of the scholars who are either themselves 'outsiders' or approach the subject of their study as outsiders. The conclusions arrived at are often so general that they appear to be fair and easy to grasp and accept. A significant thrust of this methodological approach lies in viewing or portraying the subject matter of their study as syncretic in character. They fuse the earlier-side-end in the history of the tradition but under pressure to explain the distinctness, they plant

the departures in the mid-point or the end-side point in the history of the tradition.

The micro approach has to be adopted with great patience and care. It requires hard work and a good amount of objectivity and regulation of emotion. The scholar has to overcome the temptation to magnify the trivial and the insignificant. Although the insider is generally gifted with greater possibilities of understanding his tradition, yet the amount and intensity of differences among the insiders should warn us that everything need not be final even in the work of insiders. The micro approach can of course be adopted by the 'outsiders' with satisfactory results, if they were not to lose sight of inner experience and the tradition based on it. The 'availability' of the material 'proof', or its 'non-availability' is not made the sole ground of belief in the growth of the illumination in a certain direction.

Apart from the above two paths, there can also be a fairly good combination of the two approaches. The results differ from each other in the gestalts resulting from these compounds and mixtures. Most of the synthesis stories display this approach.

We have set out this brief analysis of the three approaches to the comparative study of the religions in general and the Sikhism in particular. The purpose of this early submission is two fold. First, we have sought to hint at the tensions involved in the comparative study and the possible way out adopted by the people. Second, it is sought to highlight the fact that the two approaches may lead to different results because of the difference in the approach itself.

Herein we shall seek to adopt a path somewhat akin to the micro-analysis approach. This will, hopefully, enable us to keep in view the dynamics of the inner impulse and thus maintain the authenticity of the work. The paper is rather brief and seeks to analyse and interpret the main theme of the argument. We may begin first with the main frame of the Sikh theology.

The Sikh theology is another area of Sikh Religion which has received a continuous attention and has been a subject for interpretation or re-interpretation. This statement may appear to be contrary to the superficial notion that Sikh theology has not received attention over

the past five centuries or so. It is not unusual to come across even a few laments who feel sad that the twentieth century displays a singular lack of awareness of the need for expounding the Sikh theology. A still more interesting observation was presented during a conference held abroad. The learned scholar appeared to be bothered by the idea that now there were not many interpreters of Sikhism. The only persons acknowledged by this scholar as authentic seekers of knowledge in this area were those who were trained well away from the country of origin of Sikhism, and who tended to follow or preferred a certain methodological approach to the interpretation of Sikh history, or the extended application of the Western models of anthropological interpretation to the Sikh religion. The conceptual model of the tribal rituals and rites-de-passage were made applicable to the Sikh society, without recognising the inappropriate consequences which follow from this stretched and stressed approach. This historical, as well as the anthropological, approach does not appear to even notice the evolutionary process in the value experience or the praxis of the people they seek to study and analyse. Many of the practices which were continued by some convert families for some time even after their initiation into the Sikh religion have been taken by these anthropologists and the historians as the 'Sikh rites', thus displaying a singular lack of the understanding of comparative study of the Sikh society, values, religion, and theology. .

There are two noticeable characteristics of the normative imperatives and ideals. The 'normative cannot be established in terms of the actual conduct or the practical. The anthropologist, the historian, or scholars of the like studies are pretty close to their discipline as long as they follow this rule of their game. They may, however, seem to be astray from their course when they infer the normative from the actual. The normative is the critique in terms of which the actual is analysed and evaluated. It does not permit us to establish the normative from what we may tend to believe as being perceived by us. Such a difficulty may become multiplied many fold when the normative to be so construed is several centuries away from the times of the inference

by the anthropologist, sociologist, historian or persons of the like disciplines. One may, to some extent, attempt a history of the morals in this case but the compiler must, in this, clearly distinguish between the moral values and the history of the events including the personal or social conduct. Such a distinction is very crucial for both the scholar of the normative or the social sciences. . In recent years some historians or anthropologists appear to have overlooked this and, thus, either involuntarily, or perhaps by choice, have created an illusion whereby the actual conduct of some individuals or groups on their way of change or conversion, have been presented as the normative. Often such inferences are made in the face of the injunctions to the contrary. For example, we are aware of the injunctions by the Gurus in the *Guru Granth Sahib* against various practices based on the superstitions. We are also aware of the often cited incident where the Gurus had tested the awareness of their follower against the superstitions. But all this has not deterred some scholars from creating the illusion that the Sikh society has consisted of, or consists of, goddess and grave worshippers. Unfortunately, some scholars appear to be greatly impressed by the empirical dimensions of the generalisations made by them. The human finitude has often impelled people to seek strength or success through superstitious actions. But this does not reflect the values and normative teaching of the traditions to which they belong. There need be no theoretical confusion on this score.

We have a modest programme in this brief paper. Its objective is to direct the attention of the keen students of Sikh religion, theology and ethics to take notice of the various serious and sustained effort to interpret Sikh theology. Let us begin by stating the nature and scope of Sikh theology before discussing its main contents.

The word theology is often used to refer to various kinds and aspects of knowledge relating to God. It may refer to “knowledge of God and the supernatural; religious knowledge and belief, especially when methodically formulated.” It is also used for “the critical, historical, and psychological study of religion and religious ideas”, or it may signify “a system of religious theory or observance”. While this

may be the general outline of the subject generally referred to as theology, there is a wide variation in the actual contents of the various doctrines described as theology of different religions or of the sects within a religion. It is a rather difficult work to pronounce as to which statement of each religion or each sect within a religion is theology proper. However, we may seek to limit our inquiry to the exposition of Sikh theology, and within Sikhism, the attempt will be to deal with the mainstream statements.

Historically, the tradition of interpreting the revelation or the Word of God in Sikhism is as old as the tradition itself. The companions of Guru Nanak and the subsequent Gurus may have been called upon, by themselves, or by those around them, to interpret and explain as one whole the elements of the revelation and their intra coherence. The existence of the different levels of the seekers of knowledge must have also made this process of interpretation a continuous one. The added need for this continuous interpretation could have been the departure of the new doctrines from the traditionally accepted social codes of morals and ethics. As theology also illumines the personal and social conduct of the related individual, the new frontiers of the theology also invariably influence the ethical perceptions and actions. Thus, although there may be ethical conduct which may not be consciously grounded in theology, yet the converse does not appear to be true. And, where the new religious revelation have directly aimed at social and moral ends in view, the need for a continuous interpretation is obvious and easy to see.

Sikhism is directly grounded in the revelation received by Guru Nanak. His subsequent journeys in India are said to be made in the company of Bala or Mardana. Even apart from these companions, Guru Nanak is recorded to have met many saints and religious leaders during this phase of his life. In a dialogue, recorded as the "Sidha Gosht" in the *Guru Granth Sahib* he is asked by the Sidhas to expound his doctrine. The dialogue is rich in the theological exposition by Guru Nanak. We encounter the simple and the complex as the two ends of the dialogue in the Sidha Gosht". The seemingly simple question asked

by the Sidhas about the doctrinal identity of Guru Nanak is answered by the latter in a step-by-step ascending manner of the exposition of God's nature and the knowledge of His nature. Towards the higher and the complex end of the dialogue, the esoteric seems to speak to the esoteric. It is a very fine and illuminating example of the exposition of the Sikh theology which conveys the profundity of the revelation through the symbols of everyday use.

The second Guru, Angad, the third Guru, Amardas, and the fourth Guru, Ram Das have respectively spent time with their earlier perceptors and companions. The exposition of the religious knowledge and belief by the former for the latter is easy to imagine and understand. In a typical Eastern style of describing this process is ' *the lamp lighting the lamp*'. There is no break or darkness in between the lighting of the two lamps in succession.

The role of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, is worthy of special mention in any understanding of the history of Sikh theology. Apart from being himself a Guru, he has brought to fruition a tradition of compiling the *Guru Granth Sahib*. It is often said that the *Guru Granth Sahib* is the only Scripture of a major world religion which was composed and established during the life-time of the founders themselves. This has obviated the possibility of any subsequent interpolation. Guru Arjan Dev got the whole *Guru Granth Sahib* finally compiled and one of his trusted schola-rly companion, Bhai Gurdas, was the principal scribe for the first recension of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The present form is of this origin and authenticity.

Bhai Gurdas has also authored some compositions. His writings have often been termed as 'key' to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. His long association with the fifth Guru has led people to believe that he is the first theologian of Sikhism, other than the Gurus. His personal status is that of a highly authentic expositor of the Sikh theology. His *Vars* are a close reflection of the present auth-entic scripture.

A similar claim is often met with in respect of the second scribe of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, namely Mani Singh. His compositions are also attempts at the reflection and exposition of the Sikh theology as

in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. He is said, to have worked directly under the guidance of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. He is the last important link in the chain of the major Sikh theologians who were contemporary to the Gurus.

The Sikh theologians who have followed after the cessation of the chain of Ten Gurus in Sikhism in 1708 A.D., have proceeded in various directions in their exposition of the Sikh theology. Let us briefly notice two main streams, both of whom have sought to remain close to the Sikh traditions. The Gianis, somewhat in a general manner, have sought to remain the exponent of the Bhai Mani Singh tradition.

The Nirmalas had emerged as the important theologians of the Sikh religion during the recent past. They have expounded the Sikh religious knowledge and belief both substantively as well as analogically. The latter has been done by using the notions of the earlier schools of the Indian philosophy and religion. It appears to have been significant for them to explain the originality of the revelation received by the Sikh Gurus by calling the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the fifth *Veda*, as the status of the divine revelation (*Sruti*) was being conceded by the people at large in respect of the *Vedas*. The Nirmalas did not call *Guru Granth Sahib* as the fifth *Veda* as a scripture continuous to the earlier four *Vedas*. The use of the figure 'fifth' is more with a view to stressing the analogy so as to drive home the view that the *Guru Granth Sahib* is an independent and original revelation. The use of this analogy has, however, been sometimes misinterpreted.

The Giani tradition of the Sikh theologians have proceeded towards their goal in somewhat traditional manner wherein their closeness to the Sikh mainstream has remained influential for a longer time. Some of them have claimed to continue the Bhai Mani Singh tradition. There are, however, other developments also in this area. Bhai Vir Singh is a very outstanding theologian whose mainstream acceptability is of an outstanding status. His contribution to the Sikh ideas-infused literature and exposition of the theology proper is of a very significant nature. The mystic quality of his poetry, as well as his famous epic *Rana Surat Singh*, (1905 A.D.), which has been described

as “the sole epic in Punjabi with a religious-ethical theme” is very impressive. By this time Bhai Vir Singh was “already famous as an exponent of the teachings of Sikhism through his exigetical writing no less than his historical novel *Sundari ..*”. The Sikh penchant for intermingling the theolo-gical with the social, as observed by us earlier, is continued in *Rana Surat Singh* also. It has been pointed out that “*Rana Surat Singh*, a deeply religious work in spirit, enshrines also a powerful social message.” In it, the Rani is “exhorted to shed her own desponde-ncy and to find .a new path of ascent to a fulfilment that is both spiritual and ethical.” Anyone interested in knowing the Sikh attitude towards theology has to keep in view the *Sikh* perception of the concern of God with the social and the ethical. The theolo-gical cognition is not without the ethical impulse and ideal. The ethical is the meeting point of God-His knowledge-Man axis. This fundamental nature of the Sikh theology is seen in Guru Nanak’s “*Sidha Gosht*” as well as the lay, but devout, expression in *Rana Surat Singh* of Bhai Vir Singh. The often quoted saying of Guru Nanak that “Truth is higher than everything but higher still is true conduct” is expression of the dynamic nature of the those which is the subject-matter of theology. It is partly because of this new, but unmistakable, dimension of Sikh theology that Sikh theology is what it is.

Guru Nanak has, in the very first creedal statement with which the *Guru Granth Sahib* begins described the ‘One’ as ‘*Sat Nam*’, ‘*Karta Purukh*’. It is a reference to God and He is described as *Karta Purukh*. He is also, both in the Scripture, as well as at the common and lay level, referred to as *Kartar*, the ‘Doer’. The Gurus have sought to convey their experience of the *revelation* in a somewhat unusual manner. Our efforts to comprehend the unique-ness of this revelation will have to take due and proper notice of this underlined nature of Sikh theology. The usual and the conditioned response will not do the required job. It is here that most of the Western, as well as the Eastern, scholars have failed to understand what must be comprehended. The creedal statement, popularly called *mulmantra* in the *Guru Granth Sahib* has only at a later stage referred to God as *Akal murat*. The current use of *Akal Purakh* is historically of much latter usage. The word *Waheguru* is

also very often used by the Scholars as well as the lay Sikhs to refer to God. One of the recent Western attempt at the expounding of the Sikh theology appears to have underlined only *AkalPurakh* and *Waheguru* as the core concepts. Such an attempt often leads to the fusion of the Sikh dyanamism into the quiescence of the theolo-gy and ethics prior to Sikhism. Once the *Karta* in the *Karta purukh* is conveniently or unintentionally lost sight of two distortions emerge almost immediately. First, Guru Nanak has repeatedly stressed the dynamic and the active nature of God as an example for the humankind to follow. This is a very significant and crucial identity of Guru Nanak's message in the fifteenth century. The *Karta Purukh* is described as *nirbhau* (free from fear). Any scholar who fails to notice this identity in the fifteenth century is bound to feel puzzled by the dynamic ethics of the subsequent, Gurus. Such an error can be both intentional as well as unintentional. The latter can be corrected when the scholar comes across the literature written on the original lines. But when some scholars, even when aware of this position, seem to remain persistent in their claims that Sikhism has suddenly deviated from the path of the earlier Gurus during the later Gurus, we may not be entirely wrong in doubting the bonafides of their unwarranted conclusion. We are all aware of the logical difficulties of the theory of *Karma* prior to Sikhism. It is the revealed authority of the Guru's imperative that one ought not shun or escape from the duty of the ethical actions. Such ethical actions, Guru Nanak and other Gurus have told us, do not bind the person into the cycle of the transmigration. This is in very sharp and total departure from the earlier held view of *Karma*. This departure is a complete discontinuity with the tradition and the shaping of a new ethical identity. Second, the non-acceptance of the sacred thread as initiation into the privileged three upper castes is very significant ethical corelate of the theology of *Karta Purukh*. Nearly all the philosophers acquainted with the Indian Philosophy are aware of the doctrinal implications of this identity. However, many anthropologists and historians, seem to either not notice it or reject it for reasons best known to them.

The absolute and the continuous identify of the ethical teaching

from Guru Nanak's *upar sach achar* to Guru Gobind Singh's *Shubh Karma te Kabhu na taru* is easy to see and understand. The founders of the Sikh religion were, obviously, stressing the continuity of the ethical chain. And this was being done in discontinuity to the earlier notion that even the good actions or *shubh karman* bind the self to the *sansara* and therefore, ought to be renounced or abjured. The Gurus have totally departed from the earlier Indian ethics in this respect. The law of *Karma* in the earlier Indian systems was the mainspring of the *Varnashrama* dharma, which provided support to the institution of caste and the impulse for withdrawal from social participation. The earlier social ethics was developed on an entirely different model. The Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, gave up this model and instead developed the new structure of the ethics which universalised the participatory role of action rather than the restrictive and the withdrawal of the action. This is an extremely important development in Sikh ethics which has influenced the general Indian society subsequent to its emergence. Even the general Indian society has gradually imbibed the teachings of the Gurus and there are many who may be seen today to have rejected the earlier doctrine of the *Varnashrama* dharma. A significantly large number of contemporary Indian scholars and social leaders have derived remarkable inspiration from the teachings of the Gurus on this score. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Tagore, Vivekananda, and Radhakrishnan are only a few names which may be mentioned but the list may be large and impressive. The values of the social ethics propounded by the Sikh Gurus have provided the impulse for many ideals of social concern and service as witnessed by us in the modern India. The insistence of the Gurus on freeing the social ethics from the caste imperatives may not be so well appreciated in the changed social situation today, but its emergence and open advocacy by the Gurus is the first and very modernising attempt to proclaim the freedom of man in the name of God. Freedom of the self is made the foundation of the social freedom. Some of the ideals of freedom proclaimed by the Western society in the nineteenth and twentieth century are very clearly perceived in the teachings of the Gurus in the fifteenth to the eighteenth century India. This freedom is

based in the spiritual and social equality of the human beings.

We may pause here and make a submission. In recent times some persons have sought to interpret this love of Sikhism for freedom and equality merely as a struggle for some particular class of people. However, their teaching for participation in the social life, as well as their ideal of freedom and equality, should not be interpreted merely in material terms. The Gurus have always held the spiritual as higher to the material. They have taught us to regulate the material by the spiritual which they regard to be higher. Any effort for the equality without inspiration by the spiritual may tend to generate tension and conflict. But the Gurus have inspired freedom and equality from the mainsprings of the spiritual which may initiate and sustain the progress towards the ideal of harmony and equipoise. The Gurus have taught us that the basis for judging the issue are moral and spiritual. If an act were wrong, then it is wrong regardless of whosoever has done it. Similarly, if it were right, then it is so regardless of whosoever is involved in it. The tradition of holding even a colleague to be wrong, or serving water even to your enemy is a teaching which is grounded in the spiritual principle. The issues are not judged on partisan basis but are evaluated entirely on the moral and the spiritual grounds. In all this lies the strength and identity of the Sikh ethics.

## CHAPTER 11

### SIKH-RAHAT-MARYADA AND SIKH SYMBOLS

**GOBIND SINGH MANASUKHANI**

Sikhism is a dynamic and practical religion. Sikh Rahat Maryada started with Guru Nanak - Sangat and Pangat. In their compositions the Gurus not only formulated the tenets of the Sikh Faith, they also gave us guide-lines for a Sikh way of life, known as the 'Rahad-Maryada'. The word 'Rahat' means 'How to live' and 'Maryada', the tradition and practice of the faith. The words 'Rahat' and 'lap' are used in the Guru Granth Sahib, for example:

- (i) Sewa surt sabad veechar, jap tap sanjam haumai mar. Jiwan mukt ja sabad sunae, sachi rahat sacha sukh pae, (GGS, p, 1343).
- (ii) Kahat mukt, sunat mukt, rahat janam rahate. (GGS,p. 1230).
- (iii) Ghal khai kichu hathau dei, Nanak rah pachbanai sei. (GGS, p. 1245).  
(Earn your living with honest work and share your earnings with others. This is the way of truthful living).
- (iv) Baba hor khana khusbi khuwar,  
Jit khade tan peerie, mun mah chale vikar. (GGS, p. 16). The Gurus warned the Sikhs against the use of alcohol and wine and also emphasised the dangers of alcohol, i. e. alcohol destroys one's sense of discrimination.
- (i) Jit peete mutt door hoi, bara) pave wich ai. (GGS, p. 554).  
(Drinking wine takes away sense and dementia results).

Note : Translation of Punjabi quotation is given in brackets, wherever necessary

- (ii) It mud peete Nanaka, bahute khateeah bikar. (GGS, p. 553).  
 (By drinking such wine numerous sins are earned).  
 Guru Ramdas laid down a Sikh's routine as under:  
 "Guru satgur ka jo sikh akhave, so bhalke uthh Har nam  
 dhiave,  
 Udam kare bhalke prabhatee, isnan kare amritsar nave" (GGS,  
 p, 305).

Bhai Gurdas also wrote many verses in his Vars on the Sikh way of life:

"Kurbani tina Gur sikha, pichhal ratee uthh bahande" (Var, 12-2).

"Dekh paraia changeea, mava bhaina, dheea jane (Var, 12).

When Guru Gobind Singh created the 'Khalsa', he defined the goal of the Khalsa as under:

"Jagat jot japai nis basar, ek bina mun ek na mane, Pooran prem parteet saje, birt gor marhi mutt bhool na mane." (Dasam Granth, p. 712).

(Only they who keep alight the unquenchable torch of Truth,  
 And never swerve from thoughts of one God,

Do not thus believe, even by mistake,

In fasting, monastic life or worshipping forebears,

Such may be recognised as True members of the Khalsa).

Guru Gobind Singh issued the following *Hukam-nama* (Guru's Proclamation) to the *sangat* (congregation) of Kabul on 26th Jeth, 1756 Bikrimi (23rd May 1699 A.D.) soon after the founding of the Khalsa. In this he mentioned the *Rahat* and especially, the five symbols, as under<sup>1</sup>

1. Note: Translation of Punjabi quotation is given in brackets, wherever necessary

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I. Sikh Research and Reference Library, Amritsar (Nss) Quoted by S. Kirpal Singh in "Sikh Symbols", Sikh Missionary Society, Southal, U.K., 1971, p. 23.

i SiqgurU jI shwie  
 srbq sMgq kwbl guru rKY gw;  
 qisW aisY Aswfl bhq KiSI hY [  
 qisW Kmfy dw Aimlq pUW qo lXW ;  
 kys r-Kxy ..... ieh Aswfl mhr hY [  
 k-C ikpwn dw ivswh nhIN rKxw ;  
 dndI vkq kysW dl pwl nW krnl ;  
 srbq sMgq AbwiKAw dw kUTw Kwvy nwhIN;  
 qmwkU nw vrqnw  
 Bwdnl qQu kInAw mwrn vwly sy myl nw r-Ko [  
 MlxY, msMldy, rwm rweley kl sMgq n bIsO [  
 Grbwxl pVnl ... vIihgurU vIihgurU jpnw ;  
 guru kl rihq rKxl .....  
 srb-q sMgq apr myrI KiSI hY [  
 pWqSwHl 10  
 jYT 26  
 sthq 1746

*Copy of the letter written by Guru Gobind Singh  
 to the Sangat of Kabul (Afghanistan).  
 The original manuscript can be seen in the S.G.P.C.  
 Library, Amritsar (Punjab, India).*

“Sarbat sangat Kabul Guru rakhe ga  
 Tusa ute asadee bahut khusi hai  
 Tusi Khande da Amrit Panja to lena  
 Kes rakhne...ih asadee, mohur hai;  
 Kachh, Kirpan da visah nahee karna

Sarab loh da kara hath rakhna  
 Dono vakat kesa dee palna karna  
 Sarbat sangat abhakhia da kutha  
 Khave naheen, Tamakoo na vartana  
 Bhadni tatha kanya-maran-vale so mel na rakhe  
 Meene, Massandei, Ramraiye ki sangat na baiso  
 Gurbani parhni...Waheguru, Waheguru japna  
 Guru kee rahat rakhnee  
 Sarbat sangat oopar meri khushi hai.

Patshahi Dasvi  
 Jeth 26, Samat 1756.

(Through the grace of Our Immortal True Lord,  
 To the entire sangat at Kabul.  
 The Guru will protect the Sangat,  
 I am pleased with you all.  
 You should take baptism by the sword, from Five Beloveds  
 Keep your hair uncut for this is a seal of the Guru,  
 Accept the use of shorts and a sword.  
 Always wear iron Kara on your wrist,  
 Keep your hair clean and comb it twice a day.  
 Do not eat Halal (Kosher) meat,  
 Do not use tobacco in any form,  
 Have no connection with those who kill their daughters  
 Or permit the cutting of their children's hair.  
 Do not associate with Meenas, Massands and Ram-raiyas  
 (anti-sikh cuIts)  
 Recite the Guru's hymns.  
 Meditate on "The Name of our Wonderful Lord",  
 Follow the Sikh code of discipline,  
 I give the entire sangat my blessing).

(Signature of 10th Guru)

Jeth 26, 1756 Bikrami (23rd May 1699 A.D.)

Kavi Sainapat, the court-poet of Guru Gobind Singh in his  
 composition entitled "Gur Sobha" illustrates more aspects of the Sikh  
 discipline.

"Ai see reet rahat bataee, santan sunee adhik munbhaee"  
 (26-141).

“Panch kee ku-sangat taj, sangat so preet kare,  
 Daya aur Dharam dhar, tiyage sabh lalsa,  
 Huka na peevai, sis dharee na mundaee,  
 So to Waheguru, Waheguru, Waheguru ji ka Khalsa”. (31-47)

Bhai Desa Singh emphasises the performance of Rahat, in his Rahat-nama :

“Rahat bina nah Sikh kahave, Rahat bina dar chota khave”.

Rahat-Namas: The Rahat-namas were written by some of the Guru's devoted Sikhs. They contain details of the Sikh code of discipline. Yet H. Mcleod now challenges the Rahat-Maryada. He writes, “The Sikh code of discipline – Rahat Maryada and the Sikh symbols were evolved during the 18th century as a result of growth, though the tradition declares they were definitely settled by pronouncement of Guru Gobind Singh and were part of the Bai khi day proceedings in 1699 A.D.”<sup>2</sup> The Hukam-nama to the Sangat of Kabul, issued seven weeks after the Baisakhi (1699) calls u on the sangat to maintain their five symbols with the other regulations. The Rahat-nama of Bhai Prahlad Singh mentions the five K's (Panj-Kakkars) :

“Kachh, Kes, Kanga, Kirpan, Kara, aur jo karay bakhan  
 Ih kakay panj turn mano, Guru Granth ko sach tum mano.”<sup>3</sup>

So also the Rahat-nama of Chaupa Singh gives the names of the five K's :

“Kachh, Kara, Kirpan, Kanga, Kes ki,  
 Ih panj kakaree rahat dhare Sikh so.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Bhai Nandlal, the poet-laureate of Guru Gobind Singh's court, five K's were the definite marks of the Khalsa :

“Sikhi nishani panj haraf ast kar,  
 Hargiz na bash ad arzi panj maf,  
 Kara, kardo, kachb, Kange bid an,  
 Bina kes, he ch ast jumle nishan.”<sup>5</sup>

'Giani Gian Singh, the author of the *Panth Prakash* also confirms the Sikh symbols;

“Rakhah kachh, kes, kara, kirpan, singh nam ko iho nishan,  
Kanga, kes ke sung rabe, iho panj kakar dareh.”  
(Panth Prakash, p. 233)

Piara Singh Padam has mentioned the authors of 14 compositions along with their dates which contain details of Rahat-Maryada.<sup>6</sup> Pandit Tara Singh Narotam in his book entitled *Sri Guru Tirath Sangrah* written in 1884 has listed 21 Rahat-namas by different authors. It is possible, that some of these Rahat-namas may have later interpolations, but to reject all outright is an error. McLeod himself translated Bhai Chaupa Singh's Rahat-nama and has given its details along with the three versions.

There is therefore overwhelming and irrefutable evidence to prove that the “Rahat” and the five symbols of the Khalsa were proclaimed by the Tenth Guru. The traditional records of these facts cannot be later creations. All this confirms that McLeod made a grave error of judgment in challenging the accepted chronology and contents of the Rahat-Maryada.

Following are the principles on which the Rahat-Maryada is based:

- (i) Symbols or commandments, which promote virtue and discourage vice. For example, Kachha and Kara. Kachha symbolises chastity and moral purity in thought and action. Kara acts to warn against forgetting God and, in so doing, being overtaken by wrong or evil desires.
- (ii) Emphasis on those symbols or actions which promote cohesion and co-operation among Sikhs. For example, the five K's are not only tokens of identity, but also of fellowship and esprit de corps, which is further ensured by the use of a standardised greeting; “Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.”
- (iii) There are also those symbols which encourage a concern for the poor and the helpless. The Kirpan (Sikh Sword), is meant to defend the victims of tyranny, injustice or exploitation. It emphasises the need to defend the weak, the down-trodden and the helpless.

- (iv) Further there is a series of injunctions against the indulging in evil habits or association with vicious persons. The prohibition against tobacco, and adultery is to encourage personal well-being and social health. The dissociation with anti-Sikh cults, like the *Meenas* (followers of Baba Prithichand), *Dhirmalias*, *Ram-rayas* . and other anti-Sikh sects, is to discourage apostacy and maintain purity in the Khalsa brotherhood.

Some say that the “Khalsa Panth” was created by Guru Gobind Singh to meet the challenge of his times, to resist oppression and to undo the erosion of human rights. But, Guru Hargobind on his accession to the Guru’s throne, started wearing two swords, one of *Peeri*, or spiritual power and the other of *Meeri*, or temporal power. This was more than 90 years before the creation of the Khalsa! Guru Hargobind trained his Sikh soldiers in martial arts and fought four wars against tyranny and its Moghul perpetrators. Guru Hargobind clearly told Sant Ramdas that his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. Even Guru Gobind Singh when in his teens he battle of Bhangani and the battle of Nadaun against the oppressors, before he had created the Khalsa in 1699.

The creation of Khalsa was a historic event unrelated to any local situation. It was in fulfillment of Guru’s mission to propagate righteousness and to destroy evil. This two-fold purpose became achievable with the creation of the Khalsa Panth. The Khalsa describes an ideal man’s intent in the support of goodness and morality and the protection of basic human rights. As such, they have an external uniform and inner vision. The external uniform included the five K’s and the practice of virtuous and gallant deeds. Inner inspiration was achieved by a constant recall of and reflection on *Gurbani* coupled with meditation or *Nam-Simran* on God’s name. Both functions were succinctly summed up by Guru Gobind Singh as under:

“Dhan jeo tah kau jug mai,  
Mukh te Hari, chit main judh bichare”

(Dasam Granth)

(Blessed are those of this world, who invoke God’s Name in their minds and fight against the evil in their hearts).

Khalsa Symbols: Let us examine the five K's one by one and consider their significance in the context of the Khalsa Panth.

1. Kes: Reference to *Kes* or *Keshas* (uncut hair) is to be found in many places in the Guru Granth Sahib. Hair is not only regarded as a symbol of saintliness or holiness, but also a proof of one's living in harmony with the will of God. All the Sikh Gurus and most of the saints of India left all their hair intact. God was described by Guru Arjan as under:

“Teray bankay loian dant reesala,  
Sohne nuk jin lambray vala.”

(GGS, p. 567).

(You have adoring eyes and sparkling teeth,  
You have a beautiful nose and long hair.)

While speaking to the Muslims about their faith, Guru Nanak stressed the need to maintain their natural hair by covering it with the turban.

“Napak pak kar hadon hadeesa, sabit soorat dastar sira”

(GGS, p. 1084).

The Guru was not introducing some thing new. In India, hair was kept naturally by all sorts of persons. Hair was cut on the death of a relative as an expression of grief, or as a punish-ment for a sin. The Sikhs believe if hair is provided by God, with its peculiar distribution over our bodies, then we should respect this. Trimming or shaving only emphasises the futility of human effort, when opposing the natural law. To maintain hair, is an article of Sikh faith; it is regarded as the seal of the Guru. The head of a devout Sikh is also an offering to the Guru as a proof of his devotion.. In the past, Sikhs have made tremendous sacrifices to safeguard the sanctity of their hair.

Another explanation for the prescription of unshorn hair is that a Khalsa should look like his Guru and wear a natural uniform which is both inexpensive and dignified, i.e. to keep the Guru's form. Thus the keeping of uncut hair and wearing a turban are both necessary. Guru Gobind Singh gave his own form to the Khalsa:

“Khalsa mero roop hai khas, khalse mai hau karo nivas.”

(Sarab Loh Granth)

During the first half of the 18th century, the Moghul rulers of

the Punjab offered rewards for the head of any Sikh. As a result the Sikhs receded into the jungles but still did not cut their hair. Bhai Taru Singh faced death before allowing his hair to be cut. Sardar Mehtab Singh was sawn alive, but he too retained his hair and refused to give up his faith. Giani Gian Singh wrote:

“Mai Gursikhi nah tajohoi, kesa Swasa sung nibohoi”  
(Panth Prakash, p. 752)

Instructions regarding the care of hair are mentioned in the Rahatnama of Bhai Chaupa Singh :

“Guru ka Sikh kesa dee pal ana kare...Maila Hath na lae, joo na paven de, suchet rahe. Guru ki Mohar Nishani Sikhi hi jane”. (92)<sup>7</sup>

(Sikhs of the Guru should look after their hair. They should not touch their hair with dirty hands or allow lice to get into ‘them. They should always regard their hair as the seal of the Guru.)

Bhai Koer Singh in *Gur Bilas* (1752) wrote:

“Shastra mel, Gur sabad se, kachh, kesan sud prem,  
karad rakhani pan ch eh, taje na kabahi nem.” (40)

Bhai Sukha Singh in *Gur Bilas Patshashi Dasvi* (1797) wrote: “Bina Shastra kesan nare bhed janeo; Gahe kan tia ko kit loi sidhano Ihe mor agia sun lai piyare, bina teg kesan divo na deedare”.

Rattan Singh Bhangu in *Prachin Panth Prakash* (1841) observed:

“Kesan ki kejah pritpal, na ustran (razor) se katiyo bal”. (18)

Almost all the Rahatnamas lay special emphasis on the maintenance of un shorn hair, for it is not only the most obvious symbol of the Sikhs, but also a sign of their commitment and devotion to the Guru

“Kes bahar di Sikhi, nishani Sikhi di hai,  
Sikhi andar hovai, dono Sikhia barabar rahe”.

(Chaupa Singh)<sup>8</sup>

(69) Kesan dhoop dei such pavan, Hai it Gur ki Mohur suhavan”.

There are details of how to keep one's hair clean by washing it with curd, soap-nuts (Areethha) and Fuller's earth (Gachni). It should be regularly combed so that it does not get entangled or matted. Hair should not be nibbled, cut, plucked or dyed.<sup>9</sup> The facial hair, specially the beard and the moustache should receive extra care, according to Desa Singh Rahatnama :

“Dahra, muchh, sirr kes banaee, hai ih kirt ja prabhoo rajae, met rajai jo sees mundave, kah te jag kaise Har pave ?” (70)<sup>10</sup>

(Beard, moustache and head-hair should be properly maintained, because these are the tasks assigned under the Divine Will. One who shaves his head against the Divine Will, how can he attain salvation 7)

**2. Kanga:** Kanga or the comb is a necessary adjunct for the hair! It should be on hand to keep the hair neat and tidy. It is therefore fixed in the hair-knot. According to Bhai Kahan Singh the best way to clean the hair with a kanga is to layout a handkerchief and to collect the dead skin and fallen hair on to it. Then later burn it. It is wrong to fix a miniature sword on the kanga as is done by some Sikhs. We may as well put a miniature *kachha* and a *kara* or its drawing on the kanga. That would be ridiculous ! Bhai Nandlal observed that the hair should be combed twice daily and a turban neatly tied on the head.

“Kanga donah vakat kar, pug chunah kar bandhaee’ (13)<sup>11</sup>

**3. Kara:** Kara is a circular wrist-band made of steel iron. It reminds us of the iron will of the Khalsa. Kara tinkles and warns us of fulfilling the Khalsa vows. Kara is worn on the right or the left wrist according to being right or left handed. Its ring, on contact with anything produces its warning. When a Sikh takes up a sword for a righteous cause, the Kara indicates to him to use it carefully. Kara is not an ostentatious ornament. It should not be made of gold or other precious metal.

**4. Kachha Kachhahra:** Kachha or underwear is meant to cover the private parts of the body and is used by both sexes. It is a symbol of sexual restraint and conjugal fidelity. It keeps the Wearer covered at all times. It also enables the wearer to move with briskness and agility. In the Rahat-namas it is given as much importance as the other symbols.

“Kachh, Kirpan na kabahoo tiyage.”<sup>12</sup>

(Desa Singh Rahatnama)

Bhai Daya Singh mentions that the underwear should remain above the knees so as not to restrict the freedom of movement.

“Goday walee Kachh na pahase”<sup>13</sup>

(Daya Singh Rahatnama)

Kachh along with Kes and Kirpan are called ‘Tra-mudra’ (The three emblems)

“Kachh, Kes, Karad, Guru ki teen mudraih,

Pas te na door karay, sada ang sung dhar”

(Sarab Loh Granth)<sup>14</sup>

**5. Kirpan:** Kirpan means Sikh sword. It is generally suspended from a belt across the chest. According to Kahan Singh, Kirpan literally means a ‘house of compassion’, which implies that it is an instrument of compassion for helping victims of injustice and oppression. Others say that it is a combination of two words: “Kirpa” and “aan”; ‘Kirpa’ means grace or compassion, ‘aan’ means honour or dignity. That is, the Kirpan is an instrument of compassion, to protect and safe-guard dignity or honour of others. Kirpan is also called Karad, Tegh, Sham-sher Bhagwati.

Guru Gobind Singh regarded the sword as an emblem of power-shakti. He refers to God as Bhagwati and Sarab Loh (All Steel).

While praying to God the Vanquisher of the Wicked and the supporter of the good, he addresses him as the personification of different weapons.

“Teer tuhi, Saithee tuhi, tuhi tabar, tarmar

Nam tuharoo jo jape, bhav sindh bhau par.

(Dasam Granth, p. 1114)

“As Kirpan, Khando, Kharga, Tupak aur Teer,

Sof sarohi, sairathi, ye hi hamare Peer.”

(Dasam Granth, p. 1114)

**Kurahit::** ‘Kurahits are prohibitions to be obeyed by Amrit-dhari Sikhs. There are 4 Kurahits (major lapses) as under:

**(1) Not to cut one’s hair/s :** This is both a positive command,

also injunction. Chaupa Singh states:

“Guru ka Sikh badhan na kare.

This is a prohibition against cutting or destroying body hair. On the positive side, the Guru wants *his Sikhs* to come to him, in a way that he approves; Sukha Singh wrote:

“The mor agia suno he piare,

Bina tegh Kesan di vo na deedare

(Gur Bilas, Patshahi Dasvin)

Chaupa Singh emphasises the prohibition against the cutting of hair:

“Guru da Sikh dehi de rom na luhae” (54).

(Rahatnama Chaupa Singh).<sup>15</sup>

Sukha Singh also warns the Sikhs against shaving their hair:

“Bikhia Kirya bhadan tiagah, jata joot rahbo anuragah”.

(Gur Bilas).

(ii) Prohibition on use of tobacco: The use of tobacco in any form is forbidden. Whether smoking a *biri*, a cigarette, a pipe or a *huka*. It not only harms the body, but also makes addicts. Snuff-taking is also forbidden. Giani Santokh Singh wrote:

“Ganda dhoom bans te tiagah, ut gilana is te dhar bhagah.

(Suraj Prakash-1-44)

Bhai Desa Singh’s Rahatnama mentions:

“Bhang tamakoo nikat na jave, Tin te bhi such deghe karave”.

(154)

Sainapat states in *Gur Sobha* :

“Huka tiyage Har gun gavai, achha bhojan Har ras pavai, Bhadhan tiyag karo re bhaee, tah sikhan yah bat sunaee.”<sup>16</sup> (21-137)

(iii) **Halal Meat**: The tenth Guru prohibited the eating of ‘Halal’ meat, because the Muslim rulers had prohibited the sale of any meat except ‘Hala!’ (Kosher). The reason for this ban is that ‘Halal’ or ‘Kutha’ meat involves a lot of cruelty to the animal by gradual bleeding from the jugular vein. Secondly, it was a symbol of slavery as one had no choice but to take the prescribed meat from the Muslim vendors. According to the Guru, if meat was to be eaten, then Sikhs should kill

the animal with a single sword-blow. Sikhs. This meat called “jhatka” is permitted to the Sikhs.

“Bakra jhatka chhake ta chhakay, avar mas val kabi na takay”  
(Desa Singh Rahatnama)

Bhai Chaupa Singh wrote against the use of “Kutba” meant::

Jo kutha kbave so neech tankhaiya. (372)<sup>17</sup>

Kesar Singh Chibber cautions against eating dead animals:

“Singh Ji hai, murdar na khae.”

(Bansawali-nama).

(iv) **Prohibition of Adultery.** Guru Gobind Singh banned adultery: Sex within marriage is allowed, but any other sexual activity is prohibited. He wrote ID *Bachitra Natak* :

“Par Nari ki sej, supne mool mut jaeo”

(‘Do not even in a dream visit the bed of another woman’). When asked by the Sikh soldiers, whether they could take female enemy prisoners as booty as the Muslim soldiers did, Guru Gobind Singh told them not to retaliate, for he wanted the Sikhs to set a good example. Kazi Noor Mohammed, one of the Muslim chroniclers of Ahmed Shah Durani, who accompanied Abadali during three of his invasions of India, wrote approvingly about the high moral character of the Sikh soldiers in their treatment of women of the opponents. When Jahan Khan’s army was defeated by Sikh troops, he ran away and left his female retainers. These women were escorted to their homes by the Sikhs soon after the battle.<sup>18</sup> Desa Singh wrote in his Rahat-nama :

“Par beti ko beti jano, par istri ko mat bakbano

Apnee istri so rat hoee, rabatwant Singh bai soe.” (13)<sup>19</sup>

Bhai Nandlal also confirms the ban on adultery:

“Par istri siu neh lagavai, Gobind Singh vah Sikh na bhavai”.

(22)<sup>20</sup>

Bhai Chaupa Singh wrote, “Par istrian da sung na kare.”(11)

Besides the above four major *Kurahits*, there are some minor lapses which are called “Tankhah”. Some of them are mentioned in the Rahat-nama of Bhai Chaupa Singh, for example gambling, theft, consulting astrologers, observing omens and superstitions the use of intoxicants, the giving and taking of dowry, and following Hindu rituals.

The Tankhah-nama of Bhai Nandlal also mentions some of the lapses which the Khalsa should avoid.<sup>21</sup> Some of them pertain to the relations between Sikhs and Muslims.

Dr. McLeod objects to some of the points made in the *rahit* which are adverse to the Muslims. He writes:

“The prominence given in the early *rahit* to renunciation of Muslim contacts as an example, indicates another major element. In this period of strife, Muslims come to be identified as the prime enemies of the Khalsa and injunctions which reflect this hostility find their way into the evolving *rahit*. Some are subsequently shed or modified as changing circumstances affect attitude towards the *rahit*; others survive to the present day. The clearest of all examples is provided by the ban on *halal* meat. Another major precept which evidently reflects antagonism towards Muslims is the strict ban on the use of tobacco.”<sup>22</sup>

These conjectures of McLeod are quite misplaced and contrary to facts. Guru Gobind Singh had not only good relations with Muslims, but he commanded their respect for his spiritual stature. It speaks volumes for his godliness that a Muslim saint, Pir Budhu Shah, should be so impressed by the spirit of the Guru's mission that he should not only send hundreds of his followers to join the army of the Guru, but two of his sons should also die fighting for the Guru's cause. It is a fact of history that the Hindu hill princes besides being hostile and inimical to the Guru for his anti-caste crusade, were instrumental in inviting the Moghul forces to attack the Guru. Muslims like Nabi Khan, Ghani Khan, and General Said Khan also admired him. Even in the *Zafar-nama* he has not condemned emperor Aurangzeb but has only exposed his fanaticism and cruelty. With regard to “Halal”, the reason for its prohibition to the Sikhs have already been given under the section of “Kurahits”. McLeod's other contention that the ban on the use of tobacco for the Sikhs is antagonistic to the Muslims is unreasonable. Tobacco was smoked by both Hindus and Muslims. It was a pernicious addiction for all people and was condemned as such. The Guru had created a dynamic community with a mission and a

goal. Tobacco creates laziness, lethargy and disease and was thus a hurdle in the pursuit of an active and constructive life by the Panth. The ban on tobacco cannot, thus, be taken as exemplifying of Sikh hostility to Muslims.

Guru Gobind Singh wanted the Khalsa to follow the *rahat* strictly. There could be no exception to it. It is said that he wanted the Sikhs to be vigilant.

“Jab lag Khalsa rahe Niyara, Tab lag tej dio mai sara,  
Jab ih gahay *bipran* ki reet, Mai na karo in ki parteet.”

Sarab Loh Granth)

‘*Bipran*-ki-reet’ implies generally Brahmanism or ‘*Brahaman*-vad’. Some of the things which can be included under it are listed below:

- (i) Verna Ashram Dharma, Caste ideology, concept of pollution, superiority of Brahmins in society and the monopoly of Brahmins conducted religious and social ceremonies, etc.
- (ii) That Brahmins alone are entitled to charity. The Guru says: “*Sabhna noo kar dan*”. (GGS, *Barah Mah*).
- (iii) Belief in the theory of pollution (*sutak*) at time of birth, death, etc. The Guru says: “*Sabho sutak Bharm hai*” (GGS, p. 472).
- (iv) Ancestor-worship and idol worship along with the ceremonies connected with it.
- (v) Sanctity of cooking and enclosed space (*Chauka*) or worship.
- (vi) Incarnation, that God assumes human birth.
- (vii) Rituals like *yag*-*ya*, *sanskar*, *Havan*, *Tap*, *Pilgrimage*, *fasting*. The Guru rejected all superstitions and taboos, “*Phoota unda Bharam ka, manah bhaiyo pargas,  
Kati beree pagah te, gur keeni bund khalas*”

(GGS, p. 1002)

(“Superstition is overcome. The mind is illuminated. The shackles are broken, the Guru has liberated me.”)

**Penalties:** Infringements of the *Rahat*-*Maryada* or the Sikh Code of Discipline involve penalties, with the clear intention of reforming the defaulter. The *Tankhah-nama* of Bhai Nandlal and some other *Rahat*-

*namas* mention certain penalties for infringement. The penalties differ according to the nature and seriousness of the lapse or misdemeanour. The infringements of the *Rahat Maryada* may be classified under *three heads*, along with the procedure for punishments :

- (i) **Tankhah (Minor Lapse):** Some minor lapses are mentioned in *rahat-namas*. Tankhah or the penalty imposed is the verdict or the decision of the local *Sangat* or congregation, after due deliberation and considering the explanation of the offender. The procedure may be set in motion by any Sikh in the form of a complaint against the offender. Some of the lapses include taking of dowry, use of intoxicants, associating with anti-Sikh cults, or some violation of the Sikh Code of Discipline. The *Sangat* may accept the offender's apology and/or impose admonition, penitence, some sort of *Sewa* (service) like cleaning the shoes, serving in the *langar* or reading of some sacred compositions, or the entire *Guru Granth Sahib*, and/or a fine. After the offender has carried out the penitence/punishment, he has to appear before the *Sangat* again, and then an *Ardas* is offered which restores the penitent to his Sikh status.
- (ii) **Patitism (Apostacy):** This is a serious violation of one or all the four *Kurahits* done by an *Amritdhari* Sikh. These are, cutting of hair, eating of *halal* meat, smoking, and adultery. The offender has to appear before the *Panj Piyaras*, render an apology and accept whatever punishment is prescribed by them. After he has gone through the punishment, he has to appear again before *Panj Piyaras* and take *Amrit* again, when he is restored to his former status.
- (iii) **Excommunication:** This is the most serious punishment given for a very grave offence or misdemeanour which may affect the whole Sikh community. The punishment and penance is awarded by any of the Five *Takhats* to those accused of grave error or insult to the *Khalsa Panth*. The *jathedar* of the *Takhat* after due consideration of the explanation of the

offender prescribes a severe punishment/penitence of any kind. After the person has undergone the punishment and penitence, he appears before the *Takhat* for restoration to his status as a Sikh

**Authorised Rahat Maryada:** The Sharomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, – An All India Sikh Institution – constituted a sub-committee in 1936 to consider the formulation of a universal Sikh Rahat-Maryada. As a result, representatives of Sikh Associations and Takhats deliberated for a long time and formulated an authorised version which was published in 1945. The original publication is in Panjabi. Its English edition is also available.<sup>23</sup> This booklet is divided into six sections as under :

- (i) Discipline of the word: Liturgical texts, das, Gur- dwaras, Reading of Guru Granth
- (ii) Discipline of Sacrament: Birth and Naming ceremony, Anand marriage, Amrit ceremony, Death ceremony.
- (iii) Discipline of Service: Free Kitchen (Langar).
- (iv) Discipline of Organisation: Guru Panth, Gursangat, Gurmatta, etc.
- (v) Disciplinary Action: Imposition of punishment, Penance, Re-batism, etc.
- (vi) Definitions: Sikh, Khalsa, etc.

**Conclusion:** The Sikh ideology and ethics have unambig-uously been laid down in the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. Similarly, our discussion makes it plain that the injunctions of the Gurus and the Rehitnama have clearly specified the rules of Sikh conduct and Maryada. Should at any stage there be need of any clarification of an issue, the matter can be decided only at the Panthic level, the yard-stick<sup>24</sup> provided being the teachings of the ten Gurus enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib.

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**SECTION V**  
**THE SIKH MOVEMENT**



## CHAPTER 12

### THE CREATION OF THE KHALSA AND PRESCRIBING OF THE SIKH SYMBOLS

MADANJIT KAUR

**Introductory:** The purpose of this paper is to examine the ideological and historical importance of the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. We shall also consider how far the observations of W. McLeod in his book, 'Evolution of the Sikh Community' whereby he casts doubt on the events of the Baisakhi day 1699 A.D. are valid. McLeod describes this development of the Sikh community as due to the large scale influx of the Jats in Guru Nanak's *Panth* rather than to the thoughtful policies and activities of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. McLeod questions the authenticity of the ceremony of Baptism of the Double-edged sword enacted by Guru Gobind Singh on March 30, 1699, the Baisakhi day. He casts aspersions on the *raison de etre* of the *Khalsa Panth* bound by the symbols of the faith, the five *kakkars*.<sup>1</sup>

McLeod has borrowed this thesis from J.S. Grewal, who was the first to float this idea.<sup>2</sup> McLeod concedes that 'something certainly did happen on the Baisakhi day of 1699', but argues that the orthodox form of the *Khalsa Panth* and the *Khalsa* code of discipline indicate Jat influence. In his opinion the *Khalsa* code of discipline and the tradition of the five k's got evolved during the eighteenth century but came "to be related to the time and intention of Guru Gobind Singh."<sup>3</sup>

McLeod alleges that there is lack of historical evidence about, the great event of the creation of the *Khalsa* and the prescribing of the five Sikh symbols by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi Day of the year 1699. The Sikh tradition about the event is so logical and pregnant with significance, so deeply connected with the history of

the Sikh martyrdom and struggle, and so clearly supported by the Sikh sources that it cannot be rationally ignored. McLeod and Grewal have no doubt expressed themselves Un-ambiguously, but they have brought no historical evidence, what-soever, to substantiate their thesis of the 'Jat origin' of Sikh militancy. On the contrary, we find much good ground encom-passed in *Gurshobha*<sup>4</sup> and *Gurbilas*<sup>5</sup> traditions to uphold our contention that there was purpose in the founding of the *Khalsa* and that the ceremony of the initiation of the *Khalsa* and its rites did take place on that auspicious day of Baisakhi. Sainapat, a contemporary poet of Guru Gobind Singh, vouches for what transpired on that day. He states in no uncertain terms that Guru Gobind Singh created the *Khalsa* on that day and removed all the cobwebs from the minds of the Sikhs.<sup>6</sup> Grewal concedes this point, but concludes that all this was for beating the *masands* and purifying the Sikhs. This is like shutting one's eyes from the great plan of the Gurus so explicitly explained in *Bachiter Natak* and as evident from the time of the fifth Guru. After all, the *masands* were not much of a problem with him as were the atrocities of the then Government on the non-Muslim subjects for which his father had laid down his life. He stood pledged for the continuation of the holy war (*dharam yudh*) which had become a great necessity because of the threats of the orthodox theocratic state as well as of the hostile attitude of the caste-ridden hill chieftains with a feudal mentality.

The creation of the *Khalsa* cannot be taken as a political manouvere, nor can it be attributed to the alleged pressure by the Jats (agrarian community) or to their contribution to the militant struggle in the eighteenth century. The *Khalsa* has to be defined basically as a very important religious institution with far reaching meanings and consequences. One has to trace its genesis in the socio-political milieu of Guru Gobind Singh, and the perception of his mission and the Sikh *Dharma*. Both Grewal and McLeod ignore the crux of the issue that the founding of the *Khalsa* was the epitome of the mission of Guru Gobind Singh as recorded in the *Gur Sobha*.<sup>7</sup>

The institution of the *Khalsa* was conceived to play a definite

functional role in the society. It was further given the support of a dynamic set of symbolic forms.<sup>8</sup> We are fully aware of the lack of a sense of historicity among the early Sikh scholars. Moreover, the extraordinary circumstances following the founding of the *Khalsa* left little scope for the preservation of the contemporary historical records.

Recent researches on Religious evolution have confirmed that religious symbolization is concerned with imagining the ultimate conditions of existence, whether external or internal.

If we try to examine the Sikh religious symbolization of five K's in accordance with the basic principles of Sociology of Religion on the following points :

- (i) the kind of the symbol system involved,
- (ii) the kind of religious action, it stimulates,
- (iii) the kind of social organisation in which this religious action occurs, and
- (iv) the implications for social action in general,<sup>9</sup>

it becomes evident that the origin of the set of symbols of five K's cannot be segregated from the founding of the Order of the Khalsa and cannot be placed somewhere later in the eighteenth century as a legacy of the Jat culture as asserted by J.S. Grewal and W. H. McLeod. Therefore our contention is that the founding of the Khalsa and the prescribing of the five K's are synchronous products of the Baisakhi day of 1699, sanctified by Guru Gobind Singh by the creation of the *Khalsa* at Anandpur Sahib.

**Milieu:** Developments of far reaching consequences took place in the history of the Sikh community during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb (A.D. 1658-1707). It is a well known fact of Indian history that Aurangzeb could succeed to the Mughal throne after having killed all his brothers and nephews and imprisoning his father, Emperor Shah Jahan. Though master of a vast empire, he was, thus, guilty and bore the stigma of ruthless killings of his kith and kin. To improve his public image, he made it known that he intended to establish a truly Islamic state in India. Thereby he hoped to woo the Muslim subjects

and the orthodox elite groups. His real motive was, to gain political power. With a view to achieving this objective, he honestly manifested his conduct, behaviour and affairs of the state on the lines of puritan Islam. Himself a pupil of the Hanfi school of Islamic thought, he was a man of strong convictions with orthodox inclinations. His attitude towards his non-Muslim subjects was generated by this psyche.

The bias of Emperor Aurangzeb against his Hindu subjects is clearly evident *from* a series of decrees he issued for the destruction of the Hindu places of worship.<sup>10</sup>

In earlier days of his governance of the Mughal province of Orissa, he had ordered his local officers in every town and village from Katak to Mednipur to “pull down all temples including even clay huts, built during the last 10 to 12 years, and to allow no old temple to be repaired.”<sup>11</sup> In A.D. 1661-62 a big temple was demolished at Mathura and a Jama Masjid was erected there in the heart *of* the Hindu population.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the policy of temple destruction can be traced from the life history of Aurangzeb prior to his ascendancy to the throne. During his viceroyalty of Gujerat in 1644, he desecrated the newly built Hindu temple of Chintamani in Ahmadabad by killing a cow there and then converting the building into a mosque. At that time, he also ordered for the demolition of many other Hindu temples in the province.<sup>13</sup> From April 1665 onwards, the Hindus were made to pay custom duties twice as much as were being paid by the Muslims on all articles brought for sale.<sup>14</sup> In 1667, Muslim subjects were exempted *from* payment of custom duties while the Hindus had to pay at the old rate of five per cent.<sup>15</sup> In 1668 public celebrations of Hindu fairs and festivals were stopped.<sup>16</sup> On April 9, 1669, a general order was issued to demolish all the schools and temples of the infidels and to put down their religious teachings. In January 1670, the temple of Keshav Rao at Mathura was destroyed and the city was renamed Islamabad.<sup>17</sup> The destruction of Hindu places of worship was one of the chief duties of the *Muhtasibs* (censors of morals) who were appointed in all the subdivisions and, cities of the empire.<sup>18</sup> Hindus employed in public

services, including clerks and accountants, were dismissed in 1671.<sup>19</sup> The post of *Qanngō* could be retained by a Hindu on embracing Islam.<sup>20</sup> Others who accepted Islam received stipends, rewards, government jobs, even a release from jail, right to ancestral property and other privileges. The converts, riding on elephants followed by bands and flags were paraded through the streets and bazars.<sup>21</sup> *Jazia* (poll-tax) was levied on all Hindus from April 2, 1679.<sup>22</sup> The contemporary European traveller Manucci observes, 'Many Hindus who were unable to pay turned Muhammadan, to obtain relief from the insults of collection...Aurangzeb rejoices'.<sup>23</sup> In June 1680, the temples of Amber, the capital of Jaipur state, which was indeed the most loyal Hindu State, were demolished.<sup>24</sup> The characteristic Hindu dress, *dhoti*, so irritated and excited the imperial ire of the puritan Aurangzeb that, according to the Imperial Chronicles, *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, on the 29th April 1682, when Syed Amjad, the Chief censor reported that Hindus went about dressed in *dhoti*, Ihtimam Khan, the Deputy censor was ordered to announce by the beat of drum that the Hindus should wear *pyjamas* instead.<sup>25</sup>

In March 1693, all the Hindus, except Rajputs, were ordered not to ride on elephants, fine horses and in palanquins or to carry arms.<sup>26</sup> According to Muhammad Latif, Aurangzeb had resolved that belief in one God and the Prophet should be, not the prevailing, but the only religion of the empire of Hindustan.<sup>27</sup> Certain Hindu religious establishments no doubt, enjoyed religious grants, and the subjugated Rajput states enjoyed freedom of worship, but their privilege was conditioned by their loyalty and support to the State. Discrimination against the Hindu masses was apparent at the surface level. Probably, these drastic steps were adopted to attack them psychologically and to suppress them so that they should never get emboldened to revolt against the State. It was for this reason that the strongest Hindu cultural centres of Northern India i.e. Benaras and Mathura, became targets of State persecution. The brutal suppression of the Jat (1699) and Satnami (672)<sup>28</sup> revolts are other burning examples of state tyranny. The liberal and freedom loving Sufis also could not save themselves

from the wrath of the orthodox Emperor.<sup>29</sup> In subsequent years the Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs, who aspired for freedom, were subjected to a ruthlessly benumbing treatment at the hands of the State.<sup>30</sup> The praxis of the creation of the Khalsa lies in the political milieu because, since the time of Jehangir, the State had become increasingly intolerant. This led to the earlier organisation of the Sikh society into a well-knit revolutionary movement.<sup>31</sup> Aurangzeb adopted a resolute and uncompromising policy of repression and persecution of non-Muslims. Guru Tegh Bahadur the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, stood for religious freedom and became a martyr to this cause (the protection of *Tilak* and *Janeu*, symbols of Hinduism).<sup>32</sup> Guru Tegh Bahadur was not a votary of these religious signs. Yet he staked his life to defend the rights of those who believed in them. Implicit in the protest of the Guru was his concern to secure the people the right of freedom of belief and worship. It was a reiteration of the Sikh belief in an ethical social order and of the Sikh principles of tolerance and acceptance of diversity of faith and practice. At no time in the History of the human race, have men suffered so much to protect the faith of others as the Sikh Gurus.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was publicly beheaded under the order of Emperor Aurangzeb on 11th November, 1675 in Chandani Chowk, Delhi.<sup>33</sup> The event of martyrdom of the Guru initiated a process of moral and political awakening and changed the course of events in Punjab history. The Sikh reaction was very tense. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was the symbol of the rising Sikh reaction and resistance. Sikhism acquired a new consciousness of strength and self confidence and entered into the final stage of its struggle.

Guru Gobind Singh, the successor of Guru Tegh Bahadur, seeing the trend of events, organised the community for resistance giving recognition to the sword as a lawful alternative.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the ideological issue had already been clarified by Guru Hargobind when he conveyed to Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra that his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant and that the same was in consonance with the thesis of Guru Nanak who had never given up the world. The Guru knew that he had a definite mission and duty to perform. Therefore, the policy of creating an organised institutional

structure was proclaimed by Guru Gobind Singh. This development took its birth on the Baisakhi day, March 30 of A.D. 1699 (Julian Calender) at Anandpur Sahib in the foothills of the Shivalik Himalayas. This memorable event is well known in the annals of Sikh history but not so the revolutionary ideas which motivated this action.

### **Purpose:**

Some of the historians and scholars engaged in Sikh studies have tried to present the purpose of the founding of the Order. of the Khalsa in terms of the personal or political motives of Guru Gobind Singh, i.e. to avenge the death of his father. Guru Tegh Bahadur, to fight against the Mughals, to mend the *Masand* and to reshuffle the Sikh organisation.<sup>35</sup> However, a significant clue to the founding of the Khalsa is found in *Bachitar Natak*.<sup>36</sup> It is derived from *Desam Granth* that Guru Gobind Singh wanted to create a sense of self-respect and spiritual awakening and strength in the people, suffering under the autocratic administrative oppression.<sup>37</sup> The Guru realised the 'Divine intervention' in human life and that God was the wielder of arms (*shastar*)<sup>38</sup> to punish tyrants and destroy the evil doers. The Guru as the instrument of God seeks His support.<sup>39</sup> The *Bachitar Natak* opens with an invocation to the 'Almighty' in an extraordinary manner.<sup>40</sup> It emphasizes the idea that God upholds the good against the evil.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the Guru expresses that he was ordained by God to spread *Dharam* among mankind and make it realize its duty towards God and society. He stresses that he had come to fulfil a specific 'Divine Purpose', with enmity and prejudice towards none.<sup>42</sup> The Guru makes it explicitly clear that he Was a human instrument of God for upholding the cause of righteousness against the tyrants, sinners, and evil doers.<sup>43</sup> He was not to be deemed as God or an *avatar* but a servant (*dasa*) Sent by Him for the sake of the *dharm*.<sup>44</sup> The Guru realised from his situation that there was, in human nature, an instinctive urge for aggression and for crushing the weak. Therefore, self-respecting men, he felt, must organise and equip themselves against this persistent danger.<sup>45</sup> The Guru was a creative genius. He concluded that a man of faith and moral values must be in possession of arms to maintain his

freedom and security. Only then he could be fit to provide true leadership for upholding the right against wrong, for punishing the guilty, and (or initiating a creative role in society).<sup>46</sup> Here two things should be kept in view. First is the loud protest of Guru Nanak against the tyranny of the invaders and the rulers, which protest was in the nature of a task he had set (or the religious man and the Sikh society). Second is the amplification of the same point by Guru Hargobind when he talked to Sant Ramdas about the need of militarisation. Guru Gobind Singh, thus believed that persons grounded in virtue, talent, and dedicated to the service of God and humanity, should group themselves into the democratic order of the *Khalsa*.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, his mission was essentially to raise a stable community of saint-soldiers that should at all times be willing to face and combat the enemies of righteousness.

This idea of the nature of Guru Gobind Singh's mission is also presented by Sainapat, *darbari-Kavi* (court poet) of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>48</sup> In his famous work *Gursobha* (1711. A.D.), Sainapat views the creation of the *Khalsa* as an epitome of the Sikh movement and the mission of the Gurus.<sup>49</sup> According to the poet, the *Khalsa* (the purified Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh) were to defend the claims of conscience against any oppression and interference and to side with 'good' against 'evil'.<sup>50</sup> As the vanguard of righteousness, they were secure in their eternal foundation in the image of the Guru Himself; they were not to remain concealed<sup>51</sup> or to suffer diminution; they were to be ever on the increase.<sup>52</sup> This was the purpose and aim of the mission of Guru Gobind Singh, a conception which embodied the ideal norm towards which the entire Sikh historical process had been directed.<sup>53</sup>

It is clear from the conceptual study of the *Khalsa* that the aims of the Sikh Gurus and Guru Gobind Singh were definitely and completely at variance with the fundamental religious aims in Hinduism. The plan of *Khalsa* envisaged bringing up a basic transformation in the social organisation of the people with a view to making it possible for them to become members of a universal culture and an egalitarian

society which knew no ethnicity or regional limitation of origin or habitat.<sup>54</sup> The model for such a fraternity grounded in a universal culture, which represents a living synthesis of all the great cultures<sup>55</sup> of the world, was to be the *Khalsa*, a model for the future World society.<sup>56</sup>

This idea of the kingdom of God and the brotherhood of man, was inherent in the order of the *Khalsa*. It was the passionate conviction of the Gurus that the principles of political which govern the relations between the rulers and the citizens should be so revolutionised as to bring them in complete accord with the principles of ethics.<sup>57</sup> Unless this principle is accepted and implemented, the emergence of a universal culture is not possible. The founding of the *Khalsa* was in fact the creation of a common-wealth (*sangha*) or a party in modern political parlance for the avowed purpose of facilitating the emergence of the global fraternity.<sup>58</sup> And it is in this context that the litany (*Ardas*), which is repeated in every Sikh congregation throughout the World, every morning and evening, to the effect that:

Raj karega *Khalsa*, aaki Rahe na koi,  
Khawar hoi sabh milenge, bachei saran jo hoi.<sup>59</sup>

is to be understood and appreciated. In fact, the order of the *Khalsa*, as divorced from political activity and not dedicated to the achievement of political ends, aiming at eventual establishment of a universal equalitarian global Fraternity, has no intelligible connotation.<sup>60</sup> In the words of Bhai Nand Lal, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, 'the *Khalsa* has to fight to the end for justice and freedom.'<sup>61</sup> Such was the purpose of the Guru in the creation of the *Khalsa*.

According to Kapur Singh: "Guru Gobind Singh chose Baisakhi as the day for founding the order of the *Khalsa* deliberately, with some considerations in his mind, so as to usher in the dawn of a new and regenerated society, which was to arise in accordance with the Phoenix principle, the principle of Resurrection."<sup>62</sup> The ceremony of the demand of human heads in the cause of *Dharma*, and the subsequent presentation of the newly born Five Beloved Ones (*Panj Piaras*) to public assembly, could mean only some such dynamic, and symbolic

connotation. It was this idea to which, he gave expression by demanding the heads of living persons, and by taking them into the tent of inner sanctuary, where each individual was supposed to meet his God-in-death before he became qualified to live and to lead and serve the world. Such are the 'Five Beloved Ones', who had thus met their Death by submerging their little egos into the Universal Spirit; and received the Baptism of the Steel. They had, thus, become qualified to rule and govern through service. It is in this background that Guru Gobind Singh identifies God with Death<sup>63</sup> and gives Him the epithet of All Steel.<sup>64</sup>

That this was in essence the idea is not in doubt when we read certain poetical compositions of a contemporary poet, Bhai Gurdas Singh, the 2nd, who had a clear perception of the founding of the *Khalsa* and its implications.<sup>65</sup> The founding of the *Khalsa* marks the most significant stage in the social history of Sikhism in the century to follow. The programmatic nature of the *Khalsa* entailed a change in emphasis and transformation of the psychology of the Sikhs.<sup>66</sup> In his *Swayyas* Guru Gobind Singh is making public the divine secret, unknown to the *Vedas* and the *Quran*, and the *Khalsa* is enjoined to forget about them.<sup>67</sup> As a social movement early Sikhism no doubt possessed some features in common with the religious brotherhood of the Radical Bhagats. If Sikhism, as a whole, nevertheless, broke free from the convoluted cycle of caste ideology that overlook other protestant brotherhoods, to what cause did it owe its freedom? It is true that Sikhism barred the door of asceticism and so did not lose itself in the esoteric wilderness. But we have also to explain why it did not duly return, as so many others did, to the citadel of *Varnashram Dharma*?<sup>68</sup> The answer to this question is found in the mode of initiation ceremony, *Amrit* of the *Khanda di pahul*<sup>69</sup> (baptism of the double edged sword), and the structural significance of the set of symbols prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh at the creation of the *Khalsa*. The *Khanda di pahul* (baptism of the double edged sword) claimed to usher a new way of life, a distinct community of spiritual democracy<sup>70</sup>, the membership of which was to be won by an initiation which demanded saintliness, heroism and selfless public service as well as individual moral excellence.

The most important concern of the mission of Guru Gobind Singh's *Khalsa* was a concrete programme of social integration of a separate caste-less society. The *panj-piyaras* belonged to five different *jatis* as well as to different regions of the Indian sub-continent.<sup>71</sup> These five beloved ones formed the first members of -the order of the *Khalsa* into which the Guru himself begged to be admitted, and was duly baptised and initiated as the sixth member of the *Khalsa*.<sup>72</sup> Thus was created the order of the *Khalsa*. Koer Singh in his *Gur Bilas Patshahi 10* (1751 A.D.) records the episode of the foundation of the *Khalsa* and the prescribing of the five Ks' with full details of the ceremony.<sup>73</sup>

The Guru defined the qualifications of a 'pure member of the *Khalsa* in his well known *Sawwayas*.<sup>74</sup> This, in short, is what happened on the Baisakhi of March 30, 1699.

Persecution is one side of the coin of the Sikh exchange with contemporary wielders of power. The other side of the coin is divine intervention in history.<sup>75</sup> This is the proof of the legitimation of the use of sword against injustice and a tyrannical rule.<sup>76</sup> The *Khalsa* called forth aggression against evil. "Instead of cosmic sympathy, a partisan spirituality was demanded."<sup>77</sup> The *Khalsa* has been enjoined to forget the pluralistic thought of the *Vedas* and *Kateb (Quran)* and other religious texts, but to worship only the *Akal* (the Timeless).<sup>78</sup> Death with a sword has been equated with God.<sup>79</sup> The dictum of the Guru to the *Khalsa* is : 'God destroys the enemies of the righteous and a religious dispensation can face the situation if it accepts God as Death'.<sup>80</sup>

According to Ahmad Shah Batalia (*Tawarikh-i-Hind*) and Bute Shah (*Tawarikh-i-Punjab*) during the first few days after the Baisakhi of 1699, some eighty thousand men received the Baptism of *Khande de Pahul* to join the order of the *Khalsa*.<sup>81</sup> The authors of *Sri Gursobha* (Sainapat) (1711. A.D.)<sup>82</sup> and *Gurpartap Suraj Granth* (Santokh Singh)<sup>83</sup> both recount the ordinance issued by the Tenth Guru, to congregations throughout India including the *sangats* of Assam, Ghazni and Kabul, to follow the injunctions and *rehit* of the *amrit*.<sup>84</sup> There is a clear record in the *Gursobha* that regarding the *Kakkar* of *Keshas* and the prohibition against shaving, there was a reaction in the Delhi *Sangat* of the Sikhs.

This contemporary record proves both the event of baptism and the prescription of *Kakkars*<sup>85</sup>

With the formation of the *Khalsa* the Sikh movement started by Guru Nanak, reached its highest fulfilment. The Sikh community of saints and martyrs turned into a band of bold saint-soldiers without losing its original attributes of compassion and selflessness. There was no question of transformation of the community. It was simply the result of the continuous process of growth and development of the Sikh religion. The thought or teaching of Guru Gobind Singh cannot be studied, either theologically or logically, in isolation from the general Sikh world-view. It has to be understood and analysed within and in relation to the totality of the Sikh ethos. It is in this context that the *Khalsa* of Guru Gobind Singh is to be seen and studied.

The basic concept and ideas to which Guru Gobind Singh tries to give concrete expression in the *Khalsa* were not new but a continuation of the fundamental concerns of Sikhism. With the link of the individual soul with the infinite soul, the integration of religion and religious activity with the principles of an egalitarian society, subordinating politics to ethics, and the creation of selfless *Khalsa* upholding the vision of a regenerated humanity, a new era in the socio-cultural history of the Sikh community was heralded.

It is, thus, obvious that the new phase of the creation of the *Khalsa* was the epitome of the teachings and practices of the founder Guru and his successor gurus and not, in any way, in contradiction to their thesis. A deeper study of the growth of Sikhism reveals that the Sikh religion has a consistent ideology. Sikhism of Guru Gobind Singh is, thus, not a transformation of or a departure from the system of the earlier Gurus. Some confusion arises only in such minds as either fail to understand the radical and original character of the religion of Guru Nanak or regard his system as that of the saints of the *Bhakti* movement. There is complete uniformity in the fundamental doctrines of Sikhism at different stages of its historical development both at the phenomenal and the transcendental levels. Since the world view of Sikhism is basically rational and real, its philosophy ethical order and value system, are deeply rooted in the social context. The Gurus

that followed the Founder, had to face at different times, very challenging situations. But the policy followed by them or Guru Gobind Singh strictly falls within the framework of the Sikh doctrines that aim at socio-spiritual welfare of humanity through the organisation of a community wedded to those ideals.

**Conclusions:** If we try to examine the institution of the *Khalsa* in all its aspects, the challenge of the socio-political milieu to Guru Gobind Singh, the perception of his mission and analogical significance of the symbolic structure of the five Sikh symbols, it becomes clearly evident that the emergence of the set of five k's cannot be segregated from the founding of the Order of the *Khalsa* and it cannot be placed somewhere later in the eighteenth century as a legacy of the Jat culture as alleged by J.S. Grewal and W.H. McLeod. Mere conjecture is no ground for discarding a tradition of such a great importance particularly when all circumstantial and historical evidence is out to vouchsafe it. Our conclusion is that the founding of the *Khalsa* and the prescribing of the five K's are synchronous products of the Baisakhi day of 1699, sanctified by Guru Gobind Singh by introducing the initiation of *Khande di pahul* at Anandpur Sahib on that day.

The founding of the Order of the *Khalsa* is an evidence of Sikh religious response to the social, moral, and political problems of man. Through the creation of the *Khalsa* the Sikh religion stands virtually as the only stable challenger to the dominance of orthodox Vedic sociology or the other orthodox, pacifist or life -negating systems.

*Khande di pahul* reinforced the Sikh notion of a self-revising social system in the form of an egalitarian society. By prescribing *Khande di pahul* Guru Gobind Singh clearly showed that in the socio-religious field it was the moral stature of a person that mattered, and how the roles of the followers and the leader could become inter-changeable. This democratic initiation was supported by religious sanction and it was recognised as an actuality in the institution of the Panj Piaras.

‘The *Khalsa* greatly contributed to the development of the Sikh community by providing a more democratic mode of social organisation based on the convention of adherence to a code of discipline (*Rahit Maryada* of the *Amrit*), voluntary association and religious collectivism (*Khalsa Panth*).

The subsequent history of the Sikhs stands a testimony to the fact that the *Khalsa* acted for a long time to come as a sort of cultural and ethical holding company, and many developments in Sikh history, Sikh literature, and Sikh social welfare agencies have had their initiative from the *Khalsa Panth*.

The creation of the *Khalsa* represents a stage of religious development in many ways profoundly different from that of Indian religious traditions. The central feature of the change is a set of new value system. Through the creation of the *Khalsa*, Guru Gobind Singh made it clear that religious activity was of primary importance. Ascetic and ritualistic practices were dropped altogether as well as the monastic roles that specialized in them. Instead, the service of God, of *Guru* and of humanity became the total demand in every walk of life. The stress was on faith, on internal qualities of a person, rather than on particular ritual acts. In this respect the process of identity, and unification, a central feature of the historical religions, could itself become a new form of Sikh ethnicity.

The immediate result of Guru Gobind Singh’s effort to ground religion in the structure of the ethical life of man, pointed to the decisive role of Sikhism in the direction of what a modern religion could do in the socio-political life of the society.

The *Guru* gave a choice to every body to opt for the discipline of the *Khalsa* and become the ‘chosen one’ and to fight the cause of human freedom and righteousness as a voluntary religious group. The *Khalsa* was really a vanguard in the fulfillment of the divine plan rather than a qualitative religious elite.

The political implication of the creation of the *Khalsa* had much to do with the overthrow of the old concepts of the secular field.

The institution of the *Khalsa* with the set of five has made very important contributions to history. It provided the

ideology and social cohesion for many militant uprisings in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It has played a dynamic and purposive role in bringing about cultural awakening and social change in the Punjab society, 'since it has created not only a political society, but also customs so distinctive that those who profess it, rank in common esteem as a separate race.'<sup>86</sup>

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W. O. Cole remarks: "that the belief that the early gurus were consciously pacifist is open to question. The apparent contrast may owe more to change of conditions than to change of attitudes and to a current inclination to see Guru Nanak as a sixteenth century Gandhi".  
*The Sikh: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Vikas Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, 1978, p. 128
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- 10 See Jadunath Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzeb*, pp. 147-151
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 147
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- 28 "...until we can fully understand the developmental cycle of medieval mendicant orders we cannot place the political phenomenon of the 'fighting jogis' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. the contemporaneous militant struggles of Roshnaiya sect, the Satnami revolt of 1675 or plunder of Decca in 1763 by Sanyasis, etc., in their proper perspective. The analytical paradigm proposed must account under one and the same theory for cases or phases of political quietism as well as of political activism and conflict - I.P. Singh Uberoi. 'the Five Symbols of Sikhism' in *Sikhism* (ed. L.M. Joshi), Punjabi University. Patiala. 1980, p. 143
- 29 A Sufi Saint of Delhi, Sarmad was put to death under the order of emperor Aurangzeb for cursing the emperor and proclaiming the downfall of the Empire
- 30 See S.R. Sharma, *Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, Oxford University Press, 1940
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- Katha', Dasam Granth (ed). Giani Pub. Bhai Jawahar Singh and Kirpal Singh, Bachitra Natak Section Mohinder Singh Rattan, Amritsar, Vol. I, p. 54
- 33 The place where the Guru was beheaded is called Sis Ganj, where a Gurdwara was raised by Sardar Baghel Singh Karor Singhi in 1750
- 34 The continuous threat to the Guru's position for ever a decade during his residence in the Hill region seems to have led to acceleration of the process of militarisation (which had taken roots in the Sikh organisation during the time of Guru Hargobind (A.D. 1595-1644), the Sixth Guru of the Sikhs, who had introduced the doctrine of Miri and Piri). The dire need of defence enhanced security arrangements. The Guru had been receiving arms, tents, elephants and horses as presents right from 1680. He was visited by princes and chiefs. He held darbars resembling a royal court and was called by his Sikhs 'Saccha Padshah'. We are also told that Aurangzeb wanted his faujdars on the north-west to see that Guru Gobind Singh stopped practices that created the impression that the Guru was a 'Raja'. The Guru had even recruited Pathans who had formerly fought in the Mughal army.
- 35 Gupta. H.R. in Sikh Tradition, Edited by Gurdev Singh, p. 172-74
- 36 A composition of Guru Gobind Singh incorporated in the Dasam Granth. 'Bachitar Natak' was composed only a couple of years before the establishment of the institution of the Khalsa. Dasam Granth, Vol. I, pp. 57-58
- 37 The motive of Guru's decision was the struggle for independence. W. Owen Cole, Sikhism and its Indian Context-1469-1708, First Edition, Pub. by D.K. Agencies Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p. 266
- 38 In 'Akal Ustat', Guru Gobind calls The Supreme Being 'All Steel' Dasam Granth, Vol, p. 11
- 39 'Without God's support there is no refuge', 'Bachitar Natak', Ibid. p.77
- 40 'I bow to the Holy Sword, with love and devotion' - Ibid., p. 39
- 41 Ibid., pp. 57-58
- 42 There is no denial of the validity of Islam or Hinduism in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh. The major theme in all his hymns pertains to the unity of God, belief in one humanity and one religion (that of Truth). - 'Akal Ustat', Dasam Granth. Vol. I, p. 19
- 43 Ibid., p. 57
- 44 Ibid
- 45 Sukh Singh, Gurbilas Patshahi 10, Ch. 23, 15,21
- 46 Santokh Singh. Gurpratap Suraj Granth, Ain I. Ansu 36
- 47 A comparative study of the ideology of Guru Gobind Singh with the thought of modern thinkers like William James, Thomas Carlyle, Freidrich Nietzshe and Oswald Sangler could be helpful

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- 49 Ibid
- 50 Markande Puran, 'Chandi Charitar', Dasam Granth, Vol. I, p. 99
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- 52 J.S. Grewal; 'The Earliest interpretation of Guru Gobind Singh's Mission' in From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Essays in Sikh History), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1982, pp. 78-81
- 53 Ibid
- 54 Hinduism is basically rested in and confined to the peninsula of India, the geographical unit of the ancient Hindu cosmology called Jambudvipa, "Where alone dwell the descendants of Bharta" (Vishnupurana, 11, 3.1).
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- 56 'Akal Ustat', Dasam Granth, Vol. I, p. 19
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- 63 'Swayya' 24, Dasam Granth, Vol. I, p. 715
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- 66 Surjit Hans, 'Ramavtar in Dasamgranth' in Journal of Sikh Studies, Vol. XI, No. I, 1984
- 67 'Swayya' 17, Dasam Granth, Vol. I, p. 714
- 68 J.P. Singh Uberoi, op. Ch., pp. 143-44
- 69 The Khanda with which Guru Gobind Singh stirred the baptismal water (Amrit) on March 30, 1699, is preserved at Anandpur Sahib
- 70 Dasam Granth, Vol. I, p. 254. They were Daya Ram of Kashatriya

caste of central Punjab (Lahore)

- 71 Dharam Dass. a jat of Haryana, Mohkam Chand a washerman of Gujrat, (Dwarka), Himmat, a cook or Dhiber of Eastern India (Orissa of Jagan Nath Puri), and Sahib Chand, a barber or nai from Bidar (Karnatka).
- 72 Full details of this ceremony are given by Bute Shah Twarikh-i-Hind (Ahmad Shah Batala) (MS, A.H. 1233 /A.D. 1818), its part Zikr-i-Guruan wa Ibtuda-i-Singhan wa Mazhab-i-Eshan is printed as an Appendix to the first Daftar of Sohan Lal Suri Umdatut-Tawarik, Nawal Kishore Press, Lahore, 1885. According to Bute Shah, the Guru addressed the great gathering of his followers and said, among other things:  
 I with you all to embrace one creed and follow one path, obliterating all differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes, who have different rules laid down for them in the Shastras, abandon them altogether and, adopting the way of co-operation. mix freely with one another. Let no one deem himself superior to another. Do not follow the old scriptures.  
 Let none pay heed to the Ganges and other places of pilgrimage which are considered holy in the Hindu religion, or adore the Hindu deities, such as Rama, Krishna, Brahma and Durga. but all should believe in Guru Nanak and his successors. Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of the same vessel, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another. Tawarikh-i-Hind, pp. 405-406
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## CHAPTER 13

### SIKH MILITANCY AND THE JATS

JAGJIT SINGH

Some historians have expressed the view that the initiation and development of militarization within the Sikh movement was due to the cultural patterns and traits of the Jats who joined it in large numbers. We shall here discuss this theory (which we label as Jat Theory for the sake of brief references to it), and show that it is based *on* factually wrong assumptions and premises. For instance, there is no data to infer that the Jats were the predominant element among the Sikhs when Guru Hargobind militarized the movement, or in the battles of Guru Gobind Singh and those of Banda. Rather, all the available historical evidence points to the contrary. To argue that, “a comparatively light representation in a list of prominent members does not necessarily imply a corresponding proportion of the actual adherants,”<sup>1</sup> indicates how unsure the advocates of the Jat Theory themselves are about the factual basis of their main premise. Even this is a presumption that the Jats were the only people who bore arms, in case the population was not disarmed, and the Khatri and the castes lower than the Jats did not. Any way, we are here attempting to draw attention to those substantive factors which the protagonists of the Jat Theory blackout, but which make it quite clear that it was the Sikh ideology, and not Jat constituency\* of the Panth, that was

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\* It is against the Sikh religion to differentiate Sikhs in terms of castes or ethnic groups, but we are constrained to do so in order to meet the arguments of some scholars who have tried to interpret the militarization of Sikhs in terms of Jat character and cultural patterns. Therefore, wherever we use such terms as Jat Sikhs or Arora Sikhs, etc., these should be taken to mean the original stock from which they were drawn.

responsible for the initiation and development of Sikh militancy. Rather, the question whether or not the Jats were the dominant partners in the panth is irrelevant; because, without the Sikh ideology, the Sikh social and political revolution would not have materialized even if the Panth had been composed entirely of Jats, and been left to their own native character and mores.

### **1. Revolutionary and Non-Revolutionary Movements**

As the differences between revolutionary and non-revolutionary movements are “qualitative, marked by differences in kind, not just in amount,”<sup>2</sup> the militancy of the Sikh movement should not be confused with that of non-revolutionary movements, or for that matter with that of such a period of this movement itself. It is not just militancy that leads to a revolution. For this reason, the significance of the militancy of a mass movement cannot be understood without relating it to the purpose it wants to achieve. Mere elan or magnitude of the militancy of a movement, howso-ever intense, should not obscure the vital distinction whether or not it is yoked to serve a revolutionary purpose. “Thus, though in terms of their physical quality there is little to choose between the burning of Newgate prison in 1780 and the fall of Bastille in 1789, in terms of historical significance it is abundantly clear that the latter was a revolutionary act and the *former* was not.”<sup>3</sup>

Near at home, there are few instances in world history which compare with the reckless courage shown by Rajput men and women who committed the suicidal *Johars*, in thousands at a time, just to preserve Rajput honour and polity. The most successful Hindu revolt against Muslim domination was that of the Marathas, who reconquered a major part of the country; but their militancy was geared mainly to feudal ends, and, at its best, to some measure of Maratha-cum-Hindu nationalism allied to social reaction.<sup>4</sup>

At a later period, the Pindars overran the country for sheer loot a number of times; but would on each occasion retire to their homes to indulge in sensuous pleasures, and never bothered to carve out a dominion of their *own* which was within their easy reach. Similarly, the Jats showed exemplary courage and tenacity in defending the Bharatpur fort against Lord Lake, but their militancy either ended,

like that of the Satnamis, in Sporadic revolts, under Gokala and Raja Ram, against the Mughals, or later served the feudal-cum-dynastic objectives of the Bharatpur principality. None of these militant enterprises even conceived of revolutionary objectives; because non-revolutionary movements are “virtual prisoners of the reigning set of social values, and, therefore, cannot mount a full-scale attack on the institutional systems of stratification that are both cause and effect of these values.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the “Jat cultural patterns”, the second major factor assumed to have prompted a military response in the Sikh movement is the ‘economic problems’. Here, again, the revolutionary character of the Sikh militancy is lost sight of. It is “wrong to assume that the latent conflict produced by the various modes of social stratification will automatically reach revolutionary proportions.”<sup>6</sup> Trotsky writes: “In reality, the mere existence of privation is not enough to cause an insurrection; if it were, the masses would always be in revolt.”<sup>7</sup> There were always in French and Russian societies sub-marginally poor people, but the important thing to note is that French history and Russian history are filled with famines, plagues, bad harvests, many of which were accompanied by sporadic rioting, but by only one revolution.<sup>8</sup>

So in India, there was only one plebeian political revolution -the Sikh Revolution; and, quality-wise, it was no less significant. Whereas, none of the English, American or French revolutions “substituted a brand-new ruling class for the old one, atleast not unless one thinks of class without bothering about the human beings, who make up the class...”<sup>9</sup>, “the lowest of low in Indian estimation” shared political power under Banda,<sup>10</sup> and none higher than the Jats (on the border-line of Vaishyas and Sudras), carpenters (Sudras), and distillers (on the border-line of Sudras and outcastes) did so in the Missal period. Other Indian peasants, particularly the Jats, were no less subject to the kind of economic, political or social stresses that the Jats of the Sikh tract were, but none of them even conceived, much less attempted, to achieve revolutionary objectives. The nearest approach to a revolutionary movement were the Jat uprisings under Gokala and Raja

Ram, and the Satnami revolt, but, these partook the character of sporadic revolts. The fact is that revolutions do not just happen; they are And, there are a number of factors which contribute to are the roaking of a revolution, of which we will consider here briefly a few important ones.

**2. Goal, Purpose or Stakes and Ideology:** A revolution, by its very definition, has to have a stake no less than that of abolishing, or radically reconstructing, one or more of the traditional systems of stratification, based on class, status, or power,<sup>11</sup> in favour of the downtrodden. The last qualification is an overriding one, since any change in the reverse direction becomes counter-revolutionary. As the whole dynamics of a revolutionary movement revolves around its humanitarian motivation and stakes, the foremost question to be probed is the ideological source of such a motivation. About the Sikh ideolo-gical stand on this vital issue, there is no ambiguity.

Guru Nanak declared: "Call everyone exalted; let no one appear to thee low."<sup>12</sup> He laid down specifically: "O Unwise, be not proud of thy caste. For a myriad errors flow out of this pride";<sup>13</sup> and identified himself with the lowliest of the low castes. "There are lower castes among the low castes and some absolutely low. Nanak seeketh their company; what hath he to do with the high ones. For, where the lowly are cared for, there is Thine (God's) Benediction and Grace."<sup>14</sup>

The Gurus did away with not only 'ca5te-status' consciousness, but also with the status consciousness gap between the rich and the poor, in fact, with status gaps of every kind. "To treat the king and the pauper on equal footing, and while greeting to touch the feet of the other (i.e. to regard oneself humble as compared to others) was made the rule of conduct;"<sup>15</sup> because, "He who thinks himself to be the lowest of the lowly; Yea, he alone is the highest of the high."<sup>16</sup> In fact, the Gurus carried their egalitarianism to such an extent that they tried to bridge the gap between the Guru and the disciple. When Guru Nanak appointed Angad as his successor guru, he literally laid his head on the latter's feet as a mark of paying respect; and Guru Gobind Singh beseeched, with folded hands, the five beloved ones, whom he

had baptized earlier, to do him the honour of baptizing him. This is the highest limit of humility and egalitarianism to which a religious teacher could go.

This ideology was the motivative fountain-head of the Sikh Socio-political revolution. The Jat Theory suggests no alternative source *of* this ideological inspiration. For one thing, Jats, on their own, have rarely shown any proclivity *for* idealistic or deeply religious pursuits.<sup>17</sup> "The only distinctive Jat cults are tribal.... Among the Hindu and Sikh Jats, especially in the north-central and central districts, a form of ancestor-worship, called Jathera, is common."<sup>18</sup> It passes one's comprehension how this ancestor-worship gave rise to the Sikh revolutionary ideology? Sikhism is against ancestor-worship,<sup>19</sup> therefore, Jathera-worship could not be reconciled with it.

Nor can the Jat social egalitarianism be equated with the Sikh idea of brotherhood. Jats partake some *of* the traits of both a tribe and a caste. Their social equality is tribal, confined to their Jat *bhaichara*; and does not extend to castes lower than them. They, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, dominated and exploited the Sudras and the outcastes in their own villages.<sup>20</sup> How did such tribal social equality square with or lead to the brotherhood of the Khalsa (drawn from all castes including the Sudra and the outcastes) wherein the spirit of equality was a vital principle, and a Brahmin had no higher claim to eminence than the lowest Sudra who used to sweep his house?<sup>21</sup>

It is only in the Jat uprisings under Gokal and Raja Ram that we find the Jats motivated by considerations higher than those of personal or tribal gain. Even these outbursts were not based on Jat traits or sentiments, but were wrath directed against the destruction by the Mughals of Hindu temples at Mathura, which outraged the local religious feelings in particular. In any case, these were by no means revolutionary movements.' Because, "The essence of revolt is angry, violent expression of the refusal of an individual *or* group to continue in it a present condition.... Revolt lives in the immediate; it is in the immediate that it needs someone accountable..."<sup>22</sup> "It is the very concreteness and specificity of revolt that prevents it from calling the

whole social order in question. It is concerned with men and measures, not with fundamental institutions. That is what separates it from revolution."<sup>23</sup> Neither these Jats in revolt challenged the caste social order, nor did they conceive of capturing political power for the masses. On the contrary, a little later they came and *to* Churaman and Suraj Mal, who exploited their restiveness to build the feudal and dynastic principality of Bharatpur.

In short, what the Jat Theory avoids to tackle is the most important issue that mere militancy of any kind, or extreme discontent alone based on economic or social disparities, is not enough to produce a revolution. What is missing is some extra- push of a revolutionary ideology: "a dynamic of a genuinely spiritual and religious kind."<sup>24</sup> "While ideology is not the whole of Revolution, it is a characteristic and a partly autonomous part of it."<sup>25</sup> It is the revolutionary ideology that infuses a sense of a universally valid humanitarian purpose and direction to the revolutionary movement. Revolts and other non-revolutionary upheavals also have some sort of purpose in view, but "the limited stakes and backward glance of revolt are associated with its low level of ideology."<sup>26</sup>

It is obvious that the Sikh revolutionary motivation could not be born of Jathera worship or of the tribal equality of the Jats, who on their own, never challenged or opted out of the caste society. Its mainspring was the Sikh view of religion: "Religion consisteth not in mere words; he who looks upon all men as equals is religious."<sup>27</sup> It is this inspiration which alone could unite into a genuine brotherhood of the Khalsa those disparate elements of the caste (drawn from Brahmins and Khatri down to the untouchables), namely, the three tendencies of repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialization."<sup>28</sup> The abolition or submergence of narrow sectional interests and sentiments takes place on a mass scale only if these are displaced or overshadowed by shared loyalty to some higher cause. How could the proselytes drawn from disparate, even hostile, castes be welded into the Sikh Panth and the Khalsa, with a feeling of oneness and brotherhood, if not by the Sikh faith? It could not be done on the basis of the tribal and caste loyalties and mores of the Jats.

While ideology is not the whole of Revolution, *one* finds that its other main features also hinge on its ideology, in one *form or* the other; atleast it is so in the case of the Sikh revolutionary movement. Not only these features of Sikh militancy have no link with Jat traits, these are also unique when considered in the Indian context as a whole. Because, all other anti-caste movements remained pacific, and not one even conceived of capturing political power by the masses.

### **3. Ideology and Leadership**

The second pre-requisite of a revolution is leadership committed and devoted to its revolutionary goal. As a revolution cannot be conceived without a humanitarian goal, so it cannot be accomplished without a leadership committed and devoted to that ideology. It is leadership which maintains the purpose and direction of a movement; and leadership and coordination from two related aspects of any directed action. Because a revolution has to have a revolutionary goal and direction, it is seldom the product of spontaneous mass upsurge. The risings of the peasants under Gokala and Raja Ram, and that of the Satnamis, which attracted so much attention, illustrate this point. Collective spontaneity is, moreover, not really capable of devising specific forms of revolutionary organization.<sup>29</sup> Without leadership a revolutionary situation remains an unrealized potential.

It is, therefore, obvious that the leaders of a revolutionary movement must be deeply conscious of their mission and be deeply devoted to it. "Doctrine must subdue spontaneity", wrote Lenin.<sup>30</sup> "What seems to typify a revolution in contrast to revolt is the phenomenon of verbalization and conceptualization in advance it is not a random venture... In addition to the ideological factor, revolution implies an orientation toward organization and institutionalization."<sup>31</sup>

The role of leadership thus provides another major point of difference between revolutionary and non-revolutionary movements. "It is not that revolts are leaderless, while revolutions are led. All collective violence involves leaders of some sort. The question is rather the role played by leadership. The leaders of revolts are often skilled tacticians with occasional charismatic qualities. Yet, they are not

charged with the inspiration of a higher ideal, which only clear-cut ideology can provide. The leaders of revolts, on, therefore, continue of move within grooves determined by their narrow objectives. Without guide lines of an ideology, they cannot see beyond their limited horizons and evolve plans for accomplishing some higher mission.”<sup>32</sup> The leaders *of* a revolution, on the other hand, are ideologically oriented. In fact, they are the products of an ideology. This was one of the reasons why at the time of initiation into the Khalsa, the entrants were made to take solemn vows of Dharm Nash, Kul Nash, etc., which cut at the *roots* of the caste ideology and society. The Sikh militancy was thus wedded to the overthrow of the caste order, in addition to capturing political power for the masses. The Khalsa carried on a life and death guerilla warfare for 30 years, and guerilla warfare “has been ideological from the very outset.”<sup>33</sup> A guerilla is “an intensely motivated and highly dedicated soldier who has a keen sense of issues at stake and understands the nature *of* war he is fighting. His strength lies inside, in the moral considerations, which ‘make three-fourths of him’.”<sup>34</sup> And, the final measure of the depth of convictions is martyrology. The Sikh movement was virtually crushed a number of times,<sup>35</sup> but each time, like the proverbial phoenix, it rose from its ashes.<sup>36</sup> The only thing that sustained the Khalsa was their religious faith. The English ambassadors in Delhi at the time reported to their head that about 750 prisoners were executed along with Banda. “It is not a little remarkable with what patience they undergo their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one aposetized from his new found faith.”<sup>37</sup>

Forster writes, “Such was the keen spirit that animated the persecution, such was the success of the exertions, that the name of a sicque (Sikh) no longer existed in the Mughal dominion. Those who still adhered to the tenents of Nanoch, either fled into the mountains at the head of the Punjab, or cut off their hair, and exteriorly renounced the profession of their religion.”<sup>38</sup> Who were the steel-frame of the Khalsa struggle? Those who stuck to their faith and paid a heavy price for it, or those who ‘cut off their hair’? the charged ‘(ions) and

uncharged atoms of the same element, there were Jats and Jats. Those who were charged by the Sikh ideology played a magnificent role in the Sikh movement, but those who were not, either stayed back or renounced it in adverse circumstances. It is not the Jat traits that changed the character of Sikh movement; it is the Sikh ideology that transformed the Jats who joined it. Latif writes: "it is acknowledged on all hands that the conversion of a band of undisciplined Jats (given to rapine and plunder or to agricultural pursuits) into a body of conquerors and a political corporation, was entirely due to the genius of Govind, whose history is closely interwoven with that of the Sikhs as a nation."<sup>39</sup>

It has to be made clear that we are concerned only with the Sikh movement; because, the fallacy of those, who argue that the militarization of the Sikh movement was initiated and reinforced by the influx into it of a large number of Jats, arises in no small measure from their failure to distinguish between the revolutionary and post-revolutionary phases of the movement. They seem to judge the former in the light of the latter. There is a world of difference between the Jats who joined the Sikh movement, under the inspiration of the Sikh ideology and made an outstanding contribution to its struggle, and those who did not; or between the behaviour patterns of the same group, whether Jat or Non-Jat, when, at different periods, it had the ideological inspiration and when it lost it. We have purposely quoted, here and there, eminent scholars of political science to substantiate our argument that the differences between the characteristics of revolutionary and non-revolutionary movements (and for that matter between those of the two such phases of the same movement) "are qualitative, marked by differences in kind, not just in amount."<sup>40</sup> In the revolutionary phase of a movement, the primary and dominant factor is its ideological content and not its ethnic composition. Without the ideological surcharge, inspiration and direction, how helpless or rudderless the peasants the world over, or the Jats in India (or for that matter the other downtrodden sections of society), have been writ large on the pages of history.

It has been a consistent fact of history that none of the revolutions have been initiated or led by the downtrodden themselves

whose favour the abolition or reconstruction of stratification took place. The French Revolution formally liberated the peasants from feudalism, but it was the middle class which dominated the revolution, and the peasantry played only a secondary role limited to localized action against landlords. One of the main reasons for the failure of the German Peasant Wars, stated by Engels, is that these peasants were not indoctrinated enough, with the result that the bulk of the peasants were always ready to come to terms with the lords who exploited this weakness of theirs,<sup>41</sup> and were also readily demoralized when they met a strong resistance or a reverse.<sup>42</sup> About the Russian Revolution, Lenin observes: "while workers left to their own devices could only develop trade-union consciousness and peasants only petty bourgeois demands for land, it would be the guiding intellectuals who would lead the revolution on behalf of the workers and the peasants."<sup>43</sup> Marx likens the peasants to a bag of potatoes. All the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, which led the Communist Revolution in China, had higher education and most of them had studied abroad.<sup>44</sup> Troong Chinh points out that the great majority of the cadres and the militants in the Communist Party of the revolutionary period of Vietnam originated in the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the Cuban Revolution was a great gamble by a group of determined, educated revolutionaries which paid off.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, what is crucial to movements, besides the role of ideology, is initiative and leadership. It is the existence of a revolutionary purpose and direction, which ideology and leadership provide, that distinguishes a revolution from a mere riot or revolt. A very glaring example, which clarifies the distinction between revolution and revolt, is the well-known rebellion of the Gladiators. The capital of Rome lay at their feet, but they did not occupy it because they did not know what to do with it. As regards peasants, Eric R. Wolf gives weighty reasons for his conclusion that, "The peasant is especially handicapped in passing from passive recognition of wrongs to political participation as means of setting them right."<sup>47</sup> The Jats form the majority in Sindh, and are approximately equal to the number of Rajputs

in Bikaner, Jaiselmer and Marwar. They are three times more than the Rajputs in the Punjab (inclusive that of Pakistan) yet only fragmentary notices of the Jats occur in the accounts of Mohammadan historians, whereas the pages of Indian history are full of Rajput exploits. It could only be because the Jats Were politically in consequential.

It has got, therefore, to be explained: how the Jats of the Punjab, who dominated and exploited the Sudras and the out-castes in their own villages,<sup>48</sup> initiated and developed the militarization of a movement, whose political stake, as made explicit by Guru Hargobind to Samarath Ram Das, was to protect the poor; a movement which did not serve sectional interests, Jat or non-Jat; a movement which was not clannish, regional, feudal or dynastic; a movement which strove to capture political power by the Khalsa, a militant brotherhood drawn from all castes without discrimination? It was for this purpose that the Guru Panth was subjected to Guru Granth. How does all this fit in with the tribal egalitarianism of the Jats? The problem is not as simple as that of merely identifying the ethnic composition and traits of the participants. Unless it is established, to what extent, and in what manner, the Jat character and mores moulded the ideology, leadership and organization of the Sikh revolutionary movement to their own pattern, it leads no where. Because, as we know, the Sikh ideology was laid down by Guru Nanak and never changed even by the succeeding Gurus. The leadership of the movement remained in the Gurus' hands during their life-times, devolving afterwards on the whole Panth (Guru Panth) as a corporate body. And, the organizational institutions of the panth like Sangat, Khalsa, Panj Pyaras, Dals and Sarbat Khalsa, etc., do not bear the remotest resemblance to the Jat *gotras* and *Khaps*.

#### **4. Other Features**

Two other features of a revolutionary movement, though related to the roles that ideology and leadership play, are mentioned here separately, because these serve to distinguish from non-revolutionary upheavels.

“Revolution begins with an idea. It is specifically the infusion of an idea into a historical situation, whereas revolt is simply a movement

leading from individual experience to an idea.”<sup>49</sup> “A revolt does not have any idea (*pensee*) at the origin; it is visceral, immediate. A revolution implies a doctrine, a project, some kind of theory..... An idea may be expressed occasionally in the course of revolt, but is always incidental and emerges from the developing revolt itself.”<sup>50</sup>

The Sikh movement began with an ideal. To be precise, Sikh humanitarianism was born of the deep religious experience of the founder Guru, Guru Nanak, whose very first expression of his experience was that, “There is no Hindu, no Mussalman” (i.e. humanity is one). Further, as already seen, he identified himself, with the lowest of low castes.

Secondly, a revolutionary movement is not a chance development or a sporadic phenomenon. Not only has it a definite revolutionary goal or purpose, but it is a sustained movement with a fixed direction towards the achievement of that goal. “It is the goal of a movement that fixed its direction, and it is the existence of direction that makes revolution a political act and distinguishes it from riot,”<sup>51</sup> And, it goes without saying that it is the quality of leadership committed and devoted to the goal which maintains the direction of a revolutionary movement. The very fact that the Sikh movement succeeded in establishing an egalitarian casteless Panth and in capturing political power for the masses, as a result of a long period of protracted armed struggle, is in itself a strong proof that it did not swerve from its revolutionary purpose or direction. One major contributory factor to this end was that it was loyalty to the principles of the movement, and not to individuals or groups, that was stressed. The Tat Khalsa did not hesitate to part company with Banda when he showed an inclination towards deviating from the anti-caste and democratic principles of the Khalsa. Even at a later period, although they were struggling for their very survival, the leaders of the Missals spurned Abdali’s several offers of negotiated settlement, and preferred that the Khalsa should capture Political power in its own right.

How is this loyalty to a higher mission related to Jat character and traits? And, where elsewhere, is a similar tenacity of purpose over

a long period shown by Jats, as such?

**Sikh Ideology and Sikh Militancy:**

It is a historical reality that entrenched systems of stratification might be amenable to reform, but would not surrender without an armed struggle when their very existence is at stake. As all social, political or economic systems get entrenched, in the last analysis, on the basis of political and military sanctions, a revolution necessarily involves an armed struggle, especially when the system concerned is sought to be abolished within a short time. "Finally, our definition of revolution considers recourse to violence as essential rather than accidental to it. The magnitude and the abruptness of change involved in revolution always produces violence in some form. Revolution must be distinguished from reform, however radical, and from long-term evolutionary development such as the so-called industrial revolution and the growth of certain religious movements. The 'factor of violence helps to do this.'"<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the militarization of the Sikh movement was not accidental but was, an essential part of its development, because, "The issue of subordination is more pervasive than that of exploitation..."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, to undo subordination to the Mughals, an armed struggle was indispensable. But, what made it doubly necessary was that the goal of the Khalsa armed struggle was to capture political power by the masses themselves.

What is, however, not generally appreciated is that the Sikh militancy was equally necessary for bringing about the Sikh social revolution, because even a social radical change cannot have a permanent footing without a corresponding political change. "In character and position there is nothing to distinguish the tribes I am about to notice, save that they have never enjoyed the political importance which distinguished the Sikh Jats under the Khalsa... In

the Sikh tract, the political position of the Jat was so high that he had no wish to be called Rajput under the hills (i.e. adjoining the Sikh tract), the status of the Rajput is so superior that the Jat has no hope of being called Rajput.”<sup>54</sup> How is it that the Ramgarhias (artisans) have come to regard them-selves as peers to the Sikh Jats, and the Ahluwalias have raised their social status to be equal of Khatri and Brahmins, from that of distillers in the caste society (on the border-line of the Sudras and the outcastes), if not for having tasted political power by establishing their own Missal? It is again the legacy of the Sikh Raj that Sikhs derived from all castes are addressed by non-Sikhs as Sardars even to this day. In (act, the probability is that the Sikhs would have been engulfed by the caste society in the same manner as the other radical anti-caste movements were, had not the Khalsa established its political sway. In short, it is political power which lends permanence to a radical social change;<sup>55</sup> and political power (or a revolutionary purpose can neither be gained nor retained without armed might.

*(a) Sikh Values and Militancy:*

Sikh Militancy was in no way linked to ethnic, sectional, regional, dynastic or feudal interests. While ethnic or group mores might help or retard a revolutionary process, revolutionary movements are mothered only by revolutionary ideologies and values which clash with the prevailing unjust social and political order. This clash was inherent in Guru Nanak's declination:-

“The kings are like leopards, the courtiers like dogs;  
King's servants tear (the docile subjects) with their nails;  
And, like curs, lick up all the blood they spill.”<sup>56</sup>

Guru Arjan wrote :-

“The beard that vent his wrath on the poor of the world, Is burnt in the fire by the Transendent Lord.”<sup>57</sup>

Again :-

“Power swells our heads and we tyrannize over others...”<sup>58</sup>

The Sikh view of religion does not permit any dichotomy in life, or of any divorce of the individual from his society. Nor does it visualize that true religion and morality can operate unconcerned beside an unjust social and political order; nor that spiritual freedom can co-exist with religious dictation and political slavery. A Sikh has to take

up all the challenges which are irreligious and unethical. There cannot be a neutral position.

As stated earlier, no system of stratification has been known to yield without an armed conflict when its very existence is at stake. Hence, an armed struggle is inherent in those values which challenge stratification, provided those are pursued to their logical, end. The modalities of this clash, of course, depend upon the circumstances. Guru Arjan could have saved his life by allowing his followers to pay the fine imposed on him, but he preferred, as he told Saint Mian Mir, to suffer torture and death in order to set an example.

*(b) Ahimsa:*

This clash of values with the status-quo was inherent also in Christianity when Christ declared that a rich man could not enter heaven, and in Buddhism when it discarded status based on birth. But, the odium that somehow came to be attached to the use of force even for a just and noble cause proved a great hurdle in their way to taking to a revolutionary path. Sikhism had no such problem, because Guru Nanak, in a long hymn, emphasizes that no life process or animal life is possible without the use of flesh in one form or the other. He points out the fallacy of those who make a fetish of eating meat, but have no scruples in 'devouring' (exploiting) men.<sup>59</sup> God is: "Destroyer of the tyrant and benefactor of the downtrodden."<sup>60</sup>

*(c) Meeri-Peeri:*

It was Guru Arjan who instructed Guru Hargobind to take up arms when he felt that that was the only alternative to surrendering faith. The very first act of Guru Hargobind, when he initiated the militarization of the Sikhs, was to don two swords, which he specifically called of Meeri and Peeri, one symbolizing temporal authority and the other religious authority. In this manner, the Sikh militancy began in pursuance of the concept of combining temporal and religious realms. At that very time two separate flags were also hoisted, side by side, to emphasize the confluence of the two principles. It was, again Gum Hargobind who explained to Samarath Ramdas (believed to be Shivaji's preceptor) that his sword was meant' for the protection of the poor.<sup>61</sup>

This is how the seeds of the Sikh military struggle were sown. The naming of the headquarters of the Sikh militant movement as Akal Takhat (the throne of God), too, meant that the Sikh militancy was from its very inception linked to an eternal (AkaI) universal principle and a moral cause. The creation of the Khalsa was a continuation of the ideological line of Meeri--peeri, and "Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa and Wahiguru ji ki Pateh" was a continuation of the concept of *Akal Takhat*. In this manner, the Sikh revolutionary militancy was wedded all along to an eternal principle embodying a humanitarian cause.

(d) *Soldier-Saints:*

The use of force becomes essential rather than accidental to a revolution, but misdirected and uncontrolled violence tends to destroy the community itself. As Camus has put it : "Absolute non-violence is negative, basis of slavery and its acts of violence; systematic violence positively destroys the living community and the existence we receive from it. To be fruitful, these two ideas must establish their limits."<sup>62</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh wrote to Aurangzeb, 'when other means fail it is legitimate to have recourse to the sword'.<sup>63</sup> Qazi Nur-ud-Din testifies that the Sikhs would not strike at an enemy who laid down arms or fled from the battle-field.<sup>64</sup> The Mohammadan author of *Fatuhat Nama-i-Samdi* corroborates that, "if a woman falls into their hands (i.e. of the Khalsa), they look upon her as their mother."<sup>65</sup> Polier writes of the Missal period that, "it is true they seldom kill in cold blood or make slaves."<sup>66</sup> Griffin opines that, "There are few stories in Sikh history of outrage to women and torture to men such as stain the pages of south Indian history..."<sup>67</sup>

It is not at all suggested that the Sikh movement achieved or maintained the desired optimum balance. In fact, it is problematic whether or not humanity would be able to achieve such a target in the foreseeable future. What is pertinent here is that :

(i) the Sikh movement made a serious effort in this direction, even in the face of barbaric tortures to which they were subjected by the Mughals; (ii) this standard of Sikh conduct was not incidental. During their struggle the Sikhs made the Maintenance of ethical

standards an integral part of their militant programme; because, the Gurus had laid down the ideal: "To exercise for-bearance in the midst of power; to be humble in the midst of honour;"<sup>68</sup> (iii) the Sikh conduct as exhibited, could not be born of the mores of Jats who were given to 'rapine and plunder', and who were notoriously lax in those very qualities<sup>69</sup> for which the Qazi and others have praised the Sikhs.

## **6. Conclusion:**

The significance of the militancy of any mass movement cannot be grasped by divorcing it from the purpose to which it is yoked; but, the Jat Theory ignores altogether the motivational gap between an ideological struggle and the one for power, or the demarcation between the behaviour of the same individuals or groups, when they are charged and when not charged by a religious moral ideology. The Jat theory does not even attempt to explain how the prowess of Jats, left to their tribal mores, led to the Sikh political revolution in which political power was shared by Sudras and distillers; or how Jat cultural traits gave rise to such concepts as Sache Patshah, Meeri-Peer, Akal Takhat, Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa and Fateh? Nor does it explain as to what was the need of creating the Khalsa at all. Unless these questions, and others related ones, are answered, no conclusion would be logical or valid.

Brinton, who has studied in depth the English, American, French and Russian Revolutions, has shown that revolutionary movements, while they last, rise above the mundane interests and normal mores of the participants.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the postulate "that if a distinctive social group secures dominant status within a particular society it will inevitably exercise upon that society an influence which reflects its own mores,"<sup>71</sup> is not valid for the revolutionary period of the Sikh movement at least. As it is accepted that "the sanctified will of the Guru was beyond challenge,"<sup>72</sup> why could the Sikh ideology and faith not be the driving force of the Sikh struggle and movement in following the course chartered (or them by the Guru? In fact, Le Bon has shown that: "Among the most important factors of history one was predominant...the factor of belief."<sup>73</sup>

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## CHAPTER 14

### SINGH SABHA MOVEMENT-A REVIVAL

GURDARSHAN SINGH DHILLON

**Introductory:** In recent years some writings have appeared, which seek to suggest that the Singh Sabha Movement was a reformist movement, that made innovations in the Sikh thought and practices. Academically speaking, the method to determine whether a religious movement (Singh Sabha in this case) is reformist or revivalist is to study four aspects of it. The first aspect is the ideology of the original movement (Sikhism), and especially whether the movement under study created changes in that ideology or only invoked the original ideology of the system *to* bring about changes in the then existing practices. Second is the level of achievement in practices which the original movement (Sikh religion in this case), had made during its hey day and whether the leaders of the movement under study had invoked those achievements and the tradition as a model to follow. Thirdly, what was the fall, if any, in the state of things in the life of the community that was sought to be changed and how did it measure with the earlier high mark of the tradition, i.e. what was the then state of affairs and practices that were sought to be changed. Fourthly, how do the changes brought about by the leaders of the new movement (Singh Sabha in this case) compare with the earlier tradition and whether or not those were in consonance with it or entirely variant from it.

We are dividing our present paper into four parts so as *to* make a proper assessment of the Singh Sabha Movement. Side by side we shall be considering some variant views in the light of our discussion of the subject. We shall first state the fundamentals of the Sikh ideology especially those where Sikhism radically departed from the earlier Indian traditions.

**Sikh Ideology:** Sikhism arose in the 16th century as an entirely new ideology, opposed in its fundamentals to those of the contemporary religions. It challenged the fanaticism and religious hypocrisy of the Brahmins and the political oppression of the contemporary rulers. Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, stressed the oneness of God, Immanent, Creator, 'who is the Timeless, Eternal Reality, Formless, Unborn, Unincarnated and Self-existent without Fear and Rancour and who is realised by the Enlightener's Grace.' These attributes are incorporated in the 'Mool-Mantra' of Guru Nanak's Japji, which is the 'fundamental primal text expounding the beliefs of Sikhism'. He explicitly denounced all those religious traditions which denied the unity of God. He declared that "the belief in gods and goddesses was the source of Maya (The great Illusion)"<sup>1</sup> which led people astray. The Gurus accept 'Ek Onkar' as a declaration of the unity of God. In Asa Rag, the Guru says: "Six are the (Hindu) Shashtras and six their authors who have laid down six different philosophical concepts. But the Guru of these gurus is God Himself."<sup>2</sup>

Guru Nanak led a crusade against the caste system, idolatry, ritualism, asceticism and Brahmin's claim to superiority. He put an end to the role of middle-men (Brahmins) in man's relation with God. He advocated that man can be one with Him through his own good deeds. He emphasised moral virtues and considered rituals to be a hindrance in the salvation of man. He denounced idol worship of gods in most explicit terms: "The ignorant fools take stones and worship them, O Hin *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 357dus, how shall the stone which itself sinketh carry you across ?"<sup>3</sup> He rejected asceticism and emphasised truthful living based on good deeds and righteousness. He impressed upon his followers that salvation could be attained through the fulfilment of one's duties towards family and society. For Guru Nanak social responsibility forms an integral part of the spiritual attributes of the ideal man. It is this element that constitutes one of the essential tenets of the Sikh faith. It is this element that gives Sikhism its distinctive and historic character, role and personality.

Guru Nanak laid emphasis on the brotherhood of man and strongly condemned social inequality. He declared: "The sense of high

and low, and of caste and colour, such are the illusions created in man.”<sup>4</sup> He raised his voice against economic exploitation and political despotism of his times. According to Guru Nanak, the world is not only real but it is a meaningful place where alone God’s Creative and Attributive Will works. That is ‘God being riches to the poor, milk to the child, and eyes to the blind’,<sup>5</sup> the seeker has to follow the ethical path of values and virtues laid down by God and the Guru. It is clear that in Guru Nanak’s mission of love, two objectives become logically uppermost; and these he emphasized unambiguously in his Bani, namely, that he was to establish equality and fraternity among men, and that it was the duty and responsibility of the religious man and the religious society he was creating to resist oppression and safeguard human rights and values. The life affirming faith founded by Guru Nanak attracted a large number of followers who found in it a welcome escape from the debasing caste discrimination, Brahmanical domination and empty ritualism. It is a revolutionary system in which the dichotomy between this spiritual life and the empirical life of man was emphatically broken for the first time in the East. It was Guru Nanak who laid and led the path of universal love and the emancipation of man without distinction of caste and creed. The call for this mission was given by-him in these terms:

“If thou art zealous of playing the game of Love,  
Then come upon .my path with head on the  
Yea, once thou settest thy foot on this way,  
Then find not a way out, and be prepared to lay down thy  
head.”<sup>6</sup>

It, is in this context that the importance of Guru Nanak’s criticism of the doctrine of Ahimsa should be understood. “Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or what is sin and what is not sin.”<sup>7</sup> “Life”, he said, “was in every grain of corn or seed.”<sup>8</sup>

**Level of achievement:** It is in this background that we have to charter the course of Sikh history from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. After Guru Nanak, the period of the next three Gurus relates mainly to the creation, expansion, and organisation of a cohesive society or Panth Guru Nanak had started. With each succeeding Guru, Sikhism

became increasingly crystallised and institutionalised into a distinct faith and society.

The next major landmark was the time of the fifth Guru, who not only compiled the scripture of the new society, thereby weaning it away from all earlier beliefs, sought confrontation with the empire, and made the supreme sacrifice of his life, but also created in his life-time what Dr. H.R. Gupta calls “a state within state”. No wonder Emperor Jahangir took note of this mounting challenge and attacked the Sikh society.<sup>9</sup> From this time onward, the Sikhs had to make tremendous sacrifices and undergo sufferings to preserve their faith.

Further, it is important to understand that the doctrine of ‘Miri’ and ‘Piri’ proclaimed by the Sixth Guru, Hargobind, is the natural and inevitable corollary of the path of love and true service of man, of the rejection of asceticism and monasticism, the acceptance of the householder’s life and responsibility, and of securing justice, equality and freedom for all men preached by Guru Nanak. The Guru justified the use of force to uphold justice and righteousness and to defend the oppressed. The ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, carried on the Sikh tradition of martyrdom for the cause of justice and emancipation of man.

The tenth and the last living Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, laid down a baptismal (Amrit) ceremony for the Sikhs, initiated them into the Khalsa and prescribed the wearing of five K’s. Those who went through baptism, became members of the Khalsa brother-hood. The organisation was committed to pursuing the right path and resisting and undoing injustice, tyranny and aggression, since in the Sikh society it was a religious duty and social responsibility to promote and maintain righteousness. The Guru also furnished the order of the Khalsa with the institutions of ‘Panj Piyaras’ (Five beloved ones or leaders) and Daswandh (voluntary contribution of one tenth of one’s income to the exchequer of the Panth), thereby bestowing upon the organisation the character of a self-contained community. It is significant to note that of the five beloved ones (Piyaras) baptised by the tenth Guru, four belonged to what the Indian society then regarded as the Shudra caste. The Guru’s object was to obliterate all distinctions of caste and

creed and weld his followers into a cohesive society. The Sikhs and the five beloved ones were amazed when the Guru requested them to initiate him into the Khalsa brotherhood in exactly the same manner as he had initiated them. By this symbolic act, the Guru invested the Khalsa with leadership of the Panth and the authority of his personality. Hence forward the Guru was the Khalsa and the Khalsa was the Guru. Sikhism thus, emerged as the most democratic religion in the world.

The Gurus categorically rejected all those beliefs, rituals or ceremonies that implied the recognition of anything but one true Lord. In order to emphasize the complete independence and sep-arateness of Sikh ideology, Guru Gobind Singh introduced the 'Nash' doctrine, involving 'Kirtnash', 'Kulnash', 'Dharamnash', 'Bharamnash' and 'Karamnash' i.e. giving up of all those beliefs, prejudices and traditions that stood in the way of the sole worship of the Supreme Being.<sup>10</sup> In this way they made a complete break of the Sikh society with the past religious systems, tradition;" and customs. The Guru accomplished this many-sided transformation in bold defiance of the age old beliefs, dogmas and conservatism of the traditional Indian religions. The Khalsa created by Guru Gobind Singh was unique both in its internal features and external form and was to play a vital role in the Indian history. In the words of J.D. Cunnigham, "A living spirit possesses the whole Sikh people and the impress of Gobind has not only elevated and altered the constitution of their minds but has operated materially and given amplitude to their physical frames."<sup>11</sup>

Let us here record the relevant and clean injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh, "He who keeps alight the torch of Truth and with love has faith only in One Supreme Being, and does not believe, even by mistake, in fasting, monastic life, or worship of graves or ancestors, is the true Khalsa."<sup>12</sup> Further, a few extracts from the report of a Muslim chronicler, Ahmad Shah Batala, as given in his book *Twarikh-i-Hind*, of the speech by Guru Gobind Singh given at the time of the Amrit (Baptism) ceremony are as follows: "I wish you all to embrace one creed and follow one path, obliterating all differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes, who have different rules laid down for them in

the Shastras, abandon them altogether and mix freely with one another. Let no one deem himself superior to another. Do not follow the old scriptures. Let none pay heed to the Ganges and other places of pilgrimage which are considered holy in the Hindu religion, or adore Hindu deities, like Rama, Krishna, Brahma and Durga, but all should have faith only in Guru Nanak and his successors. Let men of four castes receive my baptism, eat out of the same vessel and feel no disgust or contempt for one another.”<sup>13</sup>

The spirit of Guru Gobind Singh was carried on by Banda Singh Bahadur and his men, who fought against the Mughals under the most inhospitable circumstances. But they stuck to their faith and principles till the end of their lives. The Sikh devotion to their religion and their spirit is evident from the fact that out of 740 Sikh prisoners of war, who were executed in Delhi, along with Banda, not one deserted the faith, even while given the choice to do so.<sup>14</sup>

**Sikhism in 19th Century.** Here it is necessary to give a demographic picture of the Sikh community from the 18th to the 19th century. The struggle and the persecution of the Sikhs was severest during the mid 18th century. A price was put on every Sikh head and three times it was reported to the authorities that the Sikhs had been exterminated root and branch.<sup>15</sup> During this period of struggle, it is reported that at one time barely two thousand guerillas were left.<sup>16</sup> This was the spirit and character of the Sikhs, when they gained power in the later half of the 18th century. The establishment of the Khalsa commonwealth, naturally, gave opportunity both to Muslim and Hindu populations to seek conversion for reasons which were obviously mundane. The Sikhs never started any proselytising campaign because it is not sanctified in their religion. Obviously, these new entrants were slow in shedding some of their old personal, family or Customary prejudices and beliefs, which included faith in local gods and goddesses, saints, fakirs and Pirs. In the time of Ranjit Singh the number of Sikhs, thus, rose to 10-11 lacs.<sup>17</sup> The first census in 1881 reports that the number of Sikhs was 17 lacs.<sup>18</sup>

It is evident that this large-scale increase in the number of Sikhs is certainly not due to the natural increase in the members of the faith, who had struggled to power in the 18th century. Regarding the Sikhs in the second half of the 19th century, Ibbetson reports that with the exception of the Akalis, who still adhered to the ordinances of the Khalsa, many of the original observances of the Sikhs had fallen in disuse but for the five external signs and abstinence from tobacco.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the Sehjdhari group of Nirankaris, who were sixty thousand at the time of the census of 1891 never believed in any god or goddess and adhered strictly to faith in Guru Granth Sahib as the sole scripture and guide.<sup>20</sup>

A demoralizing effect of the annexation of the Punjab was that some of the Sikh Gyanis, who were very learned in their special departments, did not find jobs for their talents. They, therefore, went over to the Hindus and taught their religious books. Apart from decline in the dissemination of Sikh thought, they, in order to please their employers, started giving Hindu tint to the Sikh doctrines and beliefs, causing thereby great harm to Sikhism. Secondly, it is also true that many of the Hindu entrants of the Sikh faith who had naturally curbed or shed Hindu rituals & customs during the Sikh rule, reverted to their old prejudices and practices.

Before the advent of the Singh Sabha Movement in 1873, the Sikh society was, thus, passing through a lean phase. With their uncertain political future, Sikhs had become a prey to Brahmanical Hinduism and the socio-religious fabric of the community was being damaged. Owing to the weakness of some of the Neo-Sikhs, the number of Sikhs embracing the other faiths was increasing steadily.<sup>21</sup> A contemporary observer noted, "Just as we do not see any Buddhist in the country except in images, in the same fashion, the Sikhs, who are now here and there, visible in their turbans and their other religious forms like wrist-bangles and swords, will be seen only in pictures and museums. Their own sons and grandsons clad in coats and trousers and supporting mushroom-like caps will go to see them in museums and say in their pidgin Punjabi, 'Look, that is the picture of a Sikh-the tribe that inhabited this country once upon a time.'<sup>22</sup>

The proselytising activities of the Christian missionaries also alarmed the Sikhs. The historic conversion of Maharaja Dalip Singh (son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) and Raja Harnam Singh of Kapurthala to Christianity came as a rude shock to the Sikhs.<sup>23</sup> The loss of political power (Punjab was annexed by the British in 1849) also left a demoralising effect on them. It was at this juncture that the Singh Sabha assumed the leadership of the Sikhs.<sup>24</sup>

The Singh Sabha played a significant role in the socio-religious regeneration of the Sikh community. It made the Sikhs aware of their great spiritual and cultural heritage, and of their being the 'Khalsa', the pure. By emphasis on the Sikh practices, social laws, customs and Punjabi language, it welded the Sikhs, once again, into an independent community, bound together by faith in the teachings of their Gurus. The key-note of the Singh Sabha was 'Back to Guru Granth Sahib'. The object was to restore the purity of Sikhism by abolishing later accretions and superstitious practices, which did not stand the test of old Sikh Maryada or the teachings of the Gurus.

As stated earlier, the Sikh society consisted of the two distinct segments; those from the old Sikh stock who had struggled successfully through the persecutions and the revolutionary fire of the 18th century; and second, those large number of Hindu converts to Sikhism who had for the sake of convenience swelled the Sikh ranks during the Sikh rule. Ibbetson made it clear that the Akali section fully adhered to the injunctions of the Guru;<sup>25</sup> the same was the position of the old Sehjdharis or Narankaris.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, all the Hindu converts could not shed some of their old customs and prejudices in a generation or two. Almost three fourth of the Sikhs belonged to this stock. The position, so glibly talked about that in old days one member of a family was a Hindu and another a Sikh, related exactly to this converted section of the Sikhs, and not to the old Sikh families of the 18th century, when being a Sikh involved risk to life. It is this large section that carried a back-log of Hindu prejudices which the Singh Sabha was out to eliminate. There was also another problem. Some of the descendents of the Gurus, because of the wealth bestowed on them

and the respect they commanded during the Sikh rule started the cult of personal worship and collection of offerings. This practice, though in consonance with the old Hindu culture was violative of Sikh doctrines, where under the Gurus “had prohibited touching the feet of so-called pious men and had stated that the religious path lay in working hard and sharing one’s income with others.”<sup>27</sup> But, these wealthy Sikhs had got a vested interest in these cults, because personal worship brought them offerings from both their Sikh and non-Sikh followers.<sup>28</sup> Out of the sheer self-interest of maintaining their income and offerings from their Hindu followers, they started saying that the Gurus had preached the same religious system as in the Vedas, even though the Gurus had called ‘the Vedic doctrines to be misleading concerning caste, heaven, hell, etc’.<sup>29</sup> The Singh Sabha had, thus, not only to preach against Hindu practices, but had also to fight these Sikh vested interests who kept and patronised men like A. S. Vahiria and Gulab Singh, who wrote things which were palpably against the Guru Granth and its message.

Recently some scholars in the West have presented a distorted version of the nineteenth century Sikhism. H.S. Oberoi, (presently in the chair of Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada) for example, is a clear instance of having misrepresented the Sikh tradition.<sup>30</sup> He has tried to romanticise the myths and glamourise the long-forgotten superstitions. His entire exercise seems to be devoted to projecting the late 19th century revival of Sikhism as neo-Sikhism. His evaluation of Sikhism is neither comprehensive, nor objective. In fact, it is obvious that his treatment of the subject betrays a major lapse in the methodology of study. Because, in his entire paper, he has completely ignored the two essential aspects of the issue discussed by us earlier. He has completely misrepresented the matter by harping only on some features of the late 19th century Sikhism and then wrongly projecting them to be the integral part of earlier or original Sikhism.

H.S. Oberoi in his paper entitled, ‘Re-reading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century’, read recently at a seminar at Berkley (U.S.A.), observes, “The word Sanatan derives from Sanskrit and has

connotation of something that is ancient, almost as if out of secular time. The Sanatanist Sikhs, therefore, believed that these customs, rites and rituals had origins in the beginnings of time, when the universe came into existence and were beyond the pale of diachronic time' 'The fact that the Sikhs took part in the myths, worship and cults of miracle saints, goddesses and village gods does not imply that Sikhism was in a state of decline or irrational. These practices were an integral part of a coherent way of life and should not be judged from standards which were invented at the turn of the century.'

Let us now examine the position stated by Oberoi in his paper. He mentions four practices which he claims to be ancient and native to Sikhs of the times. These are the worship of Sakhi Sarvar, Guga Pir, Seetla Devi and village ancestors. A close examination of Oberoi's paper reveals that he has merely tried to conceal the reality by resort to vague generalisations and by giving unnecessary details of the concerned practices without specifying the extent of their prevalence in the Sikh Society.

We first take up the case of the worship of Sakhi Sarvar which is the only practice of which he has indicated some data in support of his argument by saying that less than 3% Sikhs had faith in Sakhi Sarvar. Otherwise, about twenty pages of his paper are filled with irrelevant verbiage giving just a journalistic description of the four practices. The entire structure of Oberoi's argument is based on the flimsy premises that these practices were native and ancient and no one ever prohibited them. He writes, "It was Sikh reformers in the 19th century who for the first time labelled many of the current beliefs and practices among the Sikhs as acts of deviance and expressions of a superstitious mind." This observation of Oberoi is a clear misstatement. The Guru Granth is full of hymns rejecting the spiritual character of Devis, Jogis, Pirs, etc. "Afflicted are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, afflicted is the entire world."<sup>31</sup> "The Vedas do not know His greatness. Neither Brahma, nor Shiva have any clue of Him. The Devis and Devtas have sought to know Him but failed."<sup>32</sup>

In the Sikh tradition there are *four* stories concerning the futility of Sakhi Sarvar worship. The first story is of a Sakhi Sarvaria, Bhai

Manj, coming to 'Guru Arjan for religious guidance. The Guru's reply is very revealing of the Sikh thesis. He said, "You may go on with the easy path of Sakhi Sarvar worship, because Sikhism is a very difficult path and unless you are willing to be dispossessed of your wealth and to sacrifice your very life, it is no use coming to me." But, Bhai Manj did become a Sikh.<sup>33</sup> The second story also concerns Guru Arjan when he deprecated the Sakhi Sarvar practice of preparing a big cake and presenting it before the priest who read Durud (a verse from Quran) and then kept the cake, giving only a marginal part to the devotees. The Guru says, "Without the true Guru they must sit and watch without eating until the Durud is read."<sup>34</sup> The Guru, thus, denounced the practice of seeking benediction of the priest, for, only a true Guru could lead one to the right path. The third story is of a Sikh's daughter having been married to the son of a Sakhi Sarvaria. The bride seeks the blessings of Guru Hargobind and her husband also becomes a Sikh. A tussle develops between the groom and his father when the former demolishes the family shrine of Sakhi Sarvar. But the groom continues to be a Sikh. Later, his handsome son founds a village called now Bhai Rupa in Nabha State.<sup>35</sup> A similar story concerning the futility of Sakhi Sarvar worship relates to the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur, when he visited Patiala area.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Sikh writings and *Rehtnamas* categorically prohibit the worship of Devi, Devtas, saints etc.<sup>37</sup> Even Bhangu in his *Panth Parkash* (mid 19th century) specifically condemns the worship of Sakhi Sarvar. He says that the Sikhs did not believe in ghosts, spirits and graves nor did they have any faith in the *Guga* and the *Sakhi Sarvar*. He rather refers to the "frequent clashes between the Sikhs and the Sarvarias in the villa-ges and towns of Punjab."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in the face of a clear rejection of the Sakhi Sarvar practice by the Guru, the Sikh religious literature, and the tradition, the existence of a marginal 3% residue of the Sakhi Sarvarias among the new Hindu entrants to Sikhism, only shows how insignificant is its value in drawing a correct picture of the Sikh society in that period. In fact, it is creditable that under the Sikh influence all except about 3% of the new entrants had given up their old Hindu practices.

In this context, Rose clearly endorses Bhangu's view, "comparatively few Sikhs are followers of Sarvar and there is in fact a sort of opposition in the central districts between Sikhs and sultanis. You hear men say that one party in a village worships the Guru, the other worships Sarvar; that is that one party are Sikhs, the other ordinary Hindus who follow Sarvar. It has been suggested that the worship of Sarvar probably spread eastward among the Jats in the 15th and 16th centuries, and was the preva-lent cult at the time of the great development of Sikhism in the days of Guru Gobind Singh; and that most of the conversions to the Khalsa faith were from the worshippers of Sultan. This appears a very probable account of the origin of such opposition as does exist between these two forms of faith. As between the Hindus generally and the Sultani there is no sort of opposi-tion; there are instances in the popular legends of men opposing the cult of Sarvar, but in the present day the Sultan is are looked on as ordinary Hindus."<sup>39</sup> Oberoi while he gives irrelevant details of the miraculous powers attributed to Sakhi Sarvar and lavishly quotes Rose as evidence, seems to have deliberately concealed the above mentioned conclusion drawn by Rose and, instead, made the distortion that Singh Sabha leaders were the first to object to such practices. Such clear mis-statements are generally made by partisan propagandists but never, we believe, by any academician. This indicates either a lack of indepth study or a conscious attempt to suppress facts with a view to misrepresenting Sikhism.

There is another mis-statement when Oberoi says, "Historians cannot simply reproduce these value judgments and employ categories invented by a section of the Sikh elite." We have seen that prohibition of these practices was neither the invention of the Singh Sabha, nor was it the first to object to them. Nor is it true that leaders of the Singh Sabha formed a section of the Sikh elite. In fact, the pioneers of the Singh Sabha, namely, Bhais Ditt Singh and Gurmukh Singh were persons of extremely humble beginnings. Ditt Singh belonged to a poor Ramdasia family of a small village (Nandpur Kalaur) of district Ropar.<sup>40</sup> Gurmukh Singh's father was just a cook in Kapurthala.<sup>41</sup> As

against that, the persons with vested interests in personal worship were Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi, Baba Sir Gurbakhsh Singh Bedi and Raja of Faridkot. Men like Vahiria were the proteges of wealthy persons, whom they had kept to propagate their point of view even though clearly opposed to the Sikh doctrines in the Guru Granth Sahib. And who constituted the elite and who represented the voice of the people and the Sikh culture is evident from the fact that in the tussle between them, all the local and base Singh Sabhas in the country shifted their loyalty to the Ditt Singh group, except three which belonged to the towns or places of these feudal kings.<sup>42</sup> It is, therefore, just naive to suggest that these persons of small beginnings could achieve the tremendous success, they did achieve, by just innovations or inventions, unless what they pro-moted or preached had the clear sanction of the scripture and the Sikh tradition.

Regarding Guga, Sitla and ancestor worship, Oberoi has given no data at all in support of his argument, meaning thereby that the extent of these practices was even less significant than the practice of Sakhi Sarvar worship. Oberoi instead of being precise has written page after page of a journalistic account of the practi-ces without suggesting the extent of these practices, their sanction by the Sikh tradition, or their existence during any earlier period of Sikh history. Every student of Hindu religion knows that in that system, especially under *Purva Mimansa*, spiritual and other benefits can be obtained by the practice of Yajnas, sacrifices, mantras, etc. On the other hand, even the most elementary student of the Granth Sahib is aware that all such practices and worship of Devi, Devatas and the like are regarded as futile in Sikhism. Let us here just indicate two instances. Every scholar of Sikhism and Sikh history knows that the basic reason why the Hindu Hill Rajas refused to cooperate with the tenth Guru was his rejection of Devi worship and their rituals and caste observances.<sup>43</sup> The second instance is of a complaint made to Guru Hargobind about a Sikh having broken an idol of a Devi.<sup>44</sup> The Sikh explained as to what was the worth of a Devi idol if it could not protect itself. It indicates that no one respected the Devi or Devatas in the Sikh Society.

Without indicating any statistical evidence, Oberoi makes another assertion saying that “the popularity of Sakhi Sarvar among the Sikhs was matched by another Pir called Guga Pir.” It is necessary to understand that in the old Punjab, Sikhs were less than 14% and the Hindus were more than double the number of Sikhs; and even among the Sikhs about three fourth were 19th century Hindu converts of convenience. It is, therefore, highly misleading to talk in vague terms about some Hindu practices current among Punjab Hindus and then to relate them to the Sikhs on the mere ground that the Singh Sabha had also preached against them, as being contrary to the Sikh tradition.

Regarding Sitla worship too, Oberoi is equally irrelevant and vague. The Sikh position about Devi worship both in precept and practice, has already been indicated. In the article of the *Khalsa Akhbar* of March 6, 1896, it is the entire Punjab population that has been addressed to give up Sitla worship, without even mention-ing the word Sikh therein. And the advice to the people is to have themselves inoculated instead of suffering the disease.

About ancestor worship among Sikhs Oberoi’s observations are even more far-fetched. He cites Dube’s, *‘Indian Village’* and Brubaker’s *‘A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and their Religious Meaning’*. The only reference to the Sikhs is a manual by an army officer mentioning that Satnamis, Hindus and Sikhs had a practice of ancestor worship.

From Oberoi’s own paper, it is evident that Sitla, Guga and ancestor worship among the Sikhs were even less significant than the worship of Sakhi Sarvar prevalent among less than 3% Sikhs. It is suggested by Oberoi that though the practice of Sakhi Sarvar worship was insignificant in 1911 it must have been wide-spread and native to the Sikh society before the Singh Sabha propa-ganda. The argument is quite meaningless. If in the earlier four hundred years of preaching by the ten Gurus themselves and others, the Sikh tradition could not eliminate these Hindu practices entirely, how could the Singh Sabha workers, with humble beginnings, work this miracle in about one generation ? It is quite significant that in order to prove his point that In the 19th century there was not much of an ideological difference

between the Hindus and the Sikhs, Oberoi has quoted neither the *Guru Granth* nor any *Rehntamas*, nor any earlier Sikh literature or traditions, but only A.S. Vahiria and Gulab Singh, both spokesmen of the Bedi group with vested interests in maintaining the cult of personal worship. So far as the loyalist Gulab Singh is concerned his propagandist statement that the four *Vedas*' are also the religious books of the Sikhs is quite understandable. But for Oberoi to quote him approvingly shows either poor scholarship and a gross ignorance of the contents of *Guru Granth Sahib*, the *Nash* doctrine of Guru Gobind Singh, the *Rehntamas* and the Sikh religious literature and practices, or a deliberate attempt at distortion by his avoiding all references to the *Guru Granth* and Sikh literature. Even in the article of the *Khalsa Akhbar*, dated March 29, 1901, it had clearly been argued by the Sikh paper, by quoting the *Guru Granth*, that the Gurus had specifically repudiated the doctrine of the Vedas. But by the use of pointless phraseology, Oberoi suggests that in the 19th century, Sikhs like the Hindus were believers in Devis, Devatas, Guga, Sakhi Sarvar and the like. His conclusion is that the key to understanding Sikhism is that it is a peasant faith as of a peasantry elsewhere in the world. Even a most elementary knowledge of the *Guru Granth* and the teachings of the Gurus, shows that the Gurus severely condemned these Hindu practices. The views of Vahiria or Khem Singh Bedi were, thus absurdly in contradiction to the Sikh religion. And, obviously, it was such clear misrepresentations of the Sikh Scripture, the leaders of the Singh Sabha were out to oppose. But, interestingly, it is these very distorters, and promoters of the malpractices whom Oberoi quotes as authorities so as to prove what, he asserts, was the norm of Sikhism. Oberoi has also failed to record the categorical contemporary evidence that the Akalis, the core of the Panth, were fully adhering to the norm prescribed by the Gurus. If his conclusion were correct and Sikhs like the Hindu peasantry were more superstitious worshippers of Devi, Devatas and Guga and Sakhi Sarvar Pirs, how does Oberoi explain that (i) the Sikhs, an insignificant section of the population, were able to supplant the Mughal Empire in the entire north-west and stem once for all the wave after wave of invaders

that had plagued India for a thousand years, (ii) a leaderless community gave to the British the toughest fight, almost to the point of their defeat and annihilation, on the Indian soil, (iii) the Sikhs were predominantly the people who organised and manned the first rebellion (Ghaddar rebellion) against the British, (iv) of the 121 persons executed and 2646 sentenced to life imprisonment during the entire freedom struggle during the 20th century, 93 and 2047 respectively were Sikhs<sup>45</sup> and (v) during the period of Emergency from June, 1975 -March, 1977, involving the suspension of the Indian Constitution and the abrogation of all human rights and individual liberties, it was only the Sikhs who conducted a regular civil disobedience movement (Save Democracy Morcha) suffering imprisonment of over forty thousand persons,<sup>46</sup> while in the rest of India, not even half that number courted arrest or imprisonment.<sup>47</sup>

**Changes made by Singh Sabha:** Now, considering the fourth aspect of the Singh Sabha Movement, namely, the revival it brought about in the Sikh society, we find that every step they took and change they made had the full sanction of the Sikh scripture and tradition. One has only to read *Ham Hindu Nahin Hain* by Bhai Kahn Singh and *Nakli Sikh Prabodh* by Ditt Singh to find that almost every page quotes the *Bani* of the Gurus, in support of their suggestions.<sup>48</sup> The only new step they took was the establishment of educational institutions on modern lines and the publication and propagation of religious literature, not available earlier, because the services of the Printing Press had then become an easily available facility.

Oberoi denies that Sikh resurgence in the 19th century derived its inspiration from the teachings of the Gurus and the Sikh scripture. The greatest contribution of Singh Sabha lies in projecting Sikh religion in its traditional perspective. Sikhism is a revealed religion and has a recorded scripture authenticated by the Guru himself. Oberoi looks upon Sikhism as a rural religion, which “by definition is a part of the oral culture of people and it is always difficult to reconstruct and recover all the elements which go into its making.” Such statements completely misrepresent the reality in so far as there is a clear blackout, of the teachings of the Gurus, of Sikh tradition and practices, and of

Sikh history in the earlier three centuries. In his entire paper, Oberoi has not quoted even one line from the Guru Granth Sahib, indicating the principles of the Sikh faith; nor has he mentioned any of its fundamentals on which the Gurus insisted. To talk of the characteristics of the Sikh faith and beliefs without reference to the Gurus, Guru Granth Sahib, and the Sikh tradition and history is something completely incomprehensible, if not deliberately biased. One wonders, how Oberoi found a free and easy access to the so-called 'Oral tradition' to the exclusion of the actual Sikh history.

The burden of Oberoi's thesis is to highlight the points of deviation and departure from the Sikh tradition. In analysing the nature of Sikhism he forgets the historical perspective and the Sikh ideology: Marked by descriptive profusion and meaningless rhetoric, his thesis betrays an obvious ignorance of the basic tenets of the Sikh faith. By characterising the aberrations in the 19th century Sikh society as the original or ancient Sikhism, he has identified Sikh norms with the Hindu practices of the neo-converts. He has made a particular blackout of the Sikh history and the Sikh literature and injunctions that specifically prohibited pre-Sikh Hindu beliefs and practices. The author has taken it upon himself to select or reject any opinion; thus completely ignoring the traditional model and negating the original sources and opinions of many earlier or contemporary scholars. His contention that 'Sanatan Sikhism, (a term coined by him to name pre-Singh Sabha Sikhism) constituted real Sikh tradition is self. contradictory and deceptive. This term has had no place or relevance in the entire history of Sikhism or any earlier writings pertaining to the Sikhs. A Sikh movement, Singh Sabha or any other, should be judged in terms of what the Gurus had taught and the Sikhs had practised in the Guru or the revolutionary period. Any attempt virtually to legitimize the Hindu practices or the aberrations against which the Sikh Gurus, the Rehtnamas and Sikh writings had launched a crusade, is nothing but misleading. Apart from the clear injunctions of Guru Gobind Singh quoted earlier, a near-contemporary source also records that 'Guru Gobind Singh rejected the paths of both the Hindus and the Muslims and created his own Panth.'<sup>49</sup> The Rehtnamas emphasized that "The

Sikhs should maintain their separate identity from the caste society.<sup>50</sup> Rattan Singh Bhangu in his *Prachin Panth Prakash*, talks of “separate identity of the Panth, its egalitarian character, and the plebian political objectives and character of the Khalsa.”<sup>51</sup> The testimony of earlier injunctions, writings and contemporary observers, cannot be ignored. Therefore, to designate the lean period of Sikhism, when Hindu practices had crept into it, as Sanatan Sikhism is a misnomer. To assess and measure the significance of an aberration. To assess and measure the significance of an aberration in the period of decline of the Sikh movement, without reference to the norm, the long standing tradition or the injunctions in the scripture or Sikh writings, suggests a lack of sense of proportion or an attempt at distortion.

The Singh Sabha leaders aimed at “restoring the pristine purity of Sikhism,”<sup>52</sup> without propounding any philosophy of their own or introducing a new practice unsanctioned by the ideology or the tradition. Any Sikh, who adhered to the injunctions of the ten Gurus and was ready to serve the community could be admitted to the fold of the Singh Sabha.<sup>53</sup> There was no ceremony to be gone through for this purpose nor was there any distinctive dress, badge or mark to be worn. The movement was not a new cult. It retained its democratic character, despite the efforts of some persons to style themselves as Gurus and wield control over its affairs. Baba Khem Singh Bedi introduced a new cult and tried to gain supremacy over the activities of the Sabha. Being a direct descendent of Guru Nanak, he virtually aspired to become a Guru.<sup>54</sup> He wanted a well-furnished seat (*gadella*) for himself, even in the presence of the Granth Sahib.<sup>55</sup> Baba Khem Singh Bedi wished his authority to be regarded as paramount and absolute in religious matters and himself to be looked upon as the Guru in Succession to Guru Nanak.<sup>56</sup> Bhai Avtar Singh Vahiria, Was a chosen associate of Baba Khem Singh Bedi. In his books, *Khalsa Dharam Shashtar*, *Sikh Dharam Tat Darshan* and *Gurdarshan Shastar*, he writes that the Sikh Gurus did not prohibit the worship of gods and goddesses and that it was wrong to remove caste distinctions.

Actually, it was such obvious mis-statements that Prof. Gurmukh Singh, Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Maya Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh of

the Lahore Singh Sabha were out to controvert. They aimed at checking “outside influences and undesirable elements which had crept in Sikhism and thus to restore it to its former purity.”<sup>57</sup> Whereas the appeal of the Khem Singh Bedi and Vahiria group, who had their own vested interests, was mostly confined to their personal circles, that of the Lahore Sabha went further and touched the hearts of the general mass of the community.<sup>58</sup> Missionaries (*Parcharaks*) were sent even in the interior of the province to spread the message of Sikhism among hundreds and thousands of the village folks, who constituted the backbone of the Sikh community and without whose cooperation no movement could acquire a mass base. They made them aware of the fundamentals of the Sikh religion, thereby removing all doubts, regarding the identity and practices of the Khalsa. In the words of Giani Ditt Singh, “Having sprung from the Hindus, the Sikhs are yet a separate community, clearly distinguished from them in outward form, religious and social outlook, conception of God and Gurus, mode of worship, language of the scriptures and their ideas regarding caste, pilgrimage and priesthood.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, the pamphlets and writings of the Singh Sabhaites profusely quote the scripture and religious writings in support of their views, exhorting Sikhs to shed the wrong practices that had crept in the Sikh fold following the political confusion after the defeat of the Khalsa. Bhai Kahan Singh’s book *Ham Hindu Nahin* (We Are Not Hindus) was a conscious reaction against the propaganda by some of the Hindus and Sikhs like the Khem Singh and Vahiria group. Giani Gian Singh’s *Panth Parkash*, Naurang Singh’s *Sikh Hindu Nahin*, Jodh Singh’s *Sacha Dharmi* and many others, also quoted several passages from the Sikh scripture to prove that the Sikh religion was an independent religion and had nothing to do with Hinduism. In fact, Sikhism had controverted almost every fundamental of Hinduism.

Such writings inspired the Sikhs with self confidence and gave them a renewed sense of distinctiveness and direction.<sup>60</sup> The masses became sufficiently enlightened not to be misled by the Sikh vested interests and the Arya Samajists, who tried to say that the Sikhs were a part of the Hindus. The Singh Sabha leaders had a clear and firm grasp of the issues facing the Sikhs. They rightly realised that the form

and spirit of the Khalsa could be kept intact only if the Sikhs conformed to the code of conduct prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh. Any laxity in maintaining the five symbols (the five K's), they knew would mean a fall from the faith and would lead to the gradual erosion of the basic Sikh ideals.<sup>61</sup> Bhai Kahan Singh in his books, *Gurmat Parbhakar* and *Gurmat Sudhakar* quoted several passages from the Sikh scripture in order to prove that the worship of images was contrary to the teachings of the Gurus.

The Singh Sabha leaders laid emphasis on the inculcation of such virtues as love of God, service of one's fellow beings, purity of living, charitableness and truthfulness. They made it clear, as the Gurus had emphasized in their Bani, that the way to one's moral and spiritual uplift lay through good deeds and not through miracles, mystries and *mantras*. "The worship of the Almighty in homes is the best of all to obtain eternal happiness, rather than going to the pilgrimage, where one was bound to be misled by the selfish and greedy priests."<sup>62</sup> Misguided notions regarding the worship of graves, tombs, Samadhs and cremation marks, which were contrary to Sikh religious injunctions and tradition, were clearly condemned in the preachings of the Singh Sabha.<sup>63</sup> Giani Ditt Singh's booklet, *Durga Parbodh*, was written primarily to dispel the belief in Pirs and Fakirs which was of no avail and diverted man's attention from the path of righteousness. That is why, as indicated already, all the thirty seven Singh Sabhas, except the three Sabhas of Rawalpindi, Faridkot and Amritsar which were personally connected with Khem Singh and Raja of Faridkot group, followed the lead of the Ditt Singh Gurmukh Singh group.<sup>64</sup>

As a result, the period of diffidence was over and Sikhism regained its self confidence in its historic mission. The Census Report of 1921 noted: "Sikhism is a religion with a very distinct worship of its own and having attained a position of independence, is fully entitled to rank as a separate religion."<sup>65</sup>

The passing of the Anand Marriage Act in 1909, legalizing the Sikh form of marriage was a significant achievement of the Singh Sabha. Various Sikh organisations and Singh Sabhas sent telegrams

and petitions signed by lacs of Sikhs, demanding the passage of the Act.<sup>66</sup> The Government was impressed by this demonstration of Sikh unity in favour of this legislation which involved separate Sikh entity. It was an important step forward because the State was forced to accept the self assertion of the will of an independent socio-religious community.

The Sabha periodicals, the *Khalsa*, the *Khalsa Akhbar*, the *Khalsa Samachar*, the *Khalsa Advocate* and the *Sikhs and Sikhism* helped a great deal in projecting the true image of Sikhism. The influence of these periodicals was tremendous and they greatly helped in quickening the pace of revival. They succeeded in counteracting the attack of the Arya Samajists and the Christian Missionaries, who were misrepresenting the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. These periodicals were run by persons like Giani Ditt Singft, Bhai Gurmukh Singh, Bhai Mayya Singh, Bhagat Lakshman Singh, and Bhai Vir Singh who had been nurtured in the Sikh tradition.

People came in large numbers to receive baptism. A major plank of the Singh Sabha was a crusade of Amrit Parchar because to revive the institution of baptism and the connected doctrine of 'Nash', making a complete break with all earlier religious and social traditions, was the best means of eliminating the Brahmani-cal practices that had appeared among the Sikh ranks.<sup>67</sup> The Singh Sabha preachings being in line with the earlier tradition, and having the sanction of the Gurus and the scripture, no Sikh could ignore or defy them. In fact, the tremendous success the Singh Sabha revivalists had in bringing back dynamism in the Sikh life, was entirely due to their ability to invoke the authority of the Sikh Gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikh tradition in support of everything they said and preached. The Chief pillars of the movement, workers like Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Gurmukh Singh, Bhai Mayya Singh, Bhai Jawahar Singh and Bhagat Lakshman Singh, were very ordinary persons of hardly any consequence in the socio-economic or the political life of the community. There was nothing to recommend them except their devotion to the cause of the great tradition which the mass of the people understood. very well.<sup>68</sup>

It would, therefore, be naive to suggest that these simple Singh Sabha workers could have the capacity to impose on the community a new system, or make innovations in the Sikh ideology or even a major reform, without their suggestions and programme being strictly in line with the thesis of the Gurus, especially when many socially and politically influential persons in the Sikh community continued to oppose them.<sup>69</sup>

The Chief Khalsa Diwan formed a sub-committee to suggest ways and means to reform the Gurdwaras that had gone into the hands of Brahmanical priests and vested interests.<sup>70</sup> But it could not take effective measures because *Mahants* and *Pujaris* who controlled the Gurdwaras enjoyed the support of the Government.<sup>71</sup> After this tussle, the *Mahants* and the *Pujaris* became hostile to the Singh Sabha leaders.<sup>72</sup> The Sikh public was rudely made conscious of the evil designs of the *Pujaris* when they condemned the *Kamaghata Maru* Sikhs at the Akal Takhat and presented a robe of honour to General Dyer after the tragedy of *Jalianwala Bagh*.<sup>73</sup> This made the Sikhs furious. It took the Sikhs quite some time to get their shrines liberated from the *Mahants* and the *Pujaris*.

Nevertheless, the Singh Sabha succeeded in renewing a sense of self-awareness among the Sikhs. The movement, which derived its inspiration from the great spiritual heritage of the Gurus, did not 'invent' any standard of its own. It is highly incorrect, rather misleading, to attribute innovations to a movement which was wholly revivalist in its nature and character. In fact, to propound a new ideology was against the very basic principles of the Singh Sabha. A scholar who sets out to study and understand the true nature of Sikhism should do so in the context of the Sikh scripture and the historical background of the emergence of Sikhism. Oberoi's assertion that Sikhism is first and foremost a peasant faith or rural religion, displays a complete lack of knowledge and understanding of Guru Granth Sahib and the fundamentals of Sikhism. This deficiency is common with those who use social science methodology in studying a religion and its history. No where in the history of India or elsewhere in the world, there is any evidence to suggest that the peasantry could, on its own, devise a radically new religious system or sustain a social revolution of the

kind that took place in the Punjab.

Throughout the ages, Sikhism has shown a remarkable potency and will to grapple with all crisis, without compromising the basic and enduring values of its faith. It is through tremendous sacrifices and sufferings that the Sikhs have maintained their identity, ideals, and ethos and carried out the mission entrusted to them by their Gurus. Their birth, training, tradition and history have marked them out as a people separate from the rest. It is quite idle to draw simplistic conclusions about the Sikh religion and its history, without an in-depth study and analysis of the Sikh scripture and the role of each doctrine and institution in shaping the Sikh movement and the revolutionary changes it brought about.

The study of the Singh Sabha movement in isolation, and in complete disregard of the Sikh ideology and the earlier Sikh history, apart from being methodically inadequate and faulty, shows very clearly the failings of a narrow and lopsided approach. Lloyd has drawn a very interesting caricature of an anthropological view which would first magnify a very narrow aspect of a social phenomenon and then try to draw inferences there from. The social anthropologist who views religion as a social institution, quite often, fails to take into account the socio-cultural complex, "constituted by institutions, rules, beliefs and intentions" and arrives at erroneous conclusions.<sup>74</sup> Lloyd has provided a rather amusing account of what a tribal anthropologist might see if he visited the Brighton beach in the middle of summer. The anthropologist's account, he says, may read somewhat like the following :

"The people of England are religious and devout worshippers of the sun. Each year they leave their homes and travel to the coast for the purpose of worship and often take up small accommodation in tents or in what they call caravans, or live with other people during their short stay. Each day they begin worship by prostrating themselves on the shingle in the heat of the sun, which is often so hot that they wear shields over their eyes. Their bodies become burnt and some become ill, but few are deterred by this, such is their devotion. At various times people will baptise themselves in the waters, calling to

each other and waving their arms in ecstasy. At midday, families group together when a symbolic ceremony takes place. Three-cornered pieces of bread, known to the natives as 'sandwiches', are passed around and eaten. During the afternoon they throw symbolic, large, inflated, multi-coloured orbs to one another, illustrating the dominance of the sun in their lives. Throughout all this, elders lie motionless in their canvas seats with their faces covered, in deep and prolonged meditation. These observances may continue for a family for upto fourteen days, when they return to their work until the following year."<sup>75</sup>

Lloyd says that such an interpretation of what the people of Brighton beach were doing seems quite consistent with their physical movements. That is to say, if these people really were sun-worshipping, instead of sun-bathing and enjoying themselves, their bodily movements may be no different. The difference lies in how they saw their movements. What the anthropologist did not do was to see things the way the natives did, to entertain the ideas they had, to understand the significance that these things had for them. If we wish to understand what a person is doing we have to understand not only his beliefs and intentions but also the socio-cultural context and institutions, norms and rules which provide the framework within which he forms his purposes in terms of appraisal of his situation. Oberoi's study is equally narrow and inept in its vision.

## **Conclusion**

Unless there is a conscious or unconscious effort to damage and erode the very roots of the Sikh ideology and the Sikh religion, a correct evaluation of Sikhism cannot be made by a lop-sided or isolated study of a few rituals and beliefs prevalent in a very small section of the community during a particularly lean period. The worshipping of a 'Sakhi Sarvar' by less than three percent of Ignorant and illiterate villagers or a similar local aberration or belief cannot be regarded as the views and practice of the entire Sikh community, especially when the Sikh scripture, tradition and writings had specifically and repeatedly condemned them, and when there was hardly a trace of them in the Sikh community of the Guru period or of the 18th century.

People of different religions are quite often found harmonising together in social life and mutually respecting, understanding and taking part in each other's modes, ways and doings. For example 'Purdah' system which crept into the Hindu society bore the stamp of Muslim culture. It is misleading to draw inferences about the form and dynamics of a religion on the basis of socio-cultural practices and usages, which are local and temporary in character. A visitor to a Christian Sunday worship in a Panjabi village observed that "many aspects of the worship were strongly influenced by Punjabi village culture - the timing of worship, taking off shoes outside the church, the separation of the men from the women, the noise and informality of worship, the music and musical instruments."<sup>76</sup> If some Sikhs and Muslims worshipped the Sakhi Sarvar, it does not mean that Islam and Sikhism are not independent religions or that such worship is native to the two religions. "Saturnalia, the Roman winter festival of 17-21 December, provided the merriment, gift-giving and candles typical of later Christmas holidays. Sun worship hung on in Roman Christianity and Pope Leo I in the middle of the fifth century, rebuked worshippers who turned round to bow to the sun before entering St. Peter's basilica, Some pagan customs which were later Christianised,..." In short many pagan customs continued in Christianity in one form or the other for centuries on end.<sup>77</sup>

There are features which are particular to Punjab and there are practices derived from the surrounding culture which give it a particular flavour not found in other parts of the world. popular legends of 'Heer-Ranjhah', 'Sassi-Punnu' and 'Sohni Mahiwal' (mentioned by Oberoi) which found mention in the Punjabi literature placed no impediments in the recognition of Sikhism as an independent religion.

There are certain features of a culture which are local and temporal and cannot by any stretch, be deemed to be a part of the prevailing religious system. Just as the pop music that is a common feature of the urban life of the Indian community today, could not be called an integral part of the Brahmanical religion, in the same way it

would be wrong to characterise folk fables and love stories of Heer Ranjha, Sassi Pannu, etc. as a part of the Sikh religion.

Our discussion of the four related aspects of the Singh Sabha movement shows that while it played an important and significant regenerative role during a lean period of the Sikh history, it was wholly a revivalist movement working strictly within the parameters of the Sikh religion and its tradition. In fact, the very reasons that it invoked the authority of the Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib and placed before the public examples of the Sikh society and Sikh heroes who had suffered and sacrificed for the principles of Sikh religion, account for the success of the Singh Sabha leaders in safely and creditably steering the Sikh community towards its goals.

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**SECTION VI**  
**A CRITIQUE OF SOME WRITINGS**  
**ON SIKHISM**



**CHAPTER 15****MISPRESENTATIONS OF THE SIKH TRADITION  
IN WORLD RELIGIONS TEXTBOOKS****JAMES R. LEWIS**

(Genuine) knowledge of another culture is possible (but) the student must feel he or she is answerable to and in uncoercive contact with the culture and the people being studied. (In the past), most of what the West knew about the non-Western world it knew in the framework of colonialism; the European scholar therefore approached his subject from a general position of dominance, and what he said *about* this subject was said with little reference to what anyone but other European scholars had said.<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the past few decades, academics have invested increasing amounts of energy into analyzing the scholarly discourse of previous eras, particularly the scholarship that was carried out by colonialist nations with respect to subject peoples. The focus of most of this relatively recent work has been to point out how the images of non-European peoples presented in such discourse were shaped by the (often unconscious) presuppositions of European scholars, as well as how this scholarship ultimately fed back into, and helped to legitimize imperialist attitudes. Within Sikh studies, a fair amount of analysis along these lines has been carried out with respect to the semi-scholarly works produced by British officials during the period of time leading up to the annexation of the Punjab.

As someone professionally involved in the teaching of general courses on world religions, I became interested in examining how non-Western peoples were presented in contemporary survey treatments of world religions, especially the representations found in world religion textbooks. What follows is a short report of my findings in this area

with respect to the Sikh community. The focus of the discussion will be on the misrepresentations of Sikhism that are present in survey treatments of world religions as well as an analysis of the (actors responsible for such misrepresentations.

The paper has been divided into three major sections. The first section looks at simple errors of fact. The second and third sections examine two themes that surface over and over again in Western treatments of Sikhism : Sikh “syncretism,” and the contrast between the supposed “pacifism” of early Sikhism and the militancy of later Sikhism.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the first set of errors, which are due largely to carelessness, the second two misrepresentations ultimately have their roots in the less objective scholarship of the British Raj. Hence we will find that, despite the good intentions of present-day scholars, discussions of these latter two themes often subtly slander the Sikh tradition.

**Errors of Fact:** If one just glances through a half dozen or so world religion textbooks at random, the first thing that strikes one about their treatment of Sikhism is the wide diversity in the amount of space devoted to the Sikh religious tradition. This diversity ranges from whole chapters on the Sikh religion to complete absence in some texts. More often than not, Guru Nanak is at least mentioned, although usually in the form of a passing reference to the “impact” of Islam on Hinduism. The incidence of misrepresentations seems to bear no relationship either to date of publication or to length of treatment. In other words, contrary to what one might anticipate, lengthier or more recent treatments of the Sikh religion do not appear to contain fewer mistakes than shorter or older treatments. For example, in the 1987 edition of *Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, Robert Ellwood mistakenly asserts not only that Guru Nanak spent the *entire* latter part of his life as an “itinerant poet and minstrel” but he also remarks that Guru Gobind Singh was “killed in battle.” Another curious error is when Ellwood says that the Tenth Master slew a chicken rather than a goat on the occasion of the formation of the Khalsa.<sup>3</sup> Hence proximity in time to the present is no guarantee of accuracy.

As (or more extended recent treatments of Sikhism, in the 1987 edition of *Religions of the World*, Lewis M. Hopfe asserts that Guru Gobind Singh “introduced into Sikhism the worship of the terrible Hindu goddess of death, Durga.”<sup>4</sup> Hopfe appears to have fallen into this error by taking an item of historical fact, the Tenth Guru’s employment of the martial symbolism associated with the Hindu goddess, and misconstruing it so that (at least in Hopfe’s statement) it appears’ that the Sikh community as a whole actually adopted the ritual worship of Durga—a portrayal that is manifestly false. Hence extended treatment of the Sikh religion (i.e., devoting an entire chapter to Sikhism) is no more a guarantee of accuracy than a recent publication date.

Other mistakes that occasionally crop up are the long-refuted position that the First Master was a “disciple of Kabir,”<sup>5</sup> and the rather unusual item of misinformation that the Sikh community made an abortive attempt to form a country of its own during the 1947 partition of India.<sup>6</sup> One will also occasionally find statements to the effect that Guru Nanak “accepted the gods of the Hindu pantheon,”<sup>7</sup> without adding the important qualification that the First Master regarded the deities of Hindu mythology as demi-gods unworthy of religious devotion.<sup>8</sup>

It is all too apparent that the source of everyone of these misrepresentations is superficial acquaintance with the Sikh tradition. In the bibliographies of these works, one rarely finds more than one or two book-length references on Sikhism. While one can sympathize with the difficult position of an author who takes on the Herculean task of writing a world religious text, and can understand the temptation to consult as few references as absolutely necessary, there are enough Sikhs in the English-speaking world that, with relatively little expenditure of energy, an author could *at least* have sent a draft of his or her chapter on the Sikh religion to a responsible member of the Sikh community for comment and correction.

Although one might justifiably be irritated with the sloppy scholarship of these various authors, their mistakes pale in comparison with the lamentable tendency of some academics who are irresponsible enough to make negative, evaluative remarks about a religious tradition

that they have all too obviously neglected to study with care. Thus, for instance, in *A Guide to the World's Religions*, David G. Bradley remarks, in language that seems to heap ridicule on the Sikh community, that the *Guru Granth Sahib* is “not comprehensive to most Sikhs; despite that fact, they hold it sacred.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in a multi-authored work, *The Religious World*, Hyla S. Converse asserts that, “with the intention of achieving religious unity, the Sikhs, in their fight for survival against Islam, became instead a symbol of religious intransigence and hatred.”<sup>10</sup> And lastly, in a statement made by an otherwise reputable contemporary scholar (in the context of an edited work, *Religion and Man*), Robert D. Baird asserts that, “Whereas for Nanak, the ultimate matter was devotion to the True Name, for the present community, self-preservation appears to be somewhat more important.”<sup>11</sup> When contrasted with statements such as these, which constitute errors of judgment as well as errors of fact, the non-evaluative mistakes of other authors appear more forgivable.

Before leaving this section of the paper, it should be noted that not all surveys of world religions misrepresent Sikhism. There are, in fact, at least six texts containing a full chapter on the Sikh religion that appear to be free from misrepresentations. Not by coincidence, all of these general works are multi-authored volumes -an approach which, although by no means capable of guaranteeing accuracy (as we have already noted with respect to the books in which Converse's and Baird's remarks appear), at least guarantees that the people composing individual chapters have adequate opportunity to read more than one or two books on Sikhism. Three of the acceptable treatments that I found were composed by recognized scholars of the Sikh tradition: Christopher Shackle, W. Owen Cole, and W.H. McLeod.<sup>12</sup> (Although Sikhs have often criticized McLeod's more specialized studies, they will find nothing objectionable in his chapter in Parrinder's *Man and His Gods*). Hilda Wierum Boulter, who authored the chapter on Sikhism in the comparatively old (1961) *Living Schools of Religion*, was able to construct an accurate picture by consulting a learned Sikh (Dr. Anup Singh) about his own tradition.<sup>13</sup> Niels C. Nielsen, Jr., who authored

the Sikhism chapter in *Religions of the World*, appears to have avoided error by sticking rather closely to the presentation of the Sikh religion found in Cole and Sambhi's *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*.<sup>14</sup> And finally, S. Vernon McCasland, who authored the Sikhism chapter in an older survey of religion that was also entitled *Religions of the World*, managed to portray the Sikh faith accurately.<sup>15</sup> He seems to have accomplished this by following the sympathetic treatments of Sikhism found in such works as Max Arthur Macauliffe's *The Sikh Religion*.

**Syncretism** White it should be self-evident that every emergent religion relies on prior religious traditions as points of reference for a new vision of spiritual reality, the relationship between early Sikhism and its religious environment appears to have captured the attention of observers of the Sikh religion more so than other religions. In particular, the question of the relative impact of Hinduism and Islam, and more especially the notion of a "syncretism" of these two traditions, has constituted almost an obsession in Western treatments of the Sikh religion. One of the most peculiar aspects of this phenomenon is that although the majority of authors of world religion texts are willing to rely on the syncretism category in their interpretation of the Sikh religion, there is wide-spread disagreement as to the precise nature of this blend of Hinduism and Islam. For example, while some authors confidently portray Sikhism as being more of a "reformed Hindu religion,"<sup>16</sup> other authors assert, with apparently equal confidence, that in Sikhism "there is little doubt that the Muslim source predominates."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, whereas some scholars argue that "Nanak's doctrine is more a reform of Hinduism,"<sup>18</sup> one can find other scholars who see no difficulty in asserting that Guru Nanak "leaned rather more to Islam than to Hinduism."<sup>19</sup> Yet other Writers appear to argue for an equal admixture of Islam and Hinduism.<sup>20</sup> Finally, while some advocates of the syncretism Interpretation are willing "to go so far as to assert that the Sikh religion "is not in any absolute sense new"<sup>21</sup> (i.e., that *everything* in Sikhism can be traced to a source in either Hinduism or Islam), other scholars, particularly those who criticize the syncretism

interpretation, have stressed the “originality of Guru Nanak.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Hindu/Muslim syncretism, which the majority of authors of general surveys of world religions seem to accept uncritically as the starting point for their interpretation of Sikhism, turns out to be far more ambiguous than one might at first assume. This peculiar state of affairs should lead the careful observer to ask broader sorts of questions about the syncretism interpretation, such as, why has so much scholarly energy been invested in this particular question? and, what, ultimately, does it mean for one religion to be a “syncretism” and another not?

The answers to this line of questioning are complex because there is more than one factor at work here. The widespread influence of the syncretism interpretation is partially attributable to the writings of certain Sikhs who advocate the idea in order to portray Sikhism as an inherently ecumenical religion. Another factor contributing to the preeminence of the idea in surveys of world religions is the tendency of authors to overemphasize Sikhism’s syncretic character “due to the attractiveness of a syncretistic religion in a textbook on the great world religions.”<sup>23</sup> There is, however, an often unrecognized problem with the label “syncretism,” which is that the term was traditionally utilized to denounce groups that had deviated from the dominant religion and who were consequently portrayed as having polluted the true faith by “grafting on foreign elements.”<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the syncretism appellation probably originated with English missionaries or some other group of colonial officials who regarded the Sikh religion as spurious.

If someone were to argue that “syncretism” has lost its negative, judgemental connotations, we can ask, why, then, are the major religions of the West never described as “syncretisms”? In other words, there is basically nothing wrong with the observation that both Muslim and Hindu influences are evident in the Sikh religion, as long as one does not fail to note that the same state of affairs exists in other religious traditions. Christianity, for example, was shaped by Judaism, Mithraism, Neoplatonism, and other Hellenistic religions. And; not just during

the period of their birth, but also over the course of later contact with other peoples, all of the major world traditions have been influenced, to some extent, by other religions. Why, then, is it appropriate to refer to Sikhism as a “syncretism,” but not appropriate to thus refer to other religions? In other words, If a faith like Christianity cannot appropriately be called a “syncretism,” then what term would apply to Christianity’s particular blend of influences that could not apply to Sikhism ?

With a little reflection, it should be apparent that there is no clear criterion for distinguishing Sikhism from other religious traditions on this point. The covert judgement, and here we are finally in a position to state the evaluation implicit in this seemingly neutral term, is that Sikhism can be understood entirely in terms of its constituent religions, whereas other traditions are somehow “more,” or that they somehow “transcend,” the religions from which their constituents are derived. To restate this value -judgement as bluntly as possible, the founders of other traditions were somehow able to provide a special (creative? revealed?) element to their new spiritual synthesis that was somehow missing in the case of Guru Nanak. .

I am, of course, exaggerating the point, but it needs to be made perfectly clear that the characterization of the Sikh tradition as a “syncretism” is a holdover from the days when all of the other world religions were compared with Christianity for the purpose of demonstrating Christianity’s superiority. Although I recognize that present-day scholars do not consciously intend to pronounce such a judgement against Sikhism, the fact that “syncretism” continues to be used differentially-to describe some religions but not others-indicates that this judgement has not ceased to shape interpretations of the Sikh tradition.

**Pacifism/Militancy :** Next to Hindu/Muslim syncretism, the 110th frequent misinterpretation of the Sikh religion to appear in World religion textbooks is the contrast between the supposed “pacifism” of Guru Nanak and the militancy of Guru Gobind Singh. Although a few authors of general surveys have recognized that the differences between the First Master and the Tenth Master on this point lay more in the circumstances of the time during which they lived rather than

in their basic orientations (the First Nanak's attitude- was no more "passive" than the Tenth Nanak's was "violent"-both forcefully preached the truth and asserted the rights of the oppressed), more often than not such authors have seen fit to exaggerate the contrast until it appears that there is an actual contradiction between early and later Sikhism. To cite just a few such misrepresentations:

Another element in the religion of Nanak was his pacifism. This man, in all his travels and with all the rejection that he received, maintained the stance of a pacifist. He never struck out at his enemies, and apparently he taught his disciples to follow this pattern. In contrast to the teachings of Nanak, Sikhs, in their later history, became known as the most militant of warriors.<sup>25</sup>

Although the teachings of Nanak himself set forth a quietistic religion that laid stress upon the individual and his relationship to god, the religion which developed after Nanak became highly political, leading to a religious state in the Punjab. Also, the original emphasis on individual virtues and piety became in time a faith that emphasized strength, combativeness, and even militarism.<sup>26</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh, built up Sikh fighting strength, and what had begun as a group of believers in brotherly love turned into a formidable military brotherhood which waged war against Muslims and which believed, as Muslims did, that death in battle was a passport to paradise.<sup>27</sup>

These negative judgements constitute only the most recent manifestations of a biased interpretation of Sikhism that was first articulated by some of the British scholar-administrators of the Nineteenth Century. W.L. McGregor, for example, in a book originally published in 1846, observed that, "Nanak, as the founder of the Sikhs, is greatly venerated by that nation, though they appear to have entirely forgotten his tenets of peace."<sup>28</sup> In a more sharply worded statement, H.H. Wilson, in an article first published in 1848, asserted that, [Guru Gobind Singh] changed community, and converted the whole character of the Sikhs of Nanak, the disciples of a religion of

spirituality and benevolence, and professors of a faith of peace and goodwill, into an armed confederacy, a military republic. The worship of “steel” was combined with that of the “book”, and instead of attempting to unite Muhammadans and Hindus into one family fraternity, he made his disciples vow implacable hatred to the followers of Mohammed.<sup>29</sup>

Although we might be inclined to be somewhat forgiving toward these Nineteenth Century figures, who were, after all, writing around the period of the Anglo-Sikh wars as well as engaged in the difficult task of legitimating British imperialism, we have to wonder what issue is at stake behind the very similar statements of contemporary scholars. Rather than tackle this problem directly, let us ask the same type of question about the early pacifism/later militancy contrast that we asked about Hindu/Muslim syncretism-the question of differential treatment. In the case at hand, the proper way to pose the question is, Are there other religious traditions in which the founder preached (or at least appeared to preach) a pacifist message that later followers disregarded?

Of the established world religions, Jainism has been the most faithful to its founder’s pacifism, whereas Buddhism’s historical record is somewhat uneven. However, indisputably the religion with the worst history of violence-a violence totally at odds with the teachings of its founder-is Christianity. Hence, while all of the above citations are more or less inaccurate evaluations of Sikhism, in many instances a little substitution of terms would transform them into highly accurate evaluations of Christianity. For example, if one substitutes relevant Christian terms for a few of the corresponding terms in McGregor’s statement cited earlier, one obtains an entirely appropriate description of the Christian tradition:

Jesus, as the founder of Christianity, is greatly venerated by the members of that religion, though they appear to have entirely forgotten his tenets of peace.

One could do much the same with the passages cited earlier from contemporary world religion textbooks.

Considering the applicability of such statements to the Christian tradition, one might be surprised to learn that the same authors who are willing to pronounce judgement on Sikhism fail to voice similar criticisms of Christianity. Given the peculiarity of this state of affairs, it would not be inappropriate to postulate same kind of unconscious repression-projection mechanism at work that might explain these scholars' lack of even-handedness. One does not have to be a psychoanalyst to perceive that guilt about the gap between one's ideals and one's behavior can be pushed out of the light of full awareness only to re-emerge as a projection. In lieu of a better explanation of the one-sided treatment of the Sikh religion by Westerners, it appears to the present writer that the relevant scholars are uncomfortable with the contradiction between theory and practice in their own religious tradition, but have repressed the problem and have projected the contradiction onto Sikhism, a tradition that *apparently* (but not actually) contains the same contradiction. Thus their condemnation of Sikh militancy is really a projection of their own (unexpressed, repressed) condemnation of the Christian tradition. The point here is not to criticize Christianity, but rather to once again point out the differential treatment that the Sikh religion has received at the hands of Western scholars; these kinds of evaluative statements would have been less objectionable had similar criticisms been leveled against other religious traditions as well.

**Conclusion:** To bring this discussion to a close, I should like to remark that I found it highly distressing that a relative amateur in the field of Sikh studies such as myself could uncover so many errors of fact and judgement in the academic productions of religion scholars—the great majority of whom are my countrymen. While many of the misrepresentations I have indicated result from sloppy scholarship, in these writers' defense we should take into account that the Sikh religion is one of the most understudied traditions in the American academy. If one glances at the structure of the American Academy of Religion, for instance, one finds program units devoted to such tiny traditions as alive American Religions, Baha'i and Zoroastrianism, but no unit

focusing on the relatively larger Sikh tradition.<sup>30</sup> The poverty of American scholarship on Sikhism is a self-perpetuating situation that prevents an American school of Sikh studies from emerging. For example, to speak from personal experience early in my graduate work I was discouraged from focusing on the Sikh tradition because, it was said, such a speciality would limit my employment prospects. As a consequence, I set aside my original interest for a different speciality and have only sporetically been able to put my energies into Sikhism.

I know that I have painted an extremely dismal picture of the state of Sikh studies in the American religion academy but there are indications that this situation could change. Americans as a group, and consequently the American academy, have become increasingly interested in the Sikh community, although unfortunately the primary cause of this new interest in Sikhism is the series of tragic events that have taken place in the Punjab over the course of the past five years or so. It was in the same way that Islam became an important area of study in the wake of upheavals in Islamic countries. We can anticipate the emergence (though on a smaller scale) of Sikhism as a recognized area of study.

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## CHAPTER 16

### THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE SIKHS

JAGJIT SINGH

1. Background: The Sikh social revolution has not drawn the attention it deserves probably for two main reasons. Max Weber has differentiated three systems of stratification based on class, status and power; but, prior to his clarification, economic stratification was “emphasized to the point of neglecting or confusing the role of other forms of stratification.”<sup>1</sup> “For revolutions before the middle of the nineteenth century, the search for class struggle can lead to grave confusion;”<sup>2</sup> because, “Classes in the Weberian sense clearly emerge out of market relationships”, and as these market relationships were weak before the growth of capitalism, “these failed to erupt of their isolation and reshape whole societies in their image.”<sup>3</sup> “Today it is a fashion to interpret every insurrection, rebellion, or revolt in terms of class conflict. Yet this is absolutely incorrect from a historical point of view. This is a firmly established fact: revolts and revolutions prior to the end of the eighteenth century are really not expressions of the class struggle...It is difficult today to understand that the social issue of exploitation never played an important part in revolts prior to the eighteenth century. “<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is wrong to minimize the Sikh social revolution in the light of later historical developments of the capitalist era; especially so because, in India, a Chaturpati king was lower in ‘caste-status’ than his own priest (*purohita*), who was economically dependent on the prince, and the wealthiest Bania was lower in ‘caste status than the poorest Kshatriya. In short, caste circumscribed the limits within which Indian social, political and economic activities were to flow, and also set the direction these were to follow.

The second reason is that, even within the feudal set-up, the social and political context differed from society to society. Islam was lucky that it had to encounter at its birth primitive heathenic beliefs which it was easier to pierce than the hard shell of the elaborate dogma and religious philosophy (Varna Ashrama Dharma) the caste in India had spun around itself. Moreover, the Arabian society at that time was quite close to the level of primitive communism.<sup>5</sup> The Sikh movement, on the other hand, had to face the uphill task of overcoming not only caste, but an elaborate caste system.

**2. The Caste and the Caste System:** A good deal of misun-derstanding is caused, by confusing caste, as such, elements of which are present in most societies, with the caste system, which developed in India alone. We have to emphasize this distinction because it is vital to the clarification of our subject.

“The laws of the Anglo-Saxons laid it down that none was to seek in marriage a mate outside one’s class... Well-marked status- groups within a society, distinguished from one another by rights and disabilities, separated from one another by the absence of freedom of inter-marriage, may, therefore, be considered to be a common characteristic of the mental background and social picture of the Indo-European cultures.”<sup>6</sup> “Neither race nor occupation or function is by itself enough to cause a caste system to come into being, or to account for its restrictions on commensality and marriage.”<sup>7</sup> Hereditary functionalism does not constitute caste.<sup>8</sup>

It is very important, therefore, to understand that elements of caste exclusiveness, common to many other societies, assumed special significance in India only because these got welded into a system that gave them added power, momentum and thrust.

Hutton has given a number of examples where the parallel to the excreableness’ attached to our outcastes is very close. In Burma, “pagoda slave is such for life, and his children and descendents are pagoda slaves *in perpetum*. If a person who is not a pagoda slave marries or be married to pagoda slave even unwillingly, such a person and all her or his children, even by a former marriage, also become

automatically pagoda slaves perpetually. Pagoda slaves cannot be employed in any other capacity than that of a pagoda servant. It will be observed that in the last two respects the disabilities suffered are even more severe than those of outcastes in India, though the element of untouchability is not stressed at all to the same degree.”<sup>9</sup> In Japan, “So strong is the prejudice against them (Eta) that they were considered sub-human...lived in separate quarters in the village; had to wear distinct dress; could only marry among themselves; had no social intercourse with other classes, and could go abroad between sunset and sunrise...”<sup>10</sup>

What is pertinent to our purpose in these examples is that although there was common ground in these countries and in India for the origin of caste, in India alone it developed into an organic structure covering the whole society. In other countries, elements of even extreme social exclusiveness (such as in the case of pagoda slaves and Eta) became stabilized in an undeveloped form, or even degenerated, so as to affect only a limited part of society, leaving the main body of the people untouched.

“For the Burmese as a whole are as free from the working of the caste system as are other peoples among whom analogous institutions have been pointed out.”<sup>11</sup> In India alone the elements of caste exclusiveness developed into an elaborate system covering the whole society.

A system is qualitatively different from a casual or unmotivated get-together or assortment of factors or forces. It is what distinguishes philosophy, religion or science from an unintegrated mass of doctrines, tenets or data. It is what distinguishes an army from a rabble, as it involves organization, arrangement, method and well-thought out principles of procedure. Above all, a system assumes a purpose, an objective, a direction, a plan, towards the fulfilment of which the functioning of the different constituents of the system is coordinated and harmonized. More-over, a system acquires its own cumulative power, thrust, momentum and grip.

Why the caste system developed in India and no where else is a complicated question not easy to answer. But, broadly speaking other

societies lacked an elaborate caste ideology and a human agency which could harness the functioning of the different caste elements towards a set purpose and a fixed direction. In India, the Brahmin Lavite caste was consciously committed and devoted to the preservation of primarily its own 'caste-status' and, to a lesser degree, that of other 'twice-born' castes. Towards that end, economic status was lowered than 'caste-status', and political power was made subservient to the Brahmin priesthood.<sup>12</sup> The preservation of the caste order, based on 'caste-status', became the overriding compulsion of the caste society to such an extent that all liberal and egalitarian socio-religious values and trends were either engulfed in the caste ideology, or so distorted as to blunt their liberal import.<sup>13</sup>

**3. Three Pillars of the Caste System:** There are three main factors responsible for constituting and consolidating the castes into the Indian caste system, namely, the caste ideology, Brahmins, and the caste-society.

The fundamental assumption of the caste ideology is that, "Men were not - as for classical Confusionism - in principle equal, but for ever unequal."<sup>14</sup> They were so by birth, and some of them "were as unlike as man and animal."<sup>15</sup> This ideology of human inequality was sought to be reinforced through a number of channels, but mainly through the religious sanction of Hindu Scriptures, Hindu Dharma and the taboos of pollution.

The Purushua Sukta Hymn in the Rig Veda was regarded as a divine ordinance sanctioning the origin of the four castes.<sup>16</sup> Gita sanctified hereditary functionalism ("Congenital duty, O son of Kunti though defective, ought not to be abandoned.");<sup>17</sup> and Lord Krishna claims himself to be the author of castes.<sup>18</sup> What is even more significant is that in the huge corpus of orthodox literature there is not a single line which specifically condemns the Varna Ashrama Dharma. This scriptural sanction of the Varna Ashrama Dharma and the castes bears major responsibility for consolidating the castes; because, "To acknowledge the authority of the Vedas, as demanded of the Hindu, means *fides implicita* in a more' fundamental sense than that of the

Catholic Church...”<sup>19</sup> and “Brahmanical and caste power resulted from the inviolability of all sacred law...”<sup>20</sup>

The concept of Hindu Dharma came to be very closely inter-woven with the social order of Brahmanism, as the caste became a part and parcel of the Varna Ashrama Dharma, the religiously sanctioned caste system. The Hindu law books were significantly named as Dharam Shastras. “In contrast to the orthodox sects, the heresy of the theophratries consists in the fact that they tear the individual away from his ritualistic duties, hence from the duties of the caste of his birth, and thus ignore or destroy his *dharma*. When this happens, the Hindu loses caste. And since only through caste one can belong to the Hindu community, he is lost to it.”<sup>21</sup>

The taboos about pollution played the biggest role in extending the range of the caste system and in projecting it in day to day life. The idea of pollution associated with the effects of child-birth and the monthly period of women had much to do with the undermining of their social position. The peasants were downgraded because ploughing involved the killing of worms;<sup>22</sup> and, “The lowest caste strata was considered to be absolutely defiling and contaminating... This stratum comprised services which Hinduism had come to consider ritually impure; tanning, leather work.”<sup>23</sup>

What we have cited above should be enough to leave no doubt that the caste ideology was altogether different from the loose bundle or combination of social prejudices such as we meet in other societies. The caste ideology raised social exclusiveness and hierarchy to the level of a religious principle by stamping it with the sanction of Hindu scriptures, Shastras, and Hindu Dharma; and this was the ideological base on which the super-structure of the caste system was reared and maintained.

The Brahmins, as a Levite caste, were the all-time standing kingpin of the caste system; they were both its ideologues and the human focal point around which the system revolved. Almost all authorities agree that practically all the orthodox literature is the work of, or inspired by, the Brahmin hierarchy,<sup>24</sup> and the Brahmins were its

sole interpreters. The Brahmins came to occupy the central position in Hindu society because caste is essentially a social rank, and the social rank of the castes is determined with reference to the Brahmins.<sup>25</sup> In the political sphere, too, : “Whereas in other countries the rivalry between the nobility and the sacerdotal class generally resulted in the triumph of the temporal power over the spiritual in India reverse has been the case... The supremacy of the Brahmins has now become one of the cardinal doctrines of Hinduism.”<sup>26</sup>

The role of caste ideology and Brahmin Levite caste in initiating and consolidating the caste system has been widely discussed and understood. What we want to emphasize here is the role of the third main pillar of the caste system, its social frame-work, i e. the caste society itself.

Although the caste ideology, its codes and rules, were laid down by the Brahmins, the adherence to these rules and usages was ensured by the caste members of the locality, who knew one another intimately, through caste councils (Panchayats) or other-wise. The very constitution of the caste society, its every cell, was built on the principle of social inequality and hierarchy, and the caste society was inexorable in its operational efficiency to uphold that principle. The irony of it is that “the lower the caste in the social scale, the stronger its combination and the more efficient its organization.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, the lower castes were more prone to tighten their own caste shackles.

To what extent the caste governs every member of the caste is detailed by Wilson, who sums up: “It (caste) interferes, in short, with all the relations and events of life, and with what precedes and follows life...”<sup>28</sup> And, the inexorable working of the caste mechanism is illustrated by Abbe Dubois, who describes the fate of an ex-communicated man. “It renders him, so to speak, dead to the world. With the loss of caste, he loses not only his relations and (riends, but sometimes even his wife and children, who prefer to abandon him entirely rather than share his ill--fortune.”<sup>29</sup>

Each salient element of the caste ideology (i.e. caste hierarchy;

scriptural sanction; sanctions of Hindu Dharma, ritualism, custom and tradition; caste connubial and commensal restrictions; the taboos of pollution; the theory of Karma as applied to justify caste, etc.) fastens each and every individual of a sub-caste with its own ideological strand of human inequality and social exclusiveness. In other words, a member of a sub-caste was bound down, not by one or two, but by several such ideological bonds or chains. If one keeps in view how difficult it has been to erase social prejudices even where these were operating as a single factor (e.g. as colour bar in U.S.A., or as taboos in Burmah and Japan, or as endogamy in class societies) the improbability of overcoming the multiplicative power of so many different strands of caste ideology, acting in unison, becomes quite apparent.

What made the problem of the caste system still more intricate and intractable was that this composite ideology of caste hierarchy and social exclusiveness was fused with every fibre of the social texture of the caste society. Every individual in the caste-society was not only himself entangled by several tentacles of the caste ideology, but he was fastened to other similarly bound individuals within a sub-caste to form a rigid horizontal social network. In fact, the caste-bonds were the most predominant, if not the only, social bonds that united the members of a sub-caste. On top of it, this horizontal social network of each sub-caste was tied vertically, layer upon layer, both ideologically (as the ritual, the ethical code, and the penal code were all hierarchically graded)<sup>30</sup> and organizationally, to other similarly constituted higher and lower sub-castes. In short, the social fabric of the caste society and the caste ideology were interlocked around each and every social unit of the caste society. This is what made the caste system synonymous with the Hindu society. In Risky's somewhat graphic phrase, the removal of the caste system would be "more than a revolution: it would resemble the removal of some elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction." In any case, the caste system could not be tackled without tackling the caste society; it was imperative and could not be by passed. This perspective is of great importance for understanding the social significance of the Sikh movement.

#### 4. The caste System and the Sikhs in the Period of Ideological Ascendency

The Sikh movement attacked all the three (and other) pillars of the caste system. Guru Nanak directly condemned caste ideology and called it as the wisdom of the perverse.<sup>31</sup> The Sikh Gurus also rejected the Hindu scriptures;<sup>32</sup> and, since Guru Arjun established Guru Granth as the Sikh scripture, Sikhs have never owned any other. Varna Ashrama Dharma was integral part of the Hindu Dharma, but Guru Nanak rejected it and “made Dharma perfect by blend-ing the four castes into one.”<sup>33</sup> Discarding pollution taboos, all the members of the Khalsa Dal (including Rangrettas drawn from outcastes) dined together,<sup>34</sup> which fact was vouchsafed by two Muslim historians in 1733.<sup>35</sup>

Although the Brahmins were the third numerous caste in the Punjab, out numbering all but Jats and Rajputs,<sup>36</sup> there were only about 7000 Sikh Brahmins in the Census of 1881. Even these Brahmins did not constitute a priestly class, as it is a well--known fact that the Sikhs have no hereditary levite caste. By eliminating the Brahmanical influence in the Panth, the Sikh society eliminated the human kingpin of the caste system from within its ranks.

Break from the caste ideology and getting rid of Brahmin Levite caste were no doubt vital steps for undermining the caste system. But, what we want to emphasize is that the greatest hurdle was the social framework of the caste system, i.e. the caste society. The anti-caste movements could survive only if these divorced themselves from the caste society.

Max Weber writes “Once established, the assimilative power of Hinduism is so great that it tends even to integrate social forms considered beyond its religious borders. The religious movements of expressly anti-Brahminical and anti-caste character, that were Contrary to one of the fundamentals of Hinduism, have been in all essentials returned to the caste order Unless the sect is able to abolish the caste system altogether, instead of simply tearing away Some of its members, it becomes, from the stand point of the caste system, a quasi-guest

folk, a kind community in an ambiguous position in Order.”<sup>37</sup>

As the abolition of the system at one stroke could happen only through a miracle, the only practical way was to form a society outside the caste society and use it as a base for attacking the caste system from outside. This lesson of Indian history is of the utmost importance for grasping the social significance of the Sikh movement. The contaminative power of the caste system was a great that it did not spare Indian Muslims and Christians,<sup>38</sup> whom the caste society was not prepared to assimilate even if they wished it. Then, how could those anti-caste movements escape, whom the caste society was prepared to assimilate and who did not resist assimilation? All such movements, whether be of Lingayats, Chaitanyites, or of other radical Bhaktas like Namdev, Kabir, and other Saints, despite all their radical anti-caste innovations, remained as mere sects of Hinduism, or as mere appendages of the caste society. None of these came to be enumerated in census operations as distinctly non-Hindu social units like the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. It was because these anti-caste protests did not develop, for one reason or another, into sustained movements which worked consistently over a period to establish and maintain their separate social identity from the caste society in the manner the Sikh movement did in the revolutionary period of about 275 years (approximately from 1486 A.D., when Guru Nanak started his mission, to the establishment of the Missals in 1764). Even the ideological anti-caste distinctiveness of such movements tended to fade after the inspiration provided by their founders began to wane after their death, and they became more and more vulnerable to the “assimilative power of Hinduism”. In other words, mere ideological gap between the caste ideology and the anti-caste ideology of these movements, howsoever wide, was not enough. The chances of success of any anti-caste movement were in direct proportion to the extent it established and retained a separate social identity from

the caste society. A very important achievement of the Sikh movement, therefore, is that it marked a clear break from the caste society.

The Vars of Bhai Gurdas link the creation of the Panth with the abolition of caste and sects.<sup>39</sup> A contemporary Muslim historians of Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) testifies that the “Sikhs do not read the Mantras (i.e. Vedic or other scriptural hymns) of the Hindus, they do not venerate their temples or idols, nor do they esteem their Avtars.”<sup>40</sup> The creation of the Khalsa made the final break with the caste society. For joining the Khalsa brotherhood, one had to take five solemn vows of Dharm Nash, Kul Nash, etc. which cut at the roots of the cardinal principles of the caste system.<sup>41</sup>

The newswriter of the area sent to the Mughal Emperor a report of the Guru’s address at the time of the creation of the Khalsa (1699). “Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another.”<sup>42</sup> This is also corroborated by the near-contemporary Koer Singh (1751), who records that the Guru “blended the four castes into one”, had rejected, both the Hindu and Muslim religions and created a new noble Khalsa, wherein Sudra, Vaishya, Khatri and Brahmin eat together.<sup>43</sup>

The later Sikh literature of the 18th century, written by different persons and at different times, is agreed on this issue that the Khalsa broke away from the caste ideology and the caste society. *Rehatnamas*, which contain mostly precepts, take a very strong line on this issue. “He who abides by the six *Darshnas*, drags along with him his whole family into hell.”<sup>44</sup> “If any baptized Sikh puts on Janeo, he will be caste into hell.”<sup>45</sup> “A Sikh should sever connection with Mussalmans and Hindus (Mussalmans Hindu *ki aan mete*).”<sup>46</sup> Kesar Singh Chibber (1769) writes that the Guru created a new Third Panth (Khalsa Panth) by breaking with both Hindus and Mussalmans.<sup>47</sup> Sukha Singh (1797) states the same fact more explicitly: “Sudra, Vaish, Khatri and Brahmin all ate together. The religion of Vedas was rejected... All the religions of Hindus were discarded and one pure, ‘Khalsa’ was established.”<sup>48</sup> One Bhai Gurdas Singh wrote about the same time: “Ved, Puran, six Shastras and Kuran were eliminated... The third religion of Khalsa

became supreme.”<sup>49</sup> We have already referred to non-Sikh sources of Dabistan and the Mughal news writer (1699). In order to appreciate this ‘striking and complete break from caste society, we have to remind that no one could be a Hindu unless he was born Hindu and also without belonging to one caste or another;<sup>50</sup> and that restrictions on inter-caste commensality were fundamental to the caste system.<sup>51</sup>

All the evidence given above belongs to the 17th and 18th centuries. It clearly demonstrates that the separation of the Khalsa from the caste society was not an accident or an expediency. It was a regular movement which continued without a break during its revolutionary phase. But, a preposterous proposition continues to be persistently repeated that the separate identity of the Khalsa from the caste society was a creation of the Singh Sabha movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries under the influence of the divide and rule policy of the British. The Singh Sabha movement was a revival, no doubt, but by no means an innovation.

## 5. A new Socio-Political Order

The Khalsa not only broke away from the caste society, but also succeeded to a remarkable degree in giving an egalitarian socio-political orientation to its own polity. This was both an acid test and a proof of its separate identity from the caste society as well as its *raison d’etre*.

(a) **Social Structure:** The unit of the Sikh Panth was Sangat (i.e. a congregation of Sikhs) and not sub-caste or caste. Bhai Gurdas in his Var eleven has given account of some of the prominent Sangats or his time, from which it is clear that almost all the Sangats were composed of Sikhs drawn from all castes, including the Sudras and outcastes, without any distinction.

(b) **Mass Base of the Khalsa:** The Khalsa had not only an egalitarian socio-political mission, but it had also a plebeian composition. This mass base of the Khalsa reinforced the execution of the Khalsa mission as the down-trodden became both the architects and masters of their own destiny.

The plebeian base of the Khalsa is testified to by Sikh historical literature.<sup>52</sup> Non-Sikh sources of history also confirm that scavengers,

leather-dressers, and such like persons were very numerous among Banda's forces.<sup>53</sup> The mass base of the Panth continued even in the later period.<sup>54</sup>

(c) **The Spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization:** More than the form or its composition, it is the spirit which prevails within a movement which reflects its real character. The prevalence of the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization is attested to by Sikh sources of history<sup>55</sup>, and is confirmed by Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din (1722-23), who writes that the low caste Hindus swelled the ranks of Banda, and everyone in his army "would address the other as the adopted son of the oppressed Guru (Guru Gobind Singh) and would publicize himself with the title of *sahibzada*."<sup>56</sup>

(d) **Political Power:** The Sikh movement not only raised the social status of the people drawn from the lower castes into the Panth, but also shared political power with them. There cannot be a permanent footing for a social revolution without a corresponding political set up.<sup>57</sup> The Khalsa shared political power with scavengers and leather dressers, "the lowest of low in Indian estimation", under Banda.<sup>58</sup> Even in the Missal period, ordinary peasants, village menials (Jassa Singh Ramgarhia), and distillers (Jassa Singh Ahluwalia), whom the caste society rated very near the outcastes, became the leaders. What is even more significant is that there was no one else from castes higher than these. "...the whole country of the Punjab...is in the possession of this community (the Khalsa) and most of their exalted leaders are of low origin, such as carpenters, animal-skin treaters and jats."<sup>59</sup> As against it, "None of the revolutions (English, American, French or Russian) quite substituted a brand new ruling class for the old one, atleast not unless one thinks of a class without bothering about the human beings who make up the class..."<sup>60</sup>

The capture of political power by the commoners had a great social impact. It was on this account that the Sikhs in general (drawn from all castes) have come to be addressed as Sardars upto this day by the non-Sikhs. It was the taste of political power which made the Sikh

Jat feel prouder than the Rajput,<sup>61</sup> and the Ramgarhias (Carpenters) and Ahluwalias (distillers) feel as equals to the Jat.<sup>62</sup>

## **6. The Caste System and the Sikhs in the Later Period**

“It would also seem that most men cannot long stand the strain. o( prolonged effort to live in accordance with very high ideals Thermidor (i.e. return to less hectic time) comes as naturally to societies in revolution as an ebbing tide, as calm after a storm, as convalescence after fever, as the snapping back of a stretched elastic band. “<sup>63</sup>

This slide towards Thermidor, common to all revolutions, was compounded in the case of the Sikh movement by another develop-ment. The Sikh Panth had no sectarian, ethnic, or regional loyalty as a base of its own. With the exception of stray Muslims, all its recruits came from those Hindus who were drawn towards it by its ideological appeal; and, who were, in addition, during the period of the revolutionary struggle, prepared to suffer for its practical fulfilment. The number of Khalsa guerillas was for this reason, at one stage, reduced to about 2,000 persons.<sup>64</sup> Thus the ‘ideologically qualitative content of the movement during the revolutionary phase came to be regulated so to say, automatically. But, with the prospects of political power in sight, the number of Singhs suddenly rose, as estimated by Khushwaqt Rai in 1811, to be about 200,000.<sup>65</sup> It is said that this number swelled further during the *raj* of Ranjit Singh, but what can be said for certain is that the number of Sikhs increased a good deal in the British period. Between 1881 and 1931, the total number of Sikhs increased from 1,853,426 to 4,335,771.<sup>66</sup> As such, conversions were, by and large, not so much a matter of conviction as of convenience, these proselytes retained in varying degrees some elements of their heritage from their previous connection with the caste system. What is of consequence, therefore, for our study in this background is to examine in what manner, or to what extent, the revolutionary heritage of the Panth has affected the abolition or retention of the caste heritage of these proselytes at various levels of the Sikh society during the modern

period, about which alone we have authentic information regarding the post-revolutionary period.

**(A) At the Panthic Level:** (a) At the Panthic level, there is no discrimination against Sikhs drawn from any caste. Sikhs from the out castes have been the priests (*granthies*) of Harmander Sahib, Amritsar, the most sacred place to the Sikhs; and, by an unwritten convention, vice-presidents of S.G.P.C. (the constitutional body which controls all the major historic *gurdwaras* in the Punjab) have been elected from Sikhs drawn from the outcastes. The present incumbent is Ujjagar Singh 'Rangretta'. As against this, the Shankracharya has publicly declared very recently that free entry of Sudras into the premier Hindu temples would lead to the destruction of Hinduism.

The institution of *Langar* (as distinct from taking *prasad* in a temple) has been a very important factor in keeping alive, at the Panthic level, the anti-caste heritage of the earlier period. In the *Langars* attached to the *gurdwaras* and at the time of *Jor Melas* (Sikh religious gatherings), Sikhs drawn from all castes, including the outcastes, dine together and no body bothers by whom the food is cooked or served. This fact can be verified at any time. But "it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be atleast ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes."<sup>67</sup>

**(b) Jat Sikhs vis-a-vis Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs and Ram-garhia Sikhs:** These categories do not constitute a hierarchy, as is wrongly supposed, at least in the Brahmanical sense. A hierarchy presupposes fixation of higher and lower grades, and, what is more, their acceptance by the categories concerned voluntarily or otherwise. As a consequence of the Sikh Revolution, the Jat Sikhs do not recognize anybody as their social superiors;<sup>68</sup> on the other hand, "Khatri Sikhs probably considered themselves above the Jat Sikhs in status."<sup>69</sup> This apparent contradiction in these two statements is resolved if one faces the reality that none of the two groups regards itself as inferior to the other-the Jat Sikh because of the elevation of his social position by the Sikh Revolution, and the Khatri Sikh because of his wealth, education and the lingering consciousness that the Jats had been once

his inferiors in the caste hierarchy. In this respect, we bracket the Arora Sikhs with Khatri Sikhs, as the former claim Khatri origin and are socially, more or less, similarly placed.

Similarly, ever since the formation of Ramgarhia Missal, the Ramgarhia Sikhs have regarded themselves as peers to the Jat Sikhs; and their recently acquired phenomenal prosperity,<sup>70</sup> as compared to the Jat Sikhs, has added to their pride and social status. Ramgarhia Sikhs have never been denied access to *Gurdwaras*, but sometimes they build their own just to assert their independent status. In short, the Ramgarhia Sikhs do not accept at all that the Jat Sikhs are superior to them.

Ramgarhia Sikhs are not, as wrongly alleged, a sub-caste of Tarkhan Sikhs, because there are no commensal or connubial barriers between the two as evidenced by extensive family ties between them. Any Tarkhan Sikh, who leaves his village surroundings and chooses to call himself a Ramgarhia, automatically becomes one.

There are, therefore, no grounds for inferring that the Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs and Ramgarhia Sikhs constitute a hierarchy, because stratification "implies that a zero-sum of I-win-you-lose relationship exists between higher and lower strata."<sup>71</sup> In no case do they constitute a hierarchy in the Brahmanical sense; as they freely interdine, and whatever inhibitions there might be regarding intermarriages between them, belong to the type of group prejudices common to most societies, as there are absolutely no religious or ritual barriers.

**(c) Artisans and Menials:** Out of a total of 1,853,426 Sikhs in 1881, the number of artisan and menial castes among the Sikhs, other than the Tarkhans, was Lobar Sikhs, 24,614; Jhinwar Sikhs 21,754; Nai Sikhs 21,500; Chimba Sikhs 17,748; Sunar Sikhs 14,046; Kumhar Sikhs 11,947, and Kalal Sikhs 8,931.<sup>72</sup> In other words these categories do not constitute any caste problem of major social significance. Of these, Kalal Sikhs, although assigned a lower position than most of the artisan castes, raised their social status considerably, like the Ramgarhia Sikhs, by capturing political power when they formed the Ahluwalia Missal. Since then they have taken to service, primarily

in the army and the police,<sup>73</sup> and have shaken off their dependence upon any social hierarchy. The other artisan castes of the Sikhs migrated to the cities in large numbers,<sup>74</sup> where, being in small numbers and being widely dispersed, they can hardly be treated as compact groups. In the villages, too, they are similarly dispersed. As already noted, Sikhs derived from all castes, excepting the Mazhbis, interdine. Therefore; the Sikhs from artisans and menial categories face no social discrimination excepting that they find reluctance on the part of Jat, Khatri, Arora and Ramgarhia Sikhs to intermarry with them. Such intermarriages are not so common, but they are not insignificant either, the writer himself having attended such marriage ceremonies on a number of occasions. The important point to note, however, is that intermarriages are prevented by sentiment and not by hard and fast rules. "Marriages outside the class in Europe might be rare and invalid, but in India, if it is contracted outside 'the caste, it is a sacrilege."<sup>75</sup> Such marriages are neither a sacrilege in the Sikh society, nor are these visited by penalties such as those imposed by the caste ideology.

**(B) At the village Level:** It is at the village level that we find remnants of the social hierarchy operating among the Sikhs, as it does, more or less on similar lines, in Muslim villages. In both cases, the peasantry, whether Jat, Baloch or Pathan, is at the top of the hierarchy, and the artisans and menials are arranged in different lower grades, though under different labels in some cases (e.g. Mashki for Jhiwar, Mochi for Chamar, and Mussali for Chuhra). Our subject is confined to the position of the Sikhs vis-a-vis the Indian caste system, but it is pertinent to point out that most of the artisans and menials got converted to Islam long ago under the Muslim rule and their social and occupational status remains much the same as it was before conversion. This fact suggests two important implications. One, that the social hierarchy in the village has more to do with the village economy than with religion, because no body can accuse Islam of casteism. Second, if the village hierarchy could not be overhauled during the long impact of Islam and Muslim rule, it is too much to expect drastic changes in the hierarchy of Sikh villages which embraced

Sikhism at a very late date during the post-revolutionary period.

To come to our main thesis, let us find out in what respects and how far the social gradings in the Sikh villages compare with the corresponding hierarchy of the Indian caste system. The very fact that quite a large number of Sardars and outcastes left Hindu ranks and embraced Sikhism during the British period (when there could be no political pressure by the Sikhs) shows that there was a clear advantage in doing so. "Between 1901 and 1911 there were large scale conversions to Sikhism among the chuhras and chamars. Hinduism lost some 151,806 chuhras and 189,103 chamars in this period."<sup>76</sup>

Chimba Sikhs, Jhiwar Sikhs and Labana Sikhs (all from exterior castes) had hypergamous relations with their Hindu counterparts,<sup>77</sup> and the practice of this hypergamy was a step for breaking off from the parent castes.<sup>78</sup> Hutton points to the low position of the Dhobis and Chimbhas who washed clothes.<sup>79</sup> The fact that a washerman's pursuit brings him into contact with menstrually polluted clothes is enough to make him an outcaste no less than the scavenger who removed night soil or dead bodies.<sup>80</sup> The Sikh Chimbhas are not at all treated as out-castes. In another important field, the Sikhs from artisan castes have clearly improved their social position in the villages, because all the Sikhs in the village, except the Mazhabis, interdine.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, the Sikh Jats have hypergamous relations with the lower castes of the village. These are two basic departures from the two 'Constitutive principles' of the Indian caste system. Also, these Sikhs share religious equality with the Jat Sikhs, whether in the village or out-side it. The Granthi in the village Gurdwara, from whatever caste drawn whether Mazhbi or any other, is respected as much as any Granthi from whatever level of society drawn.

These facts are enough to show that the Sikhs from artisan and menial castes have, travelled a long distance away from the corresponding social position of their counterparts in the caste- society.

The real tough problem at the village level is that of Chamar and Mazhabi Sikhs. We do not want to minimise that this problem is

the darkest social blot on the Sikh society, but for the sake of our comparative study we have to point out: "No Miasma of touch pollution is attributed to them (i.e. Mazhabi Sikhs drawn from the sweeper caste).<sup>82</sup> This is a major advance from the position of the Hindu untouchables (among whom Hutton counts Chamar, Dhobi, Dom and Sweeper castes) in the caste society, where, "Some castes themselves low are especially strict in keeping un touch ables at a distance..."<sup>83</sup> But, the greatest advantage to these castes is that since Sikhism rejects the Hindu system of Yarn Ashram Dharma, there is no religious prejudice, or bar against their moral religious or spiritual progress. This is evidenced by the fact that Sudra Saints, whose Bani (hymns) is in the Guru Granth are as much respected as the Sikh Gurus and a Sudra Granthi or President of the S.G.P.C. or the Jathedar (head) of the Akal Takhat has the same authority and commands the same respect among the Sikhs as any other Sikh Granthi, President or Jathedar.

"They (Mazhabi Sikhs) sit among others in the temple."<sup>84</sup> On the other band, we have already mentioned Shankracharya's public declaration that the free entry of Sudras in the premier Hindu temples would lead to the destruction of Hinduism.

"All Sikh Jats, excepting the Mazhabis, interdine."<sup>85</sup> Since I.P. Singh conducted his investigations in 1959, 1961, we have not come across any other scientific sociological field study on this subject, but it is a widely held opinion that the commensal pre-judice against the Mazhabi Sikh among the Sikh Jats in the villages has almost disappeared. Secondly, the reluctance of the Sikh Jats to dine with the Mazhabi Sikhs in their own village, although they do so knowingly at the Langars, appears to be more a question of maintaining their social prestige in the locality, rather than, unlike the caste society, of ritual taboos sancti-fied by the Varna Ashrama Dharma. Thirdly, there is readiness among Jat Sikhs to accept Mazhabi brides.<sup>86</sup> This automatically means preparedness to abrogate commensal barriers with respect to atleast their Mazhabi brides, and this fact further supports the view we have expressed above.

The Ramdasias or the Sikh Chamars “occupy a much higher position than the Hindu Chamar.”<sup>87</sup> The workers in leather (Chamars) “are looked upon in detestation by orthodox Hindus” and the sweepers are “regarded as the very dregs of impurity.”<sup>88</sup> Marengo points out that the Chamar and Chuhra Sikhs had more literates than the Chamar and Chuhra Hindus;<sup>89</sup> and “the Chuhra Sikhs were more frequent in dropping their traditional occupation than the Chuhra Muslims or the Chuhra Hindus.”<sup>90</sup> “The Chuhra Hindu occupies the lowest place in the social scale. He was avoided by all, and his touch was considered as pollution. When converted to Sikhism, he was still a village menial but he was no longer the remover of night soil. By taking the Pahul (baptism), the Chuhra convert might change his standing in the hierarchy.”<sup>91</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The revolutionary and post-revolutionary phase of a revolution are two differently motivated periods. “In the former case, virtue was the order of the day.”<sup>92</sup> Whereas in the latter period what prevails is “self-seeking at the expense of revolutionary idealism.”<sup>93</sup> Therefore, these two periods should not be so confused as to judge one in the light of the other.

The anti-caste achievements of the Sikh movement during the period of the Gurus and the Khalsa Dal stand out in bold relief. No Indian movement succeeded, to the extent the Sikh revolution did, in making the Khatris, Aroras, Jats, artisans, village menials and the outcastes (Chamars and sweepers), forego their caste hierarchy and merge on equal terms into a genuine brotherhood of the Khalsa; or shared political power with ‘the lowest of low in Indian estimation’, as was done under Banda; or enabled the Jat (on the border line of Vaisyas and Sudras) to regard his social status as higher than that of the Brahmin and the Rajput; or raised Jats, shepherds, artisans (carpenters) and the despised caste of Kalals to be the rulers of the land. These achievements compare favourably even on the world map, if it is kept in view that the social stigma attached to the Sudras and the outcastes in the Indian society was far worse than that from which the Negroes in the U.S.A. or the slaves suffered elsewhere.

As regards the post-revolutionary period, any assessment of the problem of caste vis-a-vis the Sikhs would remain lopsided unless viewed in the proper perspective. Owing to human failings and environmental hurdles, the progress of human society in terms of its ideological aspirations has been so slow and imperceptible<sup>94</sup> that many sceptics doubt whether there has been any transformation of human motivation at all.<sup>95</sup> Hence, it is the overall contribution, even if small, which a revolutionary movement makes towards humanitarian progress that matters more than its shortcomings. The social discrimination against the Negroes prevailing in the U.S.A. should not blind us to the ennobling spirit of Christianity that opened a new chapter in the political liberation of Negroes there. Though slaves survived in the Muslim world, but one must not on that account overlook one of the greatest egalitarian social revolutions in the history of the world brought about by Islam. For a similar reason, it is no mean achievement of the Sikh Revolution that the Sikh Panth, despite all the counter-revolutionary forces at work in the post-revolutionary period, remains cut off from the most rigid social system known to mankind. All other Indian radical movements have reverted, or have remained as appendages, to the caste society, and hence to the caste system.

Secondly, the residuary progress that revolutionary movements leave behind is so impalpable that it is measurable only in comparative terms and not by absolute standards. Whereas the Hindu temples and *Maths* are the strongholds of the caste ideology and practices, there are no religious, commensal, or other social discriminations at the Panthic level. At the village level, too the Sikhs drawn from artisan, menial and outcaste categories are decidedly well-placed socially when compared to their counterparts in the caste society. These contrasts are, indeed, significant.

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## CHAPTER 17

### JANAMSAKHIS – THEIR VALUE AND IMPORTANCE

**S. S. KOHLI**

Introductory Remarks: For at least four past centuries *Janam-sakhis* have remained very popular among the religious-minded Sikhs. They have been read with faith and gusto and people believed, with a sense of wonder, whatever was recorded in them till some scholars raises controversial issues about them in the first and second quarters of the present century. In the year of the quin-centenary celebrations of the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev, the scholars became more conscious about Janamsakhis and published their research material. These scholars were Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs. The writer of this article undertook a tour of the Indian sub-continent with the help of the Panjab University, Chandigarh, in order to know the itinerary of Guru Nanak Dev during his missionary journeys. Punjabi University, Patiala published an atlas of the journeys of the Guru. Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Delhi, published a biography of Guru Nanak Dev written by Dr. Trilochan Singh. Punjabi University, Patiala also published a significant work on Janamsakhi Tradition, prepared by Dr. Kirpal Singh. Dr. W. H. McLeod published his Ph.D. thesis entitled “Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion” a year earlier, which presents his rigorous scrutiny of the Janamsakhis. Various new critical editions of the Janamsakhis also appeared, which were published by the scholars and prominent Sikh organisations.

Etymologically, the word ‘Janamsakhi’ connotes ‘the testimony of birth’. The Janamsakhis which form part of Punjabi literature, mainly concern the life of Guru Nanak Dev, the Founder of Sikhism. They bear testimony not only to the birth of the child Nanak, but also to various incidents in his life and his death (1538), with the life-span of seventy

years, five months and seven days. They are valuable sources of the life of the Guru though they do not present a systematic and complete life-account: Whatever each writer or compiler of the *Sakhis* could know from the oral tradition, was recorded by him. Since the Guru had travelled far and wide, not only within India, but also in foreign lands, the material about his journeys outside Punjab was not easily available, therefore the information could only be gathered from the people of far-away places visiting the important memo-rials of the Guru, or coming to meet his successor. Only a person, who accompanied the Guru during his travels, could give or record the correct information. Some names of such persons have been mentioned in the Janamsakhis, but the most prominent name is that of Bhai Bala, whose name is appended with one of the Janamsakhis. It is recorded that when he met Guru Angad Dev, the successor of Guru Nanak Dev, he narrated the life-account of the first Guru, which was recorded by the scribe Paira Mokha in the presence of the second Guru. As the tradition goes, this Janamsakhi was the earliest. It was considered reliable and thus it became very popular with the Sikh masses. The enemies of the Guru, not bearing his popularity, tried to malign the personality of the Guru by interpolating some nefarious statements and anecdotes in this Janamsakhi and later on in other versions.

**Various Traditions Regarding Janamsakhis:** Undoubtedly, there had been the supremacy of the tradition of Bhai Bala in manuscript form or in litho printing on another Janamsakhi version known as Puratan Janamsakhi written in A.D. 1635. Though traditionally, Janamsakhi Bhai Bala is the earliest Janam-sakhi, some scholars consider Puratan Janamsakhi as the earliest. According to them there has been no such person as Bhai Bala. He is only the product of imagination of Handalis, the votaries of the inimical Niranjania sect, who were out to deliberately debase the personality of Guru Nanak Dev and show him inferior to Baba Hindal the founder of the sect. It was Karam Singh historian, who initiated the Bala theory. His main contention was that Bhai Gurdas had mentioned only Bhai Mardana. No other companion of Guru Nanak Dev is mentioned in his first Var and he has not even included Bala's name in his eleventh Var, where he has given a

list of the prominent Sikhs of Guru Nanak Dev. As far as I think, this contention of Karam Singh is baseless. The mention of Mardana, the Muslim bard fits in the description in a short stanza regarding the visit of the Guru to Baghdad, the cultural centre of Islam. In his eleventh Var, the noteworthy Sikh savant has made a mention of 'Udasi Bal', who is none else than Bhai Bala. The word 'Bal' fits in the metre of the verse.\* He has been called a Gurmukh. I wonder why the scholars have not cared to make a thorough study of the stanza. The real Janamsakhi Bhai Bala, which was much smaller in size than the present enlarged corrupted version is not available to-day. The language of the earliest manuscript must have been somewhat different, which through the passage of time, has taken the present form. The writer of Puratan Janamsakhi, has borrowed some material from Janamsakhi Bhai Bala, but in his zeal for new, approach has erroneously inserted the verses of later Gurus in his version. Puratan Janam-sakhi was edited by Bhai Vir Singh in 1926 on the basis of Valait wali Janamsakhi and Hatizabad wali Janamsakhi. Another Janamsakhi known as Janamsakhi Meharvan was edited by Dr. Kirpal Singh in 1963-68. It is in the form of *Goshtas* (discourses). Meharvan was the nephew of Guru Arjan Dev, the son of his elder brother Prithi Chand. Another Janamsakhi named *Gyan Ratnavali* is said to have been written / compiled by Bhai Mani Singh. It is also known as *Janamsakhi Bhai Mani Singh*. Whereas Janamsakhi Bhai Bala, Puratan Janamsakhi and Janamsakhi Meharvan were the product of sixteenth (in the case of Janamsakhi Bhai Bala) and seventeenth (in the case of Puratan and Mcharvan Janamsakhis centuries, Janamsakhi Bhai Mani Singh was written in the first half of eighteenth century. Three other Janamsakhis called *Adi Sakhian* (or Shambhu Nath wali Patri Babe Nanak Ji Ki) edited and published by Dr. Piar Singh in 1969, *Prachin Janamsakhi* edited by Sewa Singh Sewak in 1969 and published by New Book Co., Jalandhar, and B-40 Janamsakhi named also Janamsakhi Guru Nanak Dev Ji and published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, in 1969, mainly toe ,the line of Puratan Janamsakhi. Thus there are four chief Janamsakhi traditions in the following order:

\* Note : This is only the view of the learned author - Editors

1. Janamsakhi Bhai Bala;
2. Puratan Janamsakhi,
3. Janamsakhi Meharvan and
4. Janamsakhi Bhai Mani Singh

Janamsakhi Bhai Mani Singh is based on the first Var of Bhai Gurdas. Janamsakhi Meharvan was discovered only in 1940 and that too in an incomplete form-only three out of the six parts have so far been traced.

### **Their Linguistic and Literary Value**

Janamsakhis are very valuable part of Punjabi Literature. Guru Nanak Age in Punjabi Literature is not only rich in diverse forms of poetry, but is also a period of the emergence and development of Punjabi Prose, especially the Janamsakhi tradition. Various versions of Janamsakhis appeared, which contained biographical details from the life of Guru Nanak Dev. In the words of Professor Puran Singh "Punjabi Literature flourished in the shade of trees surrounding the temples of Guru Nanak Dev. Those persons wrote Prose for the first time, whose lips moved with the eulogistic wind regarding the Guru like rose-petals saturated with the nectar of his love." *Janamsakhis, Sakhis* (anecdotes), *Parmarthas* (commentaries or exposition), *Goshtas* (discourses), *Parchis* (introducing personalities), *Uthanakas* (introducing works), etc. were various genres of Punjabi prose associated with the Sikh movement. The subject-matter of old Punjabi Prose is mainly religious and mystic. Its major portion pertains to the life and sayings of Guru Nanak Dev, wherein there is comparative study of various contemporary religious sects and cults. From literary point of view the old Punjabi Prose is so mature and savoury that it is hard to believe that the Janamsakhis are the earliest works. There must have been a long tradition before it. The diction of Janamsakhis is appropriate, the sentences are well-set, and the style is dramatic. It appears as if an elder sitting under a peepal tree with a flowing beard and long hair hanging over his shoulders, is busy in sweet conversation and his soul is transmuting itself spontaneously in different sentences and emitting heavenly rain of honey. The language of Janamsakhis is an admixture of Western Punjabi (Lehndi), central Punjabi, folk language

(*Khari Boli*) and elements of Rajasthani, Gujrati and Marathi. The linguists have called this language *Hindwi*. It is also called *Sadhukri* or saint-language. In different versions of Janamsakhis, the language, having the diction and element of saint-language has also the elements of the dialect of the area to which the writer belonged.

### **Their position in sacred Sikh Literature**

The most sacred Book of the Sikhs is their scripture i.e. the *Adi Granth*, on which Guruship was bestowed by Guru Gobind Singh, the last Sikh Guru. Since it contains the word of the Guru and saints, therefore it is the Guru himself. The *Dasam Granth* contains some compositions of the Tenth Guru, as well as of other poets. Much of the material is Puranic in content. Many writings are considered interpolations only a few writings composed in the praise of the Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient Lord are considered sacred. The works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal are also considered valuable because they either contain an elucidation of the tenets of Sikh Religion or the praise of the Lord and the Guru. No other Literature is considered sacred by the Sikhs. The Janamsakhis are read with respect because they either contain the anecdotes from the life of Guru Nanak Dev, the Founder of Sikh Religion, or the exposition of the composition of the Guru. Similarly, there are other works dealing with the lives of the other Gurus like Gur Bilas Patshahi 6, Gur Bilas Patshahi, 10, Gur Partap Suraj Granth, etc., which are read and heard with faith and veneration.

### **Are they biographies or hagiographies?**

The literature of the lives of saints is known as hagiology and the lives of the saints are called hagiographies. According to Dr. McLeod "the Janamsakhis are not biographical works. They are strictly hagiographic and only if this is borne in mind can they serve their proper use for the historian. Much misunderstanding has been caused, and continues to be caused, by a widespread acceptance of the Janamsakhis as biographical. This acceptance distorts our understanding of the historical Nanak and (what is equally serious) has led to a total neglect of the true value of the Janamsakhis." A biography is story of a man's life. The Janam-sakhis contain stories of the life of Guru

Nanak Dev. In this sense they are the biographical records of the Guru, and in this sense they have been mostly accepted. According to the Janamsakhis, the Guru moves on from one place to another and this is a biographical truth. Some of the events mentioned may be mythical, miraculous and legendary like the older works on the lives of the saints which are called hagiographies. But various stories are quite realistic. The Janamsakhis, thus, contain the elements of the biography as well as hagiography. They begin with the birth of the Guru, describe some events of his life and then end with his death. Some Sakhis are there in all the Janamsakhis, but there are several Sakhis, which may be there only in one or two versions. Neither we have the complete biography of the Guru nor the complete hagiography. There is an intermixture of both. One or two examples will clarify the point. The Guru went to Mecca, the religious centre of the Muslims. This is the biographical truth. We cannot distrust the oral tradition, which has been recorded by Bhai Gurdas in his first Var. But the anecdote connected with it is associated with the miracle of the revolving of Mecca along the line of the feet of the Guru. The spiritualists may have firm belief in the miracle exhibiting the spiritual power of the Guru, but the rationalists may not accept it. The intelligent researcher will give his own interpretation. He will say that the Guru enlightened the Muslims about the All-Pervasiveness of the Lord. There is mention of Dhanasari Des in Janamsakhis. The Guru faced the cannibals there. Not finding any such country on the map of India, one may say that this is totally hagiography, devoid of any biographical element. But the researcher will locate the land on the banks of Dhanasari river in Assam, where the Nagas had been practising cannibalism. Thus, this anecdote is totally biographical and there is no element of hagiography in it.

### **Do the Janamsakhis Belong to Mythical or Legendary Literature? :**

A legend usually characterizes a traditional tale thought to have a historical basis. A myth is a specific account of a god or a superhuman being. These two terms have been applied to the Janamsakhis. Dr. Mcleod feels that in the case of Janamsakhis, the source of borrowing

is the common stock of legend. According to him “Puranic elements are very prominent in the Janamsakhis, and Nath legends also occupy a position of some importance”. Dr. Mcleod has also used the word “myth” with regard to Janamsakhis in a strictly technical sense and not as a synonym for legend. A number of tests devised by him in order to test the various episodes in the Janamsakhis included the incidence of legend and the identification of the material appropriated from earlier hagiographic traditions. According to him the application of these two obvious criteria will eliminate substantial portions of the Janamsakhi narratives from the authentic: Nanak materials. “The pursuit of this somewhat arduous analysis of the Janamsakhis material will show that most anecdotes are plainly legendary in their application to Guru Nanak.” He says again, “Let us, in this connection, stress once again the peculiar nature of the Janamsakhis. The Janamsakhis are hagiographic, a word which is commonly used in a pejorative sense as a synonym for ‘legendary’. Hagiography (like myth) is not properly understood as a synonym for legend, notwithstanding the fact that hagiographic writing characteristically abounds in legendary accounts of mighty deeds...” Undoubtedly, there are a few myths and legends in the Janamsakhis, but this does not warrant their outright consideration as mythical and legendary literature. There are myths like the meeting of Guru Nanak Dev with Kaliyuga, his meeting with Siddhas on Sumeru, his birth as an incarnation of king Janaka, his meeting with a *machh* (an extra ordinary huge fish), etc: In such like anecdotes Guru Nanak Dev appears as a superhuman being, but such anecdotes from the pens of the faithful devotees are meant to exhibit the spiritual greatness of the Guru. However, their inclusion in the Janam-sakhis can be interpreted and explained. In his compositions Guru Nanak Dev has never called himself super-human or even a great man. He considers himself just a minstrel of the Lord. If anything miraculous happens, it is only the work of the Lord and not of His devotee. We have already agreed that there is hagio-graphic element in the Janamsakhis; these hagiographic elements are present in the traditional

tales or legends. It has been said, "However exaggerated or complicated a legend might be, it is based on kernel of truth". But Dr. Mcleod has failed at many places to find this kernel of truth. Without finding it, he has arrived at wrong conclusions. He has committed glaring mistakes by denying the existence of Dhanasari Desh, Asa Desh, etc. and refusing to accept the visit of the Guru to Sangladip, and other important centres and areas in India and abroad. He has rejected many of the episodes outright, considering them impossible and highly improbable. He has exhibited distrust of every-thing that is miraculous and also the distrust of everything that has an element of miraculous in it. According to him, the Guru did not venture very far outside the periphery of the Punjab.

**Their Place in History:** Janamsakhi traditions are very significant from the point of view of history. They reflect to a considerable measure the history of the times in which they were written besides presenting before us the personality of historical Nanak. The personality of the Guru is mainly revealed in his own compositions, which form part of the Janamsakhis. Our age is the age of scientific outlook and the age in which Guru Nanak Dev lived, people believed in miracles and supernatural phenomena. But we have to interpret the miracles according to the outlook of our age. We have to interpret the episodes and anecdotes of Janamsakhis scientifically. Whereas they have the elements of good literature, they have also the elements of history as regards the life of Guru Nanak Dev. We should examine the episodes in the light of the external evidence. How can we deny the historical journeys of Guru Nanak Dev, when he has himself pointed out to them in his conversation with the Yogis. The Yogis questioned him: "For what purpose you have left your home and undertaken journeys? For what purpose you have adopted this guise?" The Guru replied, "I have undertaken the journeys in search of a *Gurmukh* (an Enlightened person) and have adopted the guise in order to have his sight." (Ramkali M.1, Siddh Goshta, p. 939). How can then we deny the meeting of the Guru with the Yogis at Mount Meru (not mythical Sumeru) or Mount Kailash in Tibet? Guru Nanak Dev is still remembered as Guru Rimpoche by the Lamas of Tibet.

The Guru is remembered by hundreds of thousands of *Wanjaras* throughout India, thousands of *Tharus* in the vicinity of Nanakmata, a good number of Lamas in Arunachal Pradesh, hundreds of *Sob is* (goldsmiths) on the banks of Tigris and Euphrates, etc. How can then we deny the far and wide travels of the Guru? Even whatever has not been recorded in the Janamsakhis, is coming to light through present researches. Is it necessary that everything should have been recorded in all the Janamsakhis? There is no mention of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the eminent Vaishnava saint of Bengal in the Janamsakhis, though he was an eminent saint and contemporary of the Guru, but in our recent researches it has been found that both the Guru and the saint met at Jagannath Puri (according to *Chaitanya Bhagvat* of Ishvar Das). Though the Sakhi of the meeting of the Guru with Shiv Nabh, the king of Ceylon, is recorded in the Janamsakhis and the route of Ceylon is mentioned in "Hakikat Rah Mukam", through which Paira Mokha travelled in order to bring the Pran Sangli from Ceylon, the scholars rejected this episode, because the king Shiv Nabh of Ceylon could not be traced in the history of Ceylon. But now the visit of the Guru has been confirmed on the discovery of a Sanskrit inscription preserved in the Archaeological Museum at Anuradhapura. According to Dr. Ganda Singh, "Kaviraj Pandit Arjun Muni in his book the *Gurdwara Darpan* published in 1923, mentions a number of places in Persia in the Central Asian Republics of the U.S.S.R. and the Afghanistan, said to have been visited by the Guru. His account of the Guru's eastward journey from Baku in the U.S.S.R. to Jalalabad in Afghanistan is based on the information given to him by one Sant Atma Ram of Burail who had visited these places. The mention of the existence of Sikh *dharamsalas* at some of the places in the area with Udasi, Sutnra or Sikh priests, gives a touch of reality to it. This is also substantially supported by earlier accounts of Giani Gian Singh in his *Panth Prakash* and *Twarikh Guru Khalsa Vol. I*. During his homeward journey the Guru must have stayed at most of the places on the way, and, in all probability, the Multani and Sindhi traders in those places, most of whom are the followers and admirers of the Guru, later on established *dharamsalas* there in

memory of his visit.” The Udasi saints, to a large extent, have kept up the tradition, of the visit of the Guru at several distant place alive

**Their Geographical Knowledge:** In the Janamsakhis, the old names of several places have been given, which sometime baffle the scholar and researcher. According to Dr. Fauja Singh Dr. Mcleod’s negative conclusions regarding Guru Nanak’s visit to Assam and Dacca are based on his failure to identify the physical existence of Assa Desh, Kaura Desh and Dhanasari Desh and also on his imperfect appreciation of the origin and growth of the local traditions centred around the Guru’s visit to the eastern region of the country. Thus Dr. Mcleod lacks in geographical perspective. Another historian Dr. Kirpal Singh commenting on the work of Dr. Mcleod says, “His study and analysis of Janam-sakhis does not appear to be deep enough. Every Sakhi has to be studied in proper historical perspective taking into account various historical and geographical factors in order to arrive at a right conclusion, which Dr. Mcleod has failed to do.” Dr. Mcleod him-self has applied this geographical criterion in the case of Janam-sakhis. He says, “A degree of confidence can be placed in details relating to Guru Nanak’s life within the Punjab than in those which concern his travels beyond the province... The relevance of this particular criterion is pointed out by the marked contrast between the geographical exactitude which characterises the Janamsakhi accounts of his movements within the Punjab and the vagueness of those which describe his travels elsewhere. In the latter case the place-names are almost all either well-known capitals and centres of pilgrimage, places associated with later Sikh History, or unidentifiable and evidently non-existent places such as ‘Dhanasari’.... All Sakhis with indefinite maritime settlements must be regarded with marked scepticism”. It is true that in some Sakhis, the names of towns, places and islands have not been mentioned, which definitely does not mean that the related incidents have never occurred at all. The writer/compiler recorded only what incident had been related to him regarding the life of the Guru. But to say that the places unidentifiable are non-existent is highly unbecoming of a scholar and researcher. He must tap all the available

sources in order to discover the truth. In the Sakhi mentioning Asa Desh (the land of Asa), there is mention of Raja Samundra., Since Dr. Mcleod could not trace the existence of the Raja, the land became non-existent for him. In the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Raja Samundra has been mentioned as the Raja of Assam. There are still some' names of towns, cities, islands and lands which are untraceable, but with some effort, we are bound to discover them. For some more information about the geographical aspect my book on "Travels of Guru Nanak" may be consulted.

**Their study and criticism by various scholars:** The scholars who have contributed to the study of Janamsakhis may be divided into following categories:

1. Those who have worked on the life of Guru Nanak Dev : They include Giani Gian Singh, Giani Lal Singh of Panch Khalsa Diwan, Bhai Vir Singh, Indubhushan Banerjee, Dr. H.R. Gupta, Dr. Taran Singh, Dr. Trilochan, Drs. J. S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, Dr. S.S. Kohli, Dr. Kartar Singh, Dr. Kirpal Singh, Dr. Jagjit Singh, Dr. Piar Singh, Or. Rattan Singh Jaggi, S. Karam Singh historian, Giani Ishar Singh Nara; S. Khazan Singh, Sewaram Singh and others.

2. Those who have written critical articles on Janamsakhis : They include besides some of the above-mentioned writers, the following writers and historians: Dr. Ganda Singh, S. Kapur Singh, Dr. Fauja Singh, S. Khushwant Singh, S. Gurmukh Nihal Singh, Prof. Kulraj Singh, Major Balwinder Singh, S. Daljit Singh, Justice Gurdev Singh, S. Shamsher Singh Ashok, Piara Singh Padam, S. Sewa Singh Sewak and others.

3. Foreign writers who have written on Janamsakhis : Mr. M.A. Macauliff, Dr. Trumpp, Dr. Archer, Mr. F. Pincott, Dr. McLeod and others.

Most of the writers of the first two categories are Sikhs and are acquainted with the Indian culture and traditions. They have also the knowledge of the thought and content of the *Adi Granth*. They are men of faith; they have an understanding of the spirit behind various actions and sayings of the Guru. But we cannot say the same thing about the foreigners except Mr. M. A. Macauliffe, who did his work in

the company of various Sikh savants. Most virulent criticism has been done regarding Janam-sakhis by Dr. W.H. McLeod, who has also put forward various other propositions, which are in conflict with the basic beliefs, the Guru Granth, historical records, contemporary literature and long unbroken tradition of the Sikhs. The learned editor of *Perspectives on Sikh Traditions*, Justice Gurdev Singh, has rightly remarked, . “Curiously enough, Dr. McLeod casts all caution to the winds and feels compelled to make sweeping observations which not only tend to undermine the Sikh faith but also denigrate the mission of the Sikh Gurus and distort their image. His approach being wholly negative, his conclusions are entirely unjustified”. Several Sikh scholars have collectively criticised his three works on Sikh Tradition, namely, *Guru Nanak and Sikh Religion*, *Evolution of Sikh Community* and *Early Sikh Traditions*. In the words of Dr. Trilochan Singh “Dr. McLeod is neither honest nor rational nor anywhere correct to his much displayed analysis, nor has he followed the minimum rules of academic ethics, in his style of historical criticism. From page to page, from para to para he spins arguments based on discursive logic and desultory discussions; and with all the punditry at his disposal he throws smoke screens of doubt and dubiety on every well-established historical fact, by distorting them and misrepresenting them. Instead of sifting the right from the wrong, he sifts the wrong from the right and displays prominently all that which Sikh historians have rejected over a century ago.” According to Dr. McLeod he has made use of rigorous historical methodology. He has tried to fit the manifold traditions concerning the life of Guru Nanak Dev in five categories, which he designates as the established, the probable, the possible, the improbable and the impossible. He has also applied seven criteria. The first criterion is to discard the incidence of the miraculous. The second is the testimony of external sources. The third is the Guru’s own word recorded in the *Adi Granth*, the fourth is the measure of agreement or disagreement in different Janamsakhis. The fifth is the relative reliability of the different Janamsakhis. The sixth is the measure of trust which may be attached to genealogical references. The seventh and the final is the geographical

criterion. The criteria have been so designed as to reject the Janamsakhi accounts on one excuse or the other. After applying his criteria to the Janamsakhi episodes, Dr. McLeod has concluded: "Although some of the incidents recorded in the Janamsakhis will stand the test of rigorous analysis, the majority will not. Most of what we find in the Janamsakhis, and in the biographies based upon the Janam-sakhis, must be either rejected as impossible or regarded as un-likely. "We have seen above that Dr. McLeod has failed to give cre-dence to the external evidence. He has missed the reference to the Udasis (missionary journeys) of Guru Nanak Dev in *Siddh Goshta* in the *Adi Granth*. His geographical and historical knowledge is limited, therefore he has faltered at several places. He has not appreciated the limitations of the writers/compiler of the Janam-sakhis. He regards the Janamsakhi of Bhai Bala as nearly or totally unreliable. He believes that Janamsakhis are accounts which primarily relate not to the actual events of Guru Nanak's life, but rather to the needs and understanding of the community in which they evolved. Even a western scholar like Noel Q. King says, "while personally as I have known him, Dr. McLeod is a perfect gentleman, in his these books he has' not only shown a complete lack of courtesy and consideration and also lack of respect of truth and historical records, he has shown even greater lack of understanding of the ethical and mystical doctrines of Sikhism". Dr. McLeod may write and draw his conclusions like an armchair philosopher, but several eye-witness accounts are available in which highly placed officers have stumbled upon certain places commemorating the visit of Guru Nanak Devon his safari of the Himalayas. Lieut. Commander M.S. Kohli, leader of the Everest Expedition writes about his visit to the Thyangboche Lamasery: "The incarnate Lama of Thyangboche invited us to the Lamasery for a gracious dinner. The atmosphere in the room was deeply religious and mystical. There were colourful frescos on the walls, and the ceiling bore mythical motifs with a display of exquisite idols of varying sizes in bronze and other material. There were a large number of sacred texts, presumably the original handwritten manuscripts, stacked in pigeon-holes. The idols, we learned, were of the founder

and the later incarnate Lamas and of the venerable *gurus* and the like. We were shown one of Guru Ringpoche, the Tibetan name for Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh Religion, who in his truth-seeking wanderlust, had covered great distances for pilgrimages to the seats of religious learnings and debates in places as far apart as Tibet, the Mecca and Benaras. His Holiness the incarnate Lama, informed us that some writings of the great Guru were also in his personal possession.” More recently Major Dalvinder Singh Grewal, who toured Arunachal Pradesh during his official duties there, visited the sacred temple in the memory of the visit of Guru Nanak Dev at Menchuka. He writes, “On the central hill there is a Gompha (the Lama Temple) in which in addition to the life-size statue of Lord Buddha, similar sized statue of Guru Nanak is also worshipped. It is in this temple, where their annual function is organised. I had the privilege to be chief guest of the function this year and the impressions I gathered are unforgettable. As I proceeded from my hut went to the Gompha, I could see new spotless white flags fluttering in the entire valley. The pema-dongin (exactly the same as Nishan Sahib of Sikhs) were glittering at the top. All houses were painted white and marked with blue and green strips around... At the end of the show meals were arranged for all, and I was reminded of our *langer* system. As we entered the Gompha, we were introduced to the huge statues of Lord Buddha and Guru Nanak. I could visualise their greatness of having a religion, which has no communal tone and contained something of all religions. We all had something to learn out of this saga, which shall remain in my memory for ever”. According to Glenn M. Vernon, as written by him in his book “Sociology of Religion”, the scientist uses an objective approach in the study of his data-an impartial unbiased approach. In such an approach there are no predetermined conclusions-the individual attempts to set his own prejudices and convictions temporarily aside while he collects, analyzes, and interprets his data”. The research of Dr. Mcleod lacks such a scientific methodology or approach, or even a detailed examination of available materials.

**Their Correct Appraisal:** The Janamsakhis give us information about the life of the Guru. The episodes have not been mentioned in a serial order. There are elements of hagiography, legend and myth in them. Besides these Janamsakhis, several anecdotes about the life of the Guru are available separate in manuscript form e.g. *Makke Madine di Gosht*, *Sakhi Ajitta Randhawa*, parts of *Pran Sangli*, etc. It is necessary to collect a complete record of the oral traditions. All the external evidence is also to be taken into account. Various episodes and anecdotes of the Janamsakhis must be studied in the light of the oral traditions and external evidence. The contemporary history of the time, of the life of Guru Nanak Dev, of the states and lands visited by Guru Nanak Dev must be studied in depth. The district gazetteers and the old revenue and other records are to be scanned. Several teams of scholars and researchers should be sent to far off and distant places in order to study various aspects and traditions about the life of Guru Nanak Dev. These teams including historians and geographers should investigate the whole data and then prepare an authentic itinerary of the travels of the Guru. The suggestions given by S. Gurmukh Nihal Singh in this connection are noteworthy: "It is really the responsibility of the Sikh institutions themselves. I suggest that this work should be undertaken in co-operation by the Universities particularly the new Guru Nanak (Dev) University, which has been established at Amritsar and the Punjabi University at Patiala, and also the Departments of Sikh History and Geography in the various Khalsa Colleges; the Sikh History Research Board of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the two research institutes, which are being established at Delhi and Patiala by the Guru Nanak Foundation, may as well join in this noble work. It will not be difficult for the organisations mentioned above to spare the necessary funds for the purpose. A Central Committee to direct and supervise the whole work should also be formed; and it may be headed by a person who has recently retired from the Government of India Survey Department. In addition it will be necessary to associate persons from the different states with this

work and thus get the benefit of local knowledge, traditions and experience.” Such a comprehensive programme about the journeys of Guru Nanak Dev will not only bring a correct appraisal of the Janamsakhis, but also build a complete data about the travels, work and mission of the great Guru.

## CHAPTER 18

### **A STUDY OF W. HEW MCLEOD'S METHODOLOGY AS EMPLOYED IN HIS WORK "THE EVOLUTION OF SIKH COMMUNITY"-THE JANAM SAKHIS**

**SURJIT SINGH**

**Abstract:** Analytical methods of McLeod for the study of this particular work were reviewed. It was discovered that when these techniques were extended to the study of Four Gospels of Lord Jesus Christ, the results were even more disastrous and bordered on blasphemy, dramatizing the limits of "scientific" methods when applied to articles of Faith. McLeod's work may be considered a good work of sociology of Panjabi peasants but in terms of a theological study as expected it fails miserably. In the study of less known religions or ethnic groups a litmus test must be applied to analytical methods used. If satisfactory results are obtained when the procedures are applied to a particular author's own religion or sociological group, then only the methodology can be considered valid and a good juxtaposition of further inquiry. This particular effort only tries to re-examine the Chapter on "Janam Sakhis" as it appears in McLeod's book "Evolution of Sikh Community" published by Oxford University Press. A separate work is in preparation to analyze his other work, Guru Nanak and Sikh Religion.

On numerous occasions history has been unable to do justice in terms of accuracy to details about the lives of *Uncommon Persons* born of common lineage, because the historical impact of such persons is seldom evident during their lifetimes. It is only a few decades later that a scramble for the details of lives of these persons takes place. The chief source by this time is the folklore or memories and perceptions of surviving contemporaries. To look for more than a historical figure and general traits of personality of the Subject will

result in erroneous and misleading conclusions. Most important thing is that these personages graced this world and left a worthy legacy for humankind.

This work will try to reexamine one of the chapters from McLeod's book "Evolution of Sikh Community". It must be assured to Christian readers that this writer has the deepest affection and reverence for Lord Jesus Christ and a sample analysis of the four Gospels is only to illustrate the errors of McLeod's methodology which he employed to study the historical Guru Nanak and it is not to be construed in any way as questioning the Divinity of Jesus.

If one examines only the beginnings of four Gospels one finds them much more divergent than any set of Janam-Sakhis of Guru Nanak referred to by McLeod. For example, St. Mathew tries to establish the geneology of the Lord Jesus by counting the number of generations. If McLeod was analysing this Gospel he is bound to question this approach because if Jesus is conceived of the Holy Ghost, why would one count the generations of so-called ancestors who were mortals ? Would this not detract from Jesus being son of God?

St. Mark introduces St. John the Baptist first and is at variance about when Mary was found with the Child. He and St. Matthew try to make Jesus fulfil the previous prophesies in order to affirm that He was the Messiah. The problem with various Gospels had seemed to come to head in a bout 70 years after the death of Jesus when Luke wrote his Gospel and he begins his work to 'lift the fog'<sup>1</sup> of confusion surrounding numerous gospels current during his time as he tries to present an authoritative version. McLeod would assert that Luke's description of events is at variance with those of previous apostles! Because of all the apparent 'confusions' which McLeod's methodology would encounter, it will be overblown to such proportions, making it impossible to discover the true Historical Jesus just like the Historical Guru Nanak from His Janamsakhis. But Lord Jesus at least for His contemporaries and today's historians was the son of a humble carpenter who had changed the "God of Vengeance"<sup>2</sup> to "God of

Love”<sup>3</sup> and “Jealous God” into “Forgiving God”. He was truly a great theological innovator unrecognized by the priesthood of his time. For preaching love He was punished to be crucified like a common criminal! It is only sixty or seventy years after that the full impact of His life, His Crucifixion and Resurrection is felt and a focus on historical importance of His mission and personality is perceived. A reasonable amount of Folklore had already developed around His life and works.

Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the States kept record of only Kings and other personages that they deemed important. Life records of Folk heroes are enshrined in the hearts and minds of common folks. Consequently, there are going to be and there better be genuine differences in perceptions of events which took place during grandfathers’ times of a given generation. There will be variations whether it is the Gospels of Guru Nanak or Lord Jesus. That is why St. Luke prefaces his Gospel of Jesus Christ with the statement:

“For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us. Even as they delivered them to us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus. That Thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.”<sup>4</sup>

The quotation makes it obvious that many versions of the Gospel were already in circulation amongst the faithful. If the institution of Papacy had not been established and limited authorized versions of Gospel had not been approved and issued, one wonders how many versions of Gospels one would encounter today and what would be their contents?

A painting betrays the style of its creator. For example when shown a portrait of the same Count by Rembrandt or Degas or for that matter a caricature drawing of a common newspaper cartoonist one will immediately place the identity of the subject and any person even slightly conversant with art will be able to identify the artist who drew that particular portrait. Similarly the (Gospels) Janam-Sakhis of

Lord Jesus Christ as told by different authors are different and better vary in details for their true authenticity. For example, St. Luke emphasizes those events where Jesus healed the sick because Luke, himself a physician, will tend to highlight works associated with healing. St. John is Divi-nist and a spiritualistic person. He begins his narration thus:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God  
The same was in the beginning with God,  
All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.  
In Him was life; and the Life was the Light of men.  
And the Light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehend it not.”<sup>5</sup>

And now if we translate “Word” into IKK ONKAR or SAT NAM, the whole quotation translates into Sikh Mool Mantra (Affirmation of Faith), only if we make a minor change at the end that “darkness knows the light by the Grace of true Guru”, because Sikh Scriptures is a Divinely Revealed Book.

With the use of “Word” or “Shabad” St. John tries to establish the Divinity of Jesus, and Guru Nanak tries to lay the foundation of Sikh belief in absolute and uncompromizing monotheism in a land where every country side had its own favourite god.

The point being that if McLeod analysed the four Gospels in the manner he carried out the dissection of four Janam-Sakhis of Guru Nanak, his conclusions would be blasphemous, extremely profane and highly offensive to me as a Sikh. How would my Christian Brothers feel about it, only they can tell !

However if we overlook minor differences in various narratives a beautiful and very kind personality of Jesus emerges from the four Gospels which can be considered, and is believed by almost one billion people to be Divine. The Janam-Sakhis of Guru Nanak also reveal him to be a kind, loving, wise and godly person lit with Divine knowledge, through whom God is revealed to everybody who came in contact with him and meditated on the “Word”.

**Development of the Unique Format of Janam-Sakhis:** So far an attempt has been made to show that normally it would be very difficult to get an accurate record of events surrounding the lives of great men with humble beginnings, irrespective of culture, place or country they belonged to. Professor Sahib Singh in his book “Some More Religious Writings” (Kujh Hor Dharmik Lekh)<sup>6</sup> has so convincingly argued that “Book of Writings” of previous Gurus was methodically handed down to each succeeding Guru at the time of his installation. Nonetheless there is a tradition also accepted by Sikhs that in order to assure the inclusion of all writings of various Gurus especially Guru Nanak who travelled far and wide Guru Arjan sent his Sikhs to find and collect any lost writings. Writings thus received had to be catalogued with circumstances and events surrounding them brought orally to the Fifth Guru. It is only logical that Guru Arjan at least instructed somebody to keep a record of all such events. The special style of narration as illustrated by the Janam-Sakhis came into existence as a logical consequence of this procedure. In Mideastern literature many examples can be cited which have description of events with turning point, or moral lessons of happenings described in verse form e.g. “Gulistan” of “Saadi” or “Panch Tantra” of Hindu mythology. Since it had already been about sixty years, since the departure of Baba Nanak from this mortal world, certain amount of folklore might have already developed around the Shabads and happenings; however, overall personality portraits and teachings which are relevant and important would remain the same. Other additions or exaggerations could be a study of sociology of the time, one thing which McLeod has done well and which in no way diminishes the importance and quality of the message. With the afore-mentioned scenario in mind it seems probable that there must exist an authorized version of Janam-Sakhi of Guru Nanak, probably written by a scribe of Guru Arjan’s time. This conjecture is given force by Ernest Trump’s words;<sup>7</sup>

“In looking them (various Janam-Sakhis) over, I found an old manuscript, partly destroyed by white ants, the early characters of which resembling those of the old copy of the

Granth, preserved at Kartarpur and signed by Guru Arjan himself caught my eye. On the first leaf it contained in, Sanskrit letters of the short title. (*Nanak ka Granth Janamsakhi ka*). A book of Nanak, Referring to His Birth (or Life). The copy has been presented to the Library of East India Company according to the entry on the first leaf, by the famous H.T. Colebrooke, without his being aware, as it appears of the contents of the book. As soon as I commenced to read the book, I observed with great pleasure that this was a description of the life of Nanak quite different from all the others hitherto seen. As the characters, so also was the idiom, in which it was composed, old and in many words and expressions agreeing with the diction of Guru Arjan.....

After a lengthened examination and comparison of this manuscript with the later Janam-Sakhis, I am satisfied that this is the fountain from which all the others have drawn largely.....

The Granth is cited throughout this manuscript without any paraphrase which is not the case with all other Janam-sakhis and the vocabulary used is more archaic and akin to the one used in compositions of Guru Arjan in Granth Sahib. A number of unnecessary details and flowery miracles are absent and life of Nanak is very realistic.”

It is obvious from the above quotation and other research efforts that like the Authorized Version of Guru Granth Sahib, a life sketch of Guru Nanak was also compiled under the direction of Guru Arjan by the same scribe who wrote the Kartarpur Bir. This copy of Janam-Sakhi is obviously outside India and is somewhere in Europe. Sikh scholars should try to locate this description of the Life of Holy Guru Nanak. The trail seems to lead to the archival Libraries of Berne, Frankfurt, Bonn, Munich, Vienna and Salzburg. These are the places associated with Trump's works.

**Hagiography and Miracles:** The second charge laid by McLeod is “Hagiography”. In all historical research, legend and oral tradition is an accepted scientific source. A small coin here, or a piece of pottery there have transformed legends into history. Till 1917 Trump and

other non-Sikh scholars had dismissed the idea of Guru Nanak ever visiting Mecca and Middle East as mere fiction. Suddenly the Sikh armies come across a revered place dedicated to the Holy Baba Nanak Shah (Accepted Faqir of Allah in Baghdad, of all places) during World War I. McLeod refuses to accept the pictures of that time as proof even though the art of photography then was not deceitful;<sup>8</sup> but insists on not believing the inscription still in place even seventy years later, which though ravaged by atmospheric pollution and by time still proclaims “Baba Nanak”. Similarly Guru Nanak’s trips to South India were confirmed by discovery of numerous places associated with his visits. Either McLeod is wrong or there were hundreds of Nanaks roaming around the world of Fifteenth Century. Obviously McLeod is not a serious scholar. He loves notoriety and Sikh community in their extreme reaction may have granted his wish.

McLeod shows his antipathy to miracles when he very well knows that there is not a religion or even a cult which does not rest on some kind of miracle. He states: “Many doctrinal questions appear during the course of narratives. A peasant in the place called Land of Unbelievers’ asks,<sup>9</sup> “Without having seen him how can one know there is God?” To this the Janam-Sakhi writers have no satisfactory answer and so resort to miracle to make the point.” Very interesting that McLeod should blame the Janam-Sakhi writers. Why did he not listen to Professor Albert Einstein’s answer when asked a similar question in physics to which he replied that “most fundamental knowledge is only intuitively obvious?” In the religious realm the “intuitively obvious” for the peasant mind is explained by a miracle. In the physical world the Laws of Natural Science have always been the same, whether they stayed undiscovered or were discovered. ‘E’ was always been equal to  $mc^2$  or ‘C’ was always equal to  $v\gamma$  or Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle was always valid whether it was Jewish prehistory or Christian first century or Muslim year of Hijrah of First year or Nanak Shahi Sambat. There is no scientific inconsistency in ‘raining fire and brimstone from the sky’ any time a meteor or comet comes close to the earth. It is the ‘timing’ of such an event which makes it a miracle.

From the theological standpoint the performance of miracles or marathon travel and preaching are of secondary importance. The fact that a man such as Nanak who lived during times of forced conversions to a state religion and of spiritual tyranny enforced by a hereditary priesthood left a legacy of spiritualism and devotion that is followed to this day and would at his death be claimed by all who knew him as their saint is the greatest and most relevant of all miracles.

Since this paper deals with methodology research and findings, it will be only fitting to end with a quotation of Ezekiel from the Old Testament:

- (XIII-3) "Thus sayeth the Lord God, woe unto the foolish prophets that follow their own spirits and have seen nothing!"
- (XIII-8) "Because you have spoken vanity, and seen lies, behold I am against you, saith the Lord God."
- (XIII-22) "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from the wicked way"

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## CHAPTER 19

### A CRITIQUE ON DR. W. H. MCLEOD'S WORKS

#### RAJA MRIGENDRA SINGH

In his most thorough and learned criticism of Dr. Mcleod's main formulations, Raja Mrigendra Singh has made the following important points:

(1) Dr. Mcleod does not depend on the pure doctrine of Sikhism as delineated in authentic Sikh canon, Guru Granth Sahib, as is the universal practice of theological enquiry. Instead he goes by banned apocryphia derived from heretical sects like Minas. Not only does he project such apocryphia as true Sikh canon, he goes a step further and demands of the Sikh that they should also consider it equal to their own true canon. This is an unacademic and biased approach which is sustained by no tradition of scholarship either in the East or the West. With unabashed audacity he pontificates: "There is now reason to believe that this opinion should be revised and that Miharban Janamsakhi dismissed as sectarian polemic should be regarded as atleast equal in reliability to the Puratin tradition". He gives no reason why it should be so regarded and is fully aware that the work is anathematized in Sikhism. The schismatic sect condemned by the Guru himself cannot be admitted to Sikh denominational privilege even at the behest of Dr. Mcleod. Authority of the Guru is final in this regard and no banned work can be equated to Sikh canon. Sikhs are not prepared to become Minas by so accepting them. This approach vitiates the entire understanding and the nature of the works of Dr. Mcleod.

(2) Mcleod pretends to make a serious academic inquiry into the sources from which Guru Nanak derived his doctrine. In this context he stubbornly disregards Guru Nanak's oft repeated claim to prophethood, thereby admitting God alone to be the fountain head of his doctrine. This claim comes out loud and clear in his authentic *bani* and no objective scholar can in honesty disregard it. Revelation as the source of Guru's doctrine, is revealed by the Guru Himself.

It must also be stressed that all the early Gurus, including Guru Nanak insist that in spiritual life there is no bigger crime than concealing one's allegiance to one's Guru. Can Dr. Mcleod, in the face of this give one good reason why Guru Nanak would not acknowledge the source of his doctrine if there were a conventional one?

He totally disregards the fact that those saints whom he advertises as source of Guru Nanak's doctrine, themselves claim no doctrinal originality or Canonic worth and are thus incapable of serving as sources.

(3) Without a valid basis Mcleod talks in the same strain about the Guru borrowing concepts from other religious orders. It can be convincingly demonstrated that most of the fundamental concepts of Sikhism are original and were totally unknown to religions before the advent of Sikhism. One such is the most significant use of figure by Guru Nanak to denote God. It is wrong to assert that it denotes "non-duality" or "the unity of God" which concepts admit of existence of diversity. To the contrary, as indicated by the use of this figure at the opening of the Canon, Guru Nanak is positive, categoric and dynamically affirmative. It is indicative of one perfect and "complete Unit".

The idea of God that emanated with Judaism, later owned by Christianity and Islam, has generally remained negative in approach. It must also be brought out that no *vaishnav bhakta* including Shankra doctrinally accepts the possibility of devotion in Monism. "The Jogis, Jatis, Vaishnavas and Ram Dasi (denominations) : Doctrinally have no knowledge of Indestructible Brahm (god)", declares the Guru (Guru Granth, p. 867: 11).

(4) With unparalleled naivety and in complete disregard of ample

evidence available within the Sikh Canonical writings, Dr. Mcleod questions Guru Nanak's claim to be considered founder of the Sikh faith. In this connection, the mode of succession to Guruship, and the fact that it originated with Guru Nanak are most significant. The succession ceremony laid down by Guru Nanak may be briefly recapitulated here. After selecting his successor, Guru commanded Baba Buddha to perform benediction with a saffron mark on the forehead. A part of the ceremony was that Guru Nanak himself humbly bowed at the feet of the second Guru clearly signifying that the sacrament transferring his *Guruship* in both sacramental form and divine spirit to his successor was complete. This was the convention which endured upto anointing the last *guru*, Guru Granth Sahib. This unparalleled act of paying homage to his appointee is unique and is not known to have taken place ever before. It surprised one and all. Bhai Gurdas makes a frequent mention of it in his writings. Baba Buddha's direct descendants continued to consecrate each succeeding *guru* until the last Guru Granth Sahib was anointed by Baba Gurbux Singh or Bhai Ram Koer who survived Guru Gobind Singh by a quarter of a century.

The laying down of this unique convention by Guru Nanak himself establishes him to be the founder of Sikhism.

Besides compositions of Bhattas, which form a part of the Guru Granth, categorically state that Guru Nanak "began the sovereignty" (pp. 966: 15; 968 : 12-13) - In this they are amply supported by the successor Gurus who lay the same claim.

In view of above basic failings in the approach and perception of Dr. Mcleod, it is futile to expect him to display an understanding of the subtle strains of Sikh philosophy and theology or the profound trends of Sikh History. A study of the Sikh Canon, the Guru Granth Sahib, would show how superficial is Dr. Mcleod's knowledge and understanding of it.

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**ADVANCED STUDIES IN  
SIKHISM**



# **ADVANCED STUDIES IN SIKHISM**

**PAPERS CONTRIBUTED AT  
CONFERENCE OF SIKH STUDIES LOS ANGELES**

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*editors*

**JASBIR SINGH MANN  
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## PREFACE

With the growing interest in the study of religion, more especially of comparative religion, in the western universities, it was hoped that the study of Sikh religion, the youngest higher religion, would receive some serious attention. But unfortunately, the last decade has been quite a lean period in this respect. No major interpretative study of the Sikh Scripture, the Sikh ideology or the Sikh history has appeared.

True, in the last few decades studies in social sciences have been dominated by the methodology of Marxism, Evolutionism or Behaviourism, with the result that moral life or religious growths are simply considered responses to the social environment of man. Under this trend, lop-sided as it is, many scholars of religion have kept their studies almost confined to the phenomena of religion without relating them to the spiritual base or the spiritual experiences of man. No wonder, this situation has led men like Huston Smith to complain, "Ninian approaches religion from the angle of phenomenology and the social sciences, whereas I, a philosopher, find phenomenology confining. Ontology is too central to be bracketed." In a somewhat similar strain, and for somewhat like reasons, William Nicholls writes, "In so far as we adopt the culture of the secular university, we are systematically in opposition to the texts we are studying. In so far as we take our texts seriously, and are successful in interpreting the intention of their writers, we are in opposition to the university and its culture."

We seek to emphasize that religion and its rise, phenomena, ideas and history, cannot be explained or understood purely as responses to the facts and impacts of environment. The discipline for the study of religion has two fundamentals. First, that there is in man a factor of freedom which gives birth to his moral life. Second, that men have appeared in history, whose consciousness is so different and developed, as to enable them to perceive in the world not only a Higher Order of Being but also to work

in consonance with the Flow of that Higher Reality. This world-view categorically rejects ideas of Necessity or Blind Evolution. According to this view man is not a mere computer working without an independent and free centre of deliberation and volition. In order to clarify our point let us quote a great Neurologist, Wilder Pen field :

“Throughout my own scientific career I, like other scientists, have struggled to prove that brain accounts for the mind. But now, perhaps, the time has come when we may profitably consider the evidence as it stands, and ask the question: Do brain mechanisms account for the mind? Can the mind be explained by what is now known about the brain? If not, which is the more reasonable of the two possible hypotheses: that man’s being is based on one element or two?” “Because it seems to me certain that it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action within the brain, and because it seems to me that the mind develops and matures independently throughout an individual’s life as though it were a continuing element, and because a computer (which the brain is) must be operated by an agency capable of an independent understanding, I am forced to choose the proposition that our being is to be explained on the basis of two fundamental elements.”

Hence any system of study which denies this world view, howsoever valid or accepted it may be in its own sphere, would certainly be violative of the discipline of Religious Studies, and to that extent inadequate and partial in its understanding and interpretation of religion and its phenomena. Religion, therefore, aims at the development of this inner centre of freedom which is both the base of all moral life and also of perceiving the Universal Consciousness or Higher Reality, the Fount of all altruism.

Whatever the reasons for the present situation, the fact remains that recent western writings in the field of Sikh Studies have generally been quite peripheral in their scope and inadequate in their approach. This feeling has arisen, because in advancing his spiritual thesis, and in carrying out his mission, Guru Nanak challenged and almost completely changed the earlier religious traditions that had remained established and accepted in India for almost three millenia. For, he wholly rejected the chief fundamentals of the Indian religious life, namely, the unreality of

the empirical life; withdrawal from life and resort to asceticism, monasticism or *Sanyasa*; the hierarchical social ideology of the *Varnashram Dharma*, caste and pollution; the inviolable sanctity of *Ahimsa*; the value of ritualism and *Mantra Yoga*; the doctrine of *Avtarhood*, etc. Guru Nanak's approach is not negative. In his life-affirming system he proclaims that life is a game of love, and emphasizes that while "Truth (God) is higher than everything. higher still is truthful living." For him life furnishes a hopeful and meaningful opportunity for spiritual elevation, and he exhorts man to fulfil his destiny of becoming a being with a higher or universal consciousness.

In the East there has been a dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. That is why scholars conditioned by such a tradition, view a seeming gap between the ideology of the two Gurus, Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Nanak was the first man of God in the East to make a clear combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. Sikhism, its institutions and history have to be studied in this light. Just as in the West the epoch of Islam is the product of this integration brought about by Prophet Mohammed in the life of man, in the same way, the phenomenal results in the field of spiritual regeneration and social change in the North-West of India, are the result of this integration in the spiritual thesis of Guru Nanak. Sikh religion, its institutions and its history have to be studied in this perspective.

In this background, it was somewhat surprising to find some scholars saying that Guru Nanak made no new contribution to religious thought and life in India. After the recent political crisis in the Punjab the deficiency of serious interest in Sikh Studies became all the more obvious. It is in this context that intelligent men and women of faith felt that the existing lack of correct information and the prevailing confusion need to be dispelled. The Sikh Community of North America, therefore, decided that fundamental issues concerning the Sikh religion, should be discussed academically and clarified in an objective way. Accordingly, in early 1988 it was announced that a conference for the purpose would be held towards the end of the year. This announcement invited the scholars the world over to participate, with the indication that they were free to express their views for or against the listed issues. Since the objective was to remove the confusion, scholars

holding views contrary to the traditional versions were specifically requested to participate.

The response from scholars in America and abroad was indeed enthusiastic. The number of papers contributed was more than could be discussed in the four sessions of the conference held on the 10th December, 1988, at the California State University, Long Beach. The present volume, however, contains all the papers received. The publication comprises papers dealing with subjects like Methodology of the study of Sikh Religion, the Sikh Ideology, Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture, the Sikh Ethics and Rehat Maryada, Social and Historical Aspects of the Sikh Movement, and a critical examination of some recent writings on the Sikh Religion and Its Institutions.

At the conference and the related meetings it was suggested and discussed that, like other ethnic communities, the Sikhs in North America should have a higher academic and research centre of Sikh studies, so that Sikhism and its institutions are projected in their true perspective, and scholarly interest in this field is promoted. We hope that the publication of this volume will serve the dual objective of presenting a clear image of Sikhism and its institutions and of evoking interest in the community for the urgent need of organising a Centre of Higher Learning and Research in Sikh Studies.

The Sikh community of North America is grateful to all the scholars for responding to their invitation, particularly to those scholars like N.Q. King, James Lewis, Avtar Singh, Madanjit Kaur, Surjit Singh, Mrigendra Singh who in spite of their pressing professional duties not only contributed their papers, but also participated in the conference. We also wish to record our appreciation of the Institute of Sikh Studies (India) and its members for the help and assistance they have rendered in the publication of this volume.

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