

RESPECTIVES ON
THE SIKH TRADITION

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THE SIKH TRADITION**

Edited by :
GURDEV SINGH

Foreword by :
KHUSHWANT SINGH

Academy of Sikh Religion & Culture, Patiala.

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To
The countless
Sikhs,
men, women and children,
who suffered inhuman persecution
and laid down their lives in
service of the Gurus
and defence of their
Faith.

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GURDEV SINGH

FOREWORD

In recent years a spate of books on religion and history of the Sikhs have been published in India and abroad. As far as history is concerned, most of them are a restatement of well-known facts and followed the pattern laid down by J.D. Cunningham's pioneering work *History of the Sikhs* published in 1899. Even on religion most Sikh scholars were content to accept narration of events set out in the *Janam Sakhis* and translations of the scriptures made by M.A. Macauliffe in his Volumes, *The Sikh Religion* published in 1909. Since these works, a great deal of research has been done by Indian theologians and historians which have vastly expanded our knowledge of Sikhism and the political, economic and social development of the Sikh community. Outstanding amongst the historians are Dr. Ganda Singh, Hari Ram Gupta, and the late Dr. Fauja Singh. Amongst those who have explored the hitherto untapped material on Sikh religion, a place of honour has to be accorded to Harbans Singh who has also written on several aspects of Sikh history.

However, the most challenging event in Sikh historiography were the publications of two works by Dr. Hew McLeod: *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (1968) & *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (1975). In his first book Dr. McLeod totally rejected the *Janam Sakhis* as source-material. Although most Sikh scholars had also questioned the authenticity of the *Janam Sakhis*, they took from them whatever they felt could be substantiated by extraneous evidence and gave credit due to accepted tradition. Dr. McLeod jettisoned the entire corpus of secondary material and came to the conclusion that since there is very little historical material in the hymns of Guru Nanak and Bhai Gurdas' *Vaars*, the life-story of Guru Nanak is based on fiction. He went further and maintained that Guru Nanak only stated religious beliefs current during his time and should not be regarded as the founder of a new faith.

In his second book *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*

Dr. McLeod carried his thesis forward and cast doubts on the metamorphosis of the pacifist *Nanakprastha* Sikhs to the militant fraternity of the Khalsa. He described it as more due to the large scale incursion of the Jats into the Khalsa Panth rather than as something planned out by the Sixth Guru Hargovind, and the last Guru, Gobind Singh. He questioned the authenticity of the baptismal ceremony of the Baisakhi of 1699, the *raison d'être* of the Khalsa Panth bound by the symbols of the faith, the five *kakkas* and discounted the *Rehatnamas* as subsequent complications and often contradictory of each other.

It was evident that Dr. Hew McLeod was on weak ground and some of his conclusions erroneous. Harbans Singh has put some of the record straight on his *The Heritage of The Sikhs* (1983). But more needed to be done to establish that Sikh religious tradition was not an edifice built on hot air of make-believe but had sound historical basis for it. Dr. Noel Q King, currently Professor of History and Comparative Religion at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and his collaborators have performed this task with admirable ability. S. Daljeet Singh's analysis of cults like Nathism and Vaishnavism highlights the truly revolutionary role of Guru Nanak as the propounder of an eclectic but a new faith which categorically affirms belief in one God, rejects worship of idols and the division of society into a caste-hierarchy. Dr. Hari Ram Gupta is acknowledged as the authority on the evolution of the Khalsa from a theocratic to a political force as is Dr. Ganda Singh on the last days of Guru Gobind Singh, the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib as the symbolic representation of the ten Gurus, the rise of Banda Bairagi and the *misls* leading to the establishment of the Khalsa Raj. Professor Harbans Singh likewise is regarded today as the ablest exponent of the Sikh scriptures and their uniqueness in the body of sacred literatures of other religious systems. All that remained to clear the cobwebs of misunderstanding of Sikhism was to explain the caste composition of converts to Sikhism and its bearing on the militant fraternity. This has been ably done by Professor Jagjit Singh. Scholar as well as laymen will be vastly benefitted by this compilation of different aspects of Sikhism.

KHUSHWANT SINGH
Member Parliament

AUTHORS

Dr. NOEL Q:- KING, Professor of History and Comparative Religion, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A.

DALJEET SINGH, L.A.S. (Retd.), Formerly Secretary Education, Government of Punjab. Author of *Sikhism — Comparative Study of Its Theology and Mysticism*, and contributor to the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism and various journals. Delivered the Guru Nanak Memorial Lectures 1982, at the Punjabi University, Patiala.

Dr. HARI RAM GUPTA, Ph.D., D.Litt., Retired Professor and Head of the Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Author of thirteen research volumes on the Sikhs and Punjab and a large number of papers and monographs.

Dr. GANDASINGH, Ph. D., D.Litt., Well-known Sikh Historian and Research Scholar. Author of more than 50 books and over 175 papers in English, Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi.

PROFESSOR HARBANS SINGH, Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism in preparation at the Punjabi University, Patiala. His publications include *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, *Guru Nanak and Origin of the Sikh Faith*, *Guru Gobind Singh*, *Aspects of Punjabi Literature and Bhai Vir Singh*.

PROFESSOR JAGJIT SINGH, Author of the outstanding work on Sikh history, *The Sikh Revolution*, *Ghadar Party Lebrand Sikh Inqlab* (Punjabi).

GURDEV SINGH, Former Judge, Punjab and Haryana High Court and Fellow of the Panjab and other Universities. President of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation and also Academy of Sikh Religion and Culture; Chairman, Governing Council Guru Nanak Public School, Chandigarh.

PART I

IMPRIMIS

INTRODUCTION

GURDEV SINGH

I

Sikhism is the youngest of the world religions. Guru Nanak, to whom it traces its origin, was born in the year 1469 A.D. He has been rightly described as original formulator of the Sikh tenets and its founder. Just before his death he installed Guru Angad as his successor to carry on his mission. By this process of succession from one Guru to the other, Guru Gobind Singh became the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs in 1674 on the martyrdom of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur. He was just nine years old, but wise beyond his years endowed with rare qualities of head and heart. With unparalleled zeal to raise the down-trodden and fight against repression he created the Khalsa, uplifting the weak and instilling in them supreme courage and devotion to the righteous causes. Within a few years he created a mighty force of self-respecting, dauntless, brave and disciplined Sikhs. He ended the line of personal Gurus by ordaining, just before his death, the vesting of Gurudom in the Granth Sahib (the Holy Scripture of the Sikhs) that had been originally compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru. Since that day, in the year 1708, Guru Granth Sahib has continuously served as source of inspiration and guidance for the Sikhs and revered as their Guru Eternal.

The century following the departure of Guru Gohind Singh was a long and continuous period of ordeal, brutal persecution and immense suffering for those who professed the Sikh faith. They, however, did not lose heart and fought

not only for their survival, but, convinced of the righteousness of their mission and inspired by the teachings and the lives of their Gurus, even emerged as the single and powerful moral and political force which sealed the north-western borders of India against foreign invaders leading to the establishment of a mighty kingdom (*Sarkar Khalsa*) under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was few years after his death that the British, who had already occupied the rest of India, annexed Punjab forcing the Sikhs to join their Hindu and Muslim countrymen as subjects of the British.

From all that has been said above it is evident that the Sikhs, who were born just about five centuries back, lived through this eventful period in full gaze of history. During the last one-and-a-half centuries they have worked hard and struggled not only to survive but also made outstanding contribution to the welfare of their country and humanity. They have been mostly concentrated in the Punjab. When the Congress agreed to the Partition of India in 1947 the Punjab was divided and Sikhs, besides facing un-imaginable loss of life and property, found themselves split with about half of their brothers on either side of the border. Those who managed to survive in the West Punjab, that became a part of Pakistan, were forced to migrate leaving their hearths and homes. Endowed with indomitable will and faith in God, in due course they settled in the rest of India and even abroad in distant places, including Canada, U.S.A. and England. Wherever they went they attracted attention not only because of their distinctive looks wearing turban and beard, but also because of their integrity, hard labour and will to work, which naturally evoked interest in the Sikhs, their religion, history and social structure. This received impetus in recent years because of the celebrations of centenaries of the births of Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das and Guru Gobind Singh, besides that of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Since a large number of educated Sikhs had migrated to foreign countries, the scholars abroad also became

interested in them and some of them have made valuable contribution to the Sikh studies. Some of the works that have recently appeared are, however, tendentious and in conflict with the accepted Sikh tradition and beliefs. They not only offend the Sikhs and injure their susceptibilities, but also tend to lead astray unwary students of Sikh religion and history. It is curious indeed that despite the fact that the Sikhs came into being only five hundred years back and they have lived, struggled and achieved something in full view of history, they find themselves victims of distortions, mis-representations and misunderstandings, to say the least.

II

The foremost among the foreign writers who have recently come on the scene is Dr. W.H. McLeod, author of *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, and *Early Sikh Tradition*. Even a hurried glance through these works reveals that McLeod is at pains to propagate that Sikhism, which has recently been gaining a foothold in the West, does not deserve much consideration as it is only a rehash of a minor effete Hindu creed. Being conscious of the fact that Sikhism traces its origin to Guru Nanak, McLeod starts with him. A lot had already been written about his life and teachings, and even from his own days Guru Nanak has been lauded as the Apostle of Universal Religion, Unity of Godhead, Brotherhood of Man and messenger of peace and goodwill, laying emphasis on Truth and righteous living, discarding idolworship, rituals and dogmas and denouncing caste-system. Having been involved in the Christian Missionary activities for a number of years in the Punjab, the homeland of the Sikhs, McLeod seems to be deeply conscious of the fact that after the 1947 Partition of India, in this part of the country, the Christian Missionary work has no future unless the faith of the new generation in its own traditions is undermined. For that purpose a fresh study, with a nonbeliever's approach accepting nothing that is not established to his satisfaction,

of the founder of Sikh Religion and Sikhism assumes importance. His endeavour is to tell the growing Sikh generation, and the Westerners among whom the Sikhs have recently spread and who feel attracted to the Sikh tenets, that the image of Guru Nanak hitherto projected by his numerous biographies and studies on Sikhism is not real but legendary or a myth, and Sikhism has nothing new to offer.

As the Sikhs were preparing to celebrate the quincentenary of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of their religion, to spread his message of brotherhood of man and universal goodwill and peace, Dr. McLeod came up with his *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* in 1968. In its preface the author, while warning us that it is not, “in any direct sense, a study of the faith of Sikhs”, claims that it is “a study of the man Guru Nanak and a reference to the Sikh religion has been included in the title because the adherents of that religion quite rightly regard Guru Nanak as a determinative formulator of the beliefs which have ever since constituted the primary basis of the Sikh religion.”¹

The title of this book generates the expectation of a new scholarly biography of the great Guru, leading to better understanding of his personality and mission. Disappointingly enough what the reader finds on opening it is an assiduous effort to destroy or distort the prevailing image of this great prophet by asserting that the incidents of his life narrated in his numerous biographies have no historical basis but are the brainchild of his devotees who sought to glorify him by attributing super-natural power to him.

McLeod examines various sources of the life of Guru Nanak only to reject them. Even the *Adi Granth*, which treasures the hymns (*vani*) of Guru Nanak and his successor Gurus, is ignored despite specific reference in some of them to the contemporary events like the invasion of Babar, the depredations that followed and the sufferings of the people. He doubts the context of ‘*Babar-vani*’ and other suggestive verses as he refuses to believe that Guru Nanak was present at Saidpur when that city was sacked.

The *janam-sakhis* narrating events from the life of Guru Nanak have been discarded as “hagiographic accounts with a very substantial portion of legend and of very little historical value.” More detailed examination of the various *janam-sakhis* and the incidents narrated therein form the subject matter of McLeod’s latest book *Early Sikh Tradition- — A Study of Janam-Sakhis*.

Examining the various incidents or *Sakhis* narrated in the *janam-sakhis*, McLeod summarily rejects all that smacks of miracle or wonder. Applying the test of probability to the rest he very grudgingly accepts 28 as possible. Out of 124 *Sakhis* analysed by him as many as 87 are rejected as improbable or impossible and bare 37 classed as probable. Summing up his conclusions McLeod says:

“The *janam-sakhis* have served as a vehicle of a powerful myth, one which still commands acceptance within the society which developed it..... The myth which they express may be briefly stated as follows. Baba Nanak was the divinely commissioned giver of salvation. To all who would seek salvation the way lies open. The means of salvation consists in loyalty to the person of Baba Nanak and acceptance of his teachings. This is the myth. The form which was developed to give it expression was the narrative anecdote which, in relating some incidents concerning the life of Nanak, sought to authenticate the claims made on his behalf. These anecdotes collected into anthologies or structured biographies, constitute the *janam-sakhis*.”²

His conclusions are not surprising as his approach is negative and he starts with the assumption that *janam-sakhis*, as in the case of the Gospels, are mainly collections of myths developed during first two centuries from the imagination of the followers. This treatment of *janam-sakhis* is wholly untenable especially in view of the authentic hymns (*Bani*) of Guru Nanak himself treasured in the Adi Granth and other contemporary and near-contemporary

evidence.

The following passage occurring in his book *Evolution of Sikh Community*, reveals the working of Dr. McLeod's mind.

“The basic point which needs to be made as far as the authentic Nanak material is concerned is that the *janam-sakhis* tradition can provide no more than pointers to possibilities. Each of these possibilities must be subjected to rigorous scrutiny and only when it is *actually established* can it be accepted. Unlike the person in a court of law *janam-sakhis* must be held guilty until proved innocent. Given the hagiographic nature of the *janam-sakhis* and their general lack of reliability as far as the historical Nanak is concerned, material which cannot be positively established should only rarely be given the benefit of doubt.”³

With this attitude is it any wonder that McLeod finds next to nothing in the various *janam-sakhis* and other source material, including the *Adi Granth* and *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, as positive evidence of historical Nanak? As a result of his laborious pruning of available biographical material and rejection of the bulk of *janam-sakhis* he gives us the life picture of Nanak of History in less than a page.⁴ Stopping short of declaring Nanak a mythical figure he mercifully accepts that he lived in flesh and blood having been born in 1469 A.D. and lived till 1539, but asserts that he had an uneventful life in the course of which he did not take to any calling, and later in response to a Divine call, wandered about, ultimately setting as a peasant on the banks of the Ravi at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan) and collected a following.

It is here profitable to refer to the approach of another Western scholar, Dr. James A. Veitch. In an excellent chapter on *Religion of the Sikhs*, this learned Professor of Religious Studies stresses the importance of religious tradition and work like *Janam-sakhis* in dealing with the lives of great

religious teachers in these words:

“Of course it is difficult to distinguish between what happened in the life of the historical person Nanak, and how later traditions interpreted the impact he made upon the contemporary religious scene. Later generations, in recapturing the founding vision of Guru Nanak tend to fill out the record with stories which are more interpretative. This should not surprise the European reader: thinking and writing in historical terms is a phenomenon which has had a relatively short history in the West. Stories which are part and parcel of all religious traditions provide the media through which truths are expressed. The question to be asked of stories illustrating difficult incidents in the life of founders of the great religious traditions (such as Guru Nanak, Gotama, Muhammad and Jesus) is, not did it really happen in the way described? But what religious truth is being expressed in this story? However, this sort of comment should not obscure the originality and fresh insight into the nature of the Divine, injected by this remarkable person - Guru Nanak - into the religious life of North India.”⁵

III

Encouraged by the slow reaction of the Sikhs to such tendentious writings about their faith and their Gurus, McLeod came up with his second book, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*. In the five essays covering 104 pages he has attacked most of the Sikh traditions, institutions and beliefs, questioned their validity and striven to create doubt about others. Some of the propositions put forward by him are these:

(1) It is misleading to call Guru Nanak the founder of Sikh religion as he did not originate a new school of thought Or set of teachings. What Guru Nanak offers us is the clearest and most highly articulate expression of the *nirguna*

sampradaya, the so-called Sant tradition of Northern India, a system which he inherited, reworked according to his own genius and passed on in a form unequalled by any other representative of the tradition. It was the influence of Nath doctrine and practice upon Vaishnava bhakti which was responsible for the emergence of the Sant synthesis.”⁶

(2) The ten Gurus never preached one set of religious doctrines or system and particularly the third Guru created new institutions on the old Hindu lines, the very thing Guru Nanak has spurned.”⁷ From the sixth Guru onwards, the teachings of Guru Nanak were completely given up in favour of a militant pose in response to socio-political situations.

(3) The arming of the Panth would not have been the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind, but because of Jat influx in the Sikh fold “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.”⁸

(4) The traditional account about the founding of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of the year or 1699 (A.D.) cannot be accepted as there are “compulsive reasons for scepticism”, and “the traditions relating to the period of Guru Gobind Singh must be in some considerable measure, set aside. The slate must be wiped clean and must not be reinscribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century.”⁹

(5) The Sikh code of discipline, *Rehat Maryada*, and Sikh symbols were evolved during the eighteenth century as a result of gradual growth, though the tradition declares they were definitely settled by a pronouncement of Guru Gobind Singh and were a part of the Baisakhi day proceedings in 1699 (A.D.).¹⁰

(6) Though the Gurus denounced caste system and preached against it, yet they did not seem sincere or serious in removing caste differences.¹¹

(7) The succession of the Granth Sahib as Guru of the

Sikhs, ending the line of personal Gurus on the death of Guru Gobind Singh, was not because of an injunction of Guru Gobind Singh himself but was a subsequent adoption by the Sikhs, who were fighting for their existence, to meet the needs of the Panth for cohesion.¹²

(8) The authenticity of the current version of Guru Granth Sahib which is widely accepted and used by the Sikhs, is open to question since there are three manuscripts (Birs) available which are not entirely identical.¹³

These are some of the salient propositions that have been put forward by Dr. McLeod. They not only belittle the Sikh faith and doctrines in the eyes of the English speaking people and other non-Sikhs but also tend to shake the faith of the younger generation of the Sikhs in their religion, Gurus, scriptures, institutions and all that they inherit. He has been emboldened by the fact that in our own Universities even the scholars who are working in the Departments of the Sikh Studies have not cared to rebut or even examine his thesis and to place before the people the correct picture and real facts. This neglect has already resulted in considerable harm as even uncommitted scholars and researchers, without proper examination of the issues involved, are prone to accept the word of McLeod in the absence of any challenge by the Sikhs themselves or availability of the other point of view.

All these propositions put forward by Dr. McLeod are clearly in conflict with the basic beliefs and long unbroken traditions of the Sikhs. Their acceptance by an unwary mind may shake the faith of the believer or mislead an unsuspecting scholar, who is not fully conversant with the Sikh history, traditions and beliefs. Dr. McLeod was certainly not unmindful of the far reaching consequences of this challenge to the Sikh tradition and the unmistakable trend of his writings to undermine the Sikh faith. That he was conscious of the delicacy of the task undertaken by him is obvious from his Preface to *Guru Nanak and Sikh Religion* wherein he says: "For no one is the injunction to tread softly

more relevant than for the historian whose study carries him into religions beyond his own society. Should his study extend to what other men hold sacred the injunction becomes a compelling necessity. For this reason the westerner who ventures upon a study of Sikh history must do so with caution and almost inevitably with a measure of trepidation. In such a field the risk of giving offence is only too obvious.”¹⁴

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.

IV

Approach and Attitude

In dealing with the works of McLeod and others of his ilk, one has to be satisfied that the approach is fair and unbiased and the conclusions are based on adequate data. This important aspect has been dealt with, in the next chapter of this volume by the eminent scholar Prof. Noel Q. King, whose specialisation is History of Religion. He has also dealt with critical scholarship and the historical methodology which Dr. McLeod claims to have applied to his study of Guru Nanak and his Religion. The conclusions reached by him are important and no scholar engaged in search for truth can ignore them. Dr. King writes:

“It is apparent from all this that critical scholarship is a native growth in Judaism and Christianity. Every species of critic is more dangerous when it turns to weapons developed in one religion on to another. In addition, if the critics themselves have departed from their own belief, their remarks on other peoples’ sacred things are liable to be affected thereby. If they are disappointed in their own faith, often their bitterness

will be expressed in what they say of the faith of others. If they think their own old religion is based on irrationality and nonsense, they will hardly be able to refrain from extending the same methodology and arguments to the religions of other people.”¹⁵

Dr. King further tells us that it is most important to remember the personality and circumstances of the critics and asserts:

“In any subject which entails human subjects, the work must be put into a personal context. If it is to do with religion it should also have the statement of ingredients, including the religious standing of the writers. 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.”¹⁶

Dealing with the study of religion John A. Hutchison points out that among the general issues and the problems which one faces is “the tension between commitment and objectivity and closely related tension between the religious adherent or participant and that of the student of religion”. Elaborating he cautions:

“For the person who claims no religious adherence or who seeks to study a religion different from his own, the problem will be very different of seeking by imaginative sympathy to identify his subject. He must strive to reproduce in some measure by imagination or sympathy the view point which the adherent possesses by his real participation.”¹⁷

Referring to the characteristics of a good study he says that the student of religion must seek the facts as objectively fully and as freely as is humanly possible. He must not hide,

suppress or distort facts and this maxim is particularly necessary in the study of religion in order to dispel deeply -rooted prejudices.

Let us turn to McLeod himself to ascertain his attitude to the study of the Sikhs and their religion. As has been observed earlier, in his Preface to *“Guru Nanak and His Religion”* he says that he seeks to apply rigorous historical methodology to the traditions concerning the life of Guru Nanak.

In his later book *The Evolution of Sikh Community* he goes further and refuses to attach any importance even to the long established traditions in dealing with the creation of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of the year 1699 (A.D.). He declines to accept the unbroken tradition and all other historical evidence by saying:

“Traditions abound but so too do compulsive reasons for scepticism and asserts that the slate must be wiped clean and must not be reinscribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century. We may be sure that something certainly did happen on the Baisakhi day of 1699 and some of the tradition will eventually turn out to be subsequently accurate.”¹⁸

Again while dealing with the Khalsa code of discipline he writes:

“Although the actual institution of the code may be safely attached to a declaration made by the tenth Guru in 1699 any analysis of its actual contents must extend over a much wider period. It must relate to cultural features which were already present within Sikh society at that time, and to events which came later, particularly to events which took place during the eighteenth century.”¹⁹

It is curious indeed that being unable to refute that Guru Gobind Singh had promulgated the code of discipline at the creation of the Khalsa, McLeod persists in saying that the

Sikh symbols, and some other features of the Khalsa were adopted later. In the same strain he disregards what he himself calls “an extensive, generally consistent and almost universally accepted body of tradition to explain the creation of the Panth which indisputably had well-formulated religious doctrines, a coherent discipline and the strong conviction that it has been born to rule.”

In its final analysis the attitude of McLeod to the study of Sikhism is to accept nothing which the Sikhs value or believe in, reject even the established traditions and doubt historical facts. With this approach he asks the Sikhs to prove positively to his satisfaction that what they believe about their Gurus, religion, history etc. is correct. Even when he finds that the traditional account has a valid basis, he chooses not to accept it saying that there may be another possibility.

In justification what can be urged is that Dr. McLeod has adopted rigorous critical methodology developed in the West during the last two centuries. This has been examined in detail by Dr. N.Q. King. While saying that he was not calling for a moratorium on critical scholarship, and that Sikhism like all the great religions needs it to meet the needs of its highly educated followers, he warns that intellect and its methods as we presently know them are not perfect nor absolute, nor infallible, nor do they see things in focus or whole.”

Referring to McLeod’s studies on Sikhism under reference he writes:

“Whatever Dr. McLeod intended many readers will ask his books wrong questions and get the wrong answers. The books to an uninitiated reader seem to reiterate the notion that a great amount of Sikh belief appears to be based on uncritical religiosity. The reader seeking the well-springs of what Sikhism is will not be assisted. The only successful opponent to thousands of years of Passing conquerors must have something that makes him tick ! Nowhere in these books is there an attempt to tell us what it is. The reader wishing to know about

the heart of Sikhism will turn to these books and be offered meticulously and exhaustively carried out drills in certain methods of Western criticism. The readers' desires, and the books purpose differ."²⁰

V

On some of the propositions put forward by Dr. McLeod we have in these pages the studies made by well-known Indian scholars and historians, besides the opening essay by the eminent Professor of Comparative Religions and History, Or. Noel Q. King.

Sardar Daljeet Singh has dealt in details with the various features of Nathism and Vaishnavism, which, according to McLeod, are the elements of *Sant Mat* that Guru Nanak is said to have reworked and put forward. Making comparison of these two systems with Sikhism Daljeet Singh has brought out the distinction features of Guru Nanak's teachings which are not only in conflict with the *Sant Mat*, but unequivocally reject them.

Dr. Hari Ram Gupta, the renowned historian, whose specialty is the Punjab History, has given a detailed account of the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi of the year 1699 A.D. It is based upon authentic contemporary and near-contemporary evidence. This must dispel any doubt which McLeod has voiced without any cogent material to justify it.

Dr. Ganda Singh and Professor Harbans Singh, writing separately about the installation of Guru Granth Sahib as Eternal Guru ending the line of personal succession, have affirmed the Sikh tradition finding abundant unimpeachable evidence to support it.

Prof. Jagjit Singh has studied in detail the caste system as it prevailed in the Hindu society and brought out that Guru Nanak and his successors not only rejected it but also took effective steps to wean away the Sikhs and obliterate all distinctions of castes and status.

Prof. Jagjit Singh has also forcefully controverted Dr. McLeod's thesis about the militarisation of Sikh movement that it was the influx of Jats that led to it.

Beginning of Sikhism

The Sikhs trace the origin of their faith to Guru Nanak who indisputably is the determinative formulator of the Sikh teachings. Dr. McLeod, while conceding that "the following which gathered around Guru Nanak was certainly the original nucleus of the *Sikh Panth*", asserts that he cannot be called the founder of Sikh religion, because "if we compare his teachings with those of other contemporary or earlier religious figures, we shall at once see that he stands firmly within a well-defined tradition, *nirguna sampradaya*, the so-called Sant tradition of Northern India." Elaborating it he says: "It was the influence of Nath doctrine and practice upon Vaishnava bhakti, which was primarily responsible for the emergence of the Sant synthesis. Muslim beliefs, both Sufi and orthodox, had at most a marginal effect."²¹

Both Hindus and Muslims, who had been at loggerheads for hundreds of years, felt attracted by Guru Nanak's teachings, and that too, despite the fact that when Guru Nanak set out to spread the message of God after his mystic encounter at Sultanpur Lodhi, he had declared: "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman." The original nucleus of followers that he had gathered around him was drawn from both these opposing religious communities and when he departed from this world both claimed that he belonged to them.

This brings out the universal nature of Guru Nanak's doctrine and the fact that men of conflicting faiths discovered that here was the one in whom they found the culmination of their own faith. That is why he is still remembered in Punjab as the "King of holy men : the Guru of Hindus and the *Pir* of Musalmans."

As K.L. Seshagiri Rao points out, the question whether

Guru Nanak gave humanity some new truth. or merely echoed the ideas contained in Hindu heritage, is neither proper nor fair. as it ignores the historical fact that the great leaders of the world are as much created by history as they are the creators of history

Scholars of various religions have found some cardinal elements of their own religions in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, but this only highlights the universal appeal of Sikhism as the world religion and not that it is a sect of another, or a syncretic blend of different, and often conflicting, faiths. Dr Richard V Desmet in his study “Nanak and Christ” finds “a remarkable convergence of their teachings and affinities between them”, and says: Nanak’s singing of the true God seems like an echo across the centuries of monotheistic preachings of Jesus.”²²

Again it is interesting that Dr. L.M. Joshi finds that Sikhism is nearer to Buddhism than to any other religious tradition and there are manifest similarities between them. Despite this none has traced the origin of Sikhism to Christianity or Buddhism, which is fundamentally different both from Sikhism and Christianity being a non-theistic religion. Monotheism, brotherhood of man, rejection of caste system and idol worship, and some other religious beliefs, which are cardinal both in Islam and Sikhism, have fostered an impression that Guru Nanak’s teachings are nearer to Islam and that Sikhism was born out of the wedlock of Hinduism and Islam. Discovery of some elements of various religions in Guru Nanak’s teachings merely goes to show that Sikhism has universal appeal and elements of World Religion and not that Guru Nanak was propagating the principles of one or the other of the existing religions. The view that Guru Nanak’s monotheism was because of Islam’s influence, Dr Mujeeb asserts :

“The revelation that came to Guru Nanak must have been as direct and immediate and as independent of

history and social circumstances as the religious records of the Sikhs show it to be.”

In his recent Berkely Lectures on Sikhism at the University of California, Professor Harbans Singh has aptly summed up the correct position in these words:

“The beginnings of the Sikh faith go back to the revelation brought to light by Guru Nanak. In the message he delivered lay the seed of a vital thought-stream which moulded a new community of men. Attempts have been made to split Guru Nanak’s doctrine into various strands and to trace their origin to precedent schools of thought. But to understand Guru Nanak fully, we have to look at the totality of his tenets and at what impact it made on history. In this perspective, we shall see that Guru Nanak is historically the founder of the Sikh faith. His precept was definitely the starting point. In many significant ways, it signalled a new departure in contemporary religious ethos. Sikh tradition in continuum bears witness to the individual quality of Guru Nanak’s intuition.”²²³

Rejecting the theory of syncretistic union between Hinduism and Islam, or an effort to have in his teachings a judicious mixture of elements of each faith to be acceptable to all, Prof. Harbans Singh continues:

“His equal attention to Hindu and Muslim identities and use of some of their religious vocabulary have led some to depict him as the reconciler of the two, faiths and to see Sikhism as a deliberate mingling of Hindu and Muslim practices. To do so will mean missing much of his individual genius and misinterpreting the historical development arising from his revelation.”²²⁴

While observing that some of the notes were already audible in the milieu in which Guru Nanak was born. Prof. Harbans Singh rejects the contention that the *Nirgun*

Sampradaya and Sufism were the basis of Guru Nanak's teachings. Admitting that all this was a part of Guru Nanak's inheritance, he, however, maintains that yet he belonged to none of these systems and orders, nor could he be placed in the framework of any of these and asserts that attempts at tracing kinship between him and Bhakti reformers and the description of Kabir as "forerunner of Sikhism" are equally misleading. The inclusion of some of the sayings of Kabir and other Bhaktas in the Guru Granth Sahib was much later by Guru Arjan Dev. McLeod himself concedes that "there is no evidence to support the impression that Guru Nanak had met Kabir and little to suggest that he knew any of his works", yet some Western scholars have gone to the extent of describing Nanak as "a disciple of Kabir, or a second-rate Kabir." Such observations are neither fair nor tenable. They betray thoughtless acceptance of the views of some Hindus to whom the very idea of independence and distinctness of the Sikh doctrine has been an anathema.

In dealing with this matter it is important to remember that the songs of Kabir and some others found in Guru Granth Sahib are only a part of the compositions of those Bhaktas. It is abundantly clear that Guru Arjan, who compiled the Adi Granth, had selected these leaving out others which did not accord with the Sikh doctrine. So far as Kabir is concerned we have the recent study by Ms. Karim Schomer, "Kabir in the Guru Granth Sahib: An Exploratory Essay." Pointing out that historians of Indian religion have tended to oversimplify the medieval religious situation by classifying all important figures, movements and literature as representative of either *Saguna Bhakti* or *Nirguna Bhakti*, she tells us:

"Even a preliminary examination of the corpus of Kabir's utterances included in the *Guru Granth Sahib* reveals some noticeable differences between Kabir the mystic and the organized Sikh Panth. The inclusion of some of his utterances in the Guru Granth Sahib is not automatic proof of identity of moods and

motivation between him and the compilers of the Granth. ²⁵

On comparison of the various songs of Kabir found in the *Kabir Granthavali* with some of those included in the Guru Granth Sahib, Schomer sums up her conclusion in these words:

“Thus we see that the *dohas* of Kabir included and preserved in the Guru Granth tradition tend to be those which encourage the ‘moods and motivation’ appropriate to a solid, moral, Godfearing religious community of householders. Utterances pointing to the ecstasies of mystical experience are not totally absent, but are strikingly few in comparison with those found in the *Kabir Granthavali*.²⁶

Similar studies of the sayings of other Saints that are found in the Guru Granth Sahib will reveal that Guru Arjan took care to select only those hymns which were consistent with the teachings of Guru Nanak. This clearly brings out the points of departure from the current Bhaktas’ cult. The most important was the emphasis of Guru Nanak and his successors on social morality while living as a householder and not as an escapist. What Cuningham says in this connection is instructive:

“Ramanand and Gorakh had preached religious equality, and Chaitan had repeated that faith levelled caste. Kabir had denounced images, and appealed to the people in their own tongue, and Vallabh had taught that effectual devotion was compatible with the ordinary duties of the world. But these good and able men appear to have been so impressed with the nothingness of life, that they deemed the amelioration of man’s social condition to be unworthy of a thought.... They formed pious association of contented quietists, or they gave themselves up to the contemplation of futurity in the hope of approaching bliss, rather than called upon their fellow creatures to throw aside every

social as well as religious trammel, and to arise a new people freed from debasing corruption of ages. They perfected form of dissent rather than planted the germs of a nation, and their sects remain to this day as they left them. It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform and to lay down those broad foundations which enabled his successor *Gobind* to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes.”²⁷

The lives, works and thoughts of all great men of the bygone centuries are the common heritage of all of us, but God-inspired men like Nanak go forward discarding all that alienates man from God and impedes human progress. Their new concept of God’s purpose and man’s duty opens vast avenues for man’s redemption and good of the society transcending all that has gone before. Tracing of influences of some earlier traditions must not blur our vision and prevent us from discovering the contribution made by Guru Nanak and his successors to religious thought.

Reminding us that all great religions of the world had their precursors, Prof. Harbans Singh elaborates:

“Gautama and early Buddhism were preceded by the intellectuals of Brahmanic orthodoxy and exponents of several yogic asceticism. Jesus and primitive Christianity show the influence of Hebrew prophets, Essene Sectarians and rabbinic teachers. Similarly Guru Nanak was the product of his times and the heritage that had come to him. But his originality, like that of other great teachers, lies in his reassertion of the eternal truths and in what he made of his inheritance and what he created out of the matrix of his own personality.”

Talking about Sikhism and Bhakti and Sant cults, Dr. Attar Singh rightly emphasises:

“It is Sikhism alone which instead of seeking

accommodation either within Hinduism, or within the conquering Islam chose to protest against both of them, revolt against the former and confront the later. It is this revolutionary configuration of protest, revolt and confrontation that the inner urges and aspirations sought and achieved their basic articulation not only mystically and metaphysically but even as historically. ^{“28}

Commenting on the fact that several commentators of Sikh faith have seen in Guru Nanak a kindred soul of the Sufis or Islam and the Bhaktas and Saints of the Hindu faith, Dr. Attar Singh aptly points out:

“But the crucial point which is not appreciated is that while Guru Nanak went along with the Sufis and the Bhaktas to a certain length, he ultimately reaches past both of them when he demands a new praxis, both individual and social, to make a bid for changing what was dead and rotten..... Guru Nanak’s religious quest starts appropriately with man and the human condition in both, the necessary and contingent, eternal and the temporal contexts In Guru Nanak’s faith vital question is not that of man losing his identity in God but that of God’s awakening within man.”²⁹

In this volume we have a comparative study of Nathism, Vaishnavism and Sikhism made by a well-known scholar of Theology Sardar Daljeet Singh. He has examined in detail the various features of these three systems and has come to the conclusion that they are independent in their fundamentals and world views. Their activities and ideologies are different. They are entirely different in approach, their ideas and ideologies, and their modes of worship. Even their goals are different. Rejecting the caste system, idol worship and escapist attitude Sikhism stands by itself. Accepting the householder’s life and responsibilities to carry out the Attributive Will of God and a continuous virtuous endeavour to solve problems of man a Sikh has not only to work for his own emancipation but also work

for the good of the society.

VI

Birth of the Khalsa

The Sikhs owe their distinctive look and identity to Guru Gobind Singh who created the Order of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of the year 1699 (A.D.). For that historic event he had called upon his followers to reach Anandpur Sahib with arms and wearing their hair and beards inviolate. The historical records reveal that eighty thousand Sikhs responded to his call. At an impressive function he baptised the faithful into the new Order of the Khalsa by administering to them *Amrit* prepared with double-edged sword (*Khande-Ka-Pahul*). He enjoined upon them the wearing of the five insignia or emblems (*Kakas*) beginning with the letter 'K', including *Kesh* and *Kirpan*; rejection of old customs; adoption of the new mode of life; a strict code of conduct; forging brotherhood of his disciples as equals dedicated to the service of God and the humanity. In the words of Dr. J.S. Grewal, Guru Gobind Singh successfully completed 'the revolution' which had been initiated by Guru Nanak. Both in his life and his death Guru Gobind Singh had made himself master of the imagination of his followers. He had fired their imagination and instilled new spirit into them which inspired "sparrows hunt the hawks and one Sikh fight a legion." Prof. Harbans Singh has beautifully summed up the result in these words:

"The inauguration of the Khalsa was the realization of Guru Gobind Singh's divinely inspired vision and his design for the uplift of the people. It was a grand creative deed of history conceived to bring about a revolutionary change in the minds of men and arouse their energies for positive and altruistic action. They were to be made conscious of the disabilities of their state, of their servitude and abjectness and taught to stand upon their feet and work ceaselessly and

courageously to redeem their predicament. They were to be rid of the superstitions and divisions which had enfeebled and entombed their spirit for centuries and were given a new conceit of themselves and their destiny. A new impulse of chivalry arose in the northern India and it resulted in an endless chain of shining deeds of sacrifice and gallantry, giving the irrevocable turn to the course of events. How the Guru shook out of their lassitude people reconciled for long to their fallen state, their will to action completely atrophied, is one of the miracles of history.”²³⁰

Thus out of the oppressed and demoralised arose a distinctive people fired with a sense of mission and determination to usher in a new society implicitly believing that the Khalsa will rule. With faith in God and righteousness of their cause they did carve out the kingdom of Punjab, leaving no trace of the Mughal rule and sealing the north-western borders of India against the foreign invaders by planting their own banner even beyond the rugged frontiers of their land.

Creation of the Khalsa was evidently an outstanding event of far-reaching consequences not only for the Sikhs but in the history of India. Hew McLeod, however, chooses not to accept the account of the birth of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi of the year 1699 (A.D.), not because he finds any evidence to falsify it but by simply refusing to believe it, saying:

“Our knowledge of the 18th century is still limited. Traditions abound but so too do compulsive reasons for scepticism. What we do know, however, indicates that traditions relating to the period of Guru Gobind Singh must be, in some considerable measure set aside The slate must be wiped clean and must not be rein scribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century.”

It may be remembered that the eighteenth century, on which McLeod needs more light is the period following the

death of Guru Gobind Singh who departed from this world in 1708. To accept the account of Guru Gobind Singh's life and achievements McLeod asks for a convincing account of what went on in the century after him, to exclude the suspicion that the tradition in question is historio-graphical phenomena.

Here in this volume Dr. H.R. Gupta, the eminent historian, has exhaustively dealt with the founding of the Khalsa. He finds ample and un rebuttable evidence in support of it. As Prof. Harbans Singh reminds us, it must not be forgotten that there is unbroken tradition in support of the Sikh account of the creation of Khalsa which stands un rebutted and cannot be discarded on mere suspicion about its authenticity.

The detailed account of this historic event rests upon authentic sources, including the newswriter of the Mughal Court, who was present on the occasion. Khushwant Singh, who has dealt with it in detail, has beautifully summed up the impact of this momentous step in his *History of the Sikhs*.

“Sikh chronicles maintain that baptism of the twenty thousand Sikhs at Anandpur was followed by mass baptism all over Northern India. The Guru had dinned into the timid peasantry of the Punjab that they must take the broom of Divine knowledge and *sweep* away the filth of timidity.

Thus did Gobind ‘train the sparrow to hunt the hawk and one man to fight a legion’. Within a few months a new people were born - bearded, beturbaned, fully armed, and with a crusader’s zeal to build a new commonwealth. They implicitly believed that

The Khalsa shall rule

Their enemies will be scattered.

Only they that seek refuge.³¹

will be saved.”

Here the present writer would like to refer to his family history. He is a direct descendant of Mahan Singh who had

got baptised as Khalsa and received *Amrit* from the hands of Guru Gobind Singh himself. In the history of the family based on the family records and diaries it is recorded not only that Mahan Singh went to Anandpur Sahib and got baptised as a Khalsa but also that Guru Gobind Singh himself graciously administered *Amrit* to him, changed his name from Mehtab Shah to Mahan Singh and enjoined upon him to observe the new code of discipline and all the essentials of the new Order, including the five emblems (*Kakas*). From that day Mehtab Shah became Mahan Singh, with changed appearance as a Khalsa wearing *Kes* and the rest of the four emblems, daily reciting the Gurbani, particularly Japuji Sahib and lap Sahib.

VII

Sikh Symbols and Discipline

It is further specifically recorded in this account how Guru Gobind Singh enjoined upon him to observe the new Khalsa Code.

“When I was baptised and received *Amrit* from the hands of Guru Gobind Singh Maharaj it was enjoined on me to keep *Kes* and wear *Kirpan*, *Kara*, *Kanga* and *Katch*. I was directed to be righteous in my conduct, do good deeds, worship God and be honest and upright. I was asked to consider all Sikhs as my brothers, share my earnings with others, and consider the service of my parents far more meritorious than pilgrimage to *tiraths*. It was emphasized that God is neither born nor dies: One who takes birth and dies can never take the place of God. I was commanded to shun intoxicants, consider all women, other than the one whose hand I had got in marriage, as my mother, sister or daughter, and avoid evil ways.”

This is positive evidence of the authenticity of the Sikh tradition, which is unbroken, that Guru Gobind Singh had

himself prescribed the 5 Ks, including *Kes* and *Kirpan*, and laid down rules of conduct and discipline for the Sikhs initiated into the Order of the Khalsa taking vow from them to observe the same.

It is also recorded in this family history that at the time Guru Gobind Singh blessed Mehtab Shah with *Amrit* he changed his name to Mahan Singh and thereafter this ancestor of mine wore a changed physical appearance as Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. All this must dispel any lurking suspicion about the Sikh traditional account of the origin of the Sikh symbols and the basic requirements of the *Rehat Maryada* which an *Amritdhari*, or baptised Sikh, has to observe.

The fact that in course of time these rules were compiled or elaborated by some persons does not warrant the conclusion that the *Rehat Maryada* was a subsequent invention. It is important to remember that by the year 1699 (A.D.), when Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa, he had fought many battles, studied and written prolifically, conversed with the learned whom he had gathered around him at Poanta Sahib, contemplated a lot on the problems facing the country and people around him, besides having constant communion with the Creator whose attributes he recounted in his outstanding composition *Jap Sahib*, and invoked His blessing in his other inspiring and inspired hymns. From his early days he believed that he was the man with a mission. In his autobiographical composition *Bachitar Natak* he asserted that the Lord sent him into this world charged with the duty to uphold the good and uproot sin and evil. It was after deep and long contemplation and considerable planning that he created the missionary force, Khalsa, to accomplish his mission. When he created a new Order of Saint-soldiers, armed but devout and committed to the good of humanity, he could not have omitted to lay down a strict code of discipline and insisted on its observance. It was indispensable for the new organisation, that had to actively engage in battles and save the oppressed

and the meek. Broad and essential outlines, especially the wearing of the symbols and observance of religious injunctions, must have been laid down at the foundation of the Khalsa and explained to the mammoth gathering. If latter they were compiled by various persons and each of them gave his own account, it is unfair to say that the *Rehat Maryada* was a subsequent innovation.

In dealing with this question it is necessary to keep in mind that the decades following the death of Guru Gobind Singh were of continuous grim struggle for survival for the Sikhs. Banda Bahadur, whom Guru Gobind Singh, in his last days, charged with the duty of punishing the persecutors of the Sikhs and those, who had murdered his sons, planted the Guru's standard in a village thirty five miles from the capital, by the time he learnt about the murderous assault on Guru Gobind Singh. Thereafter in rapid strides he led the Khalsa into the Punjab and with the destruction of Sirhind became the master of the territories between the Jamana and the Sutlej. Vastly outnumbered by the Mughal forces Banda was captured and eventually executed alongwith his four-year old son and hundreds of Sikhs in June 1716. Edicts were issued to capture and kill the Sikhs wherever found and price was set on their heads. The Sikhs not only faced the wrath and the might of the Mughals but also met the onslaught of the invaders, Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali. The Sikhs were hounded and brutally massacred. One of these holocausts known as *Chhota Gballughara* was in June, 1746 and another, far more disastrous, *Vada Gballughara* (The Great Holocaust) was on February 5, 1762.

In this state of affairs when the Sikhs were hunted and hounded for several decades right from the death of Guru Gobind Singh, can it be imagined they would forge the five Sikh *Kakas* or symbols and wear them. The unshorn hair, which is one of these, at once marks out a Sikh and enables you to pick out one in a multitude. Had it not been an injunction of Guru Gobind Singh, who had created the

Khalsa, the Sikhs carrying a price on their heads could not have even thought of introducing these symbols which would make them easy targets. The very fact that throughout their life-and-death struggle they stuck to these symbols and all the Sikh martyrs refused to surrender their hair leaves no doubt about the tradition. Since Guru Gobind Singh was determined to make sparrows fight hawks, as he himself proclaimed, it can well be believed that he himself deliberately prescribed the wearing of long hair and other four symbols so that men with courage to wear the external marks of identification as Sikhs may flock under his banner and when apprehended would not be able to deny that they are the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh.

VIII

Guru Granth Sahib

The line of personal Gurus had continued for over two hundred years. The Sikh Church with its cardinal tenets, beliefs, doctrines, and various institutions stood fully organised and established, culminating in the Order of the Khalsa promulgated by Guru Gobind Singh himself. Since the days of Guru Arjan, who had compiled and installed Granth Sahib (Adi Granth) in the *sanctum sanctorum*, Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar, this fore-most holy Scripture of the Sikhs had occupied central place in Sikh religious life being the treasure-house of the Guru's Word (*Shabad*). In the words of Prof. Harbans Singh:

“The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued forever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib to be his successor. It was through the Word that Guru

could be made everlasting. This object Guru Gobind Singh secured when he pronounced the Holy Granth to be the Guru after him. The Guru Granth was henceforth, and for all the times to come, the Guru for the Sikhs.³²

The question may be examined from another angle. During the life time of some of the Gurus some aspirants for the exalted and holy office kicked up disputes and created difficulties for the acknowledged Gurus. Ram Rai, the eldest son of Guru Har Rai persistently opposed the succession of his younger brother Har Krishan who had been nominated as the next Guru by their father. Guru Gobind Singh's own father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, faced worst opposition. The latter's predecessor, Guru Har Krishan was yet a child when he became the eighth Guru. He lived only for a couple of years thereafter and when he died unexpectedly, of small-pox, indicated that his successor would be his elderly relation living in Bakala and not any of his contenders Ram Rai or Dhirmal. When, in accordance with this injunction, Guru Tegh Bahadur was traced and installed by the Sikh masses as their Guru, despite his reluctance being of retiring habits, his adversaries attempted to remove him from the scene and compelled him even to quit Punjab. Is it any wonder that in this background Guru Gobind Singh sagaciously decided to put an end to personal succession and installed the Holy Granth Sahib as the future Guru of the Sikhs in perpetuity? This step was in full accord with the teachings of his predecessors. Right from Guru Nanak it has been emphasised that the "Word" is Guru, the Guru reveals the Word as it comes to him from God and as kindled light shows the way, for the afflicted and toiling humanity, to the fulfilment of the goal of human existence. It is a fundamental Sikh tenet that Guru resides in his Word and is the voice of God. Guru Nanak unhesitatingly declared:

As the Word of the Lord comes to me
I reveal it to you, O Lalo!³³

This has been the consistent stand of all the Gurus. Even when the person of the Guru was revered and loyalty to the Guru became unswerving it was Word or *Bani* of the Guru that was supreme and served as inspiration and guide for the Sikhs, who gave it an honoured place in their daily religious routine and on all occasions. Guru Gobind Singh himself left no doubt about the place of 'Word' in Sikh theology and unambiguously declared:

“Whatever the God tells me
I convey it to you”

Since the Sikhs hold that their's is the revealed religion and the revelation started with Guru Nanak, the succession of Guru Granth Sahib, embodying the Word or *Bani* of the Gurus, ending with Guru Gobind Singh, was natural culmination of that faith.

Guru Granth Sahib no doubt continues even today to serve as the primary cohesive factor for the Sikhs, but it is unfair to suggest that it was installed as Guru, not because of any injunction of Guru Gobind Singh, but to serve as a cohesive force for the leaderless community after the execution of Banda Bahadur. It is important to remember that since the succession of Guru Arjan, the Fifth Guru, the office of the Guru had become hereditary. All the four young sons of Guru Gobind Singh having courted martyrdom in the service of the Khalsa, none was left to succeed the Tenth Guru. Guru Gobind Singh did not die suddenly, but because of bursting open of a healing wound. He was fully conscious and being aware of his approaching end he had ample time to nominate his successor. According to the unbroken Sikh tradition he vested Gurudom in the Granth Sahib in perpetuity, deliberately putting an end to the line of personal Gurus. It is unimaginable that such an astute leader as Guru Gobind Singh would leave the question of future leadership of his trusted flock unsettled, being fully conscious of the fact that on previous occasions self-seekers and enemies of the Gurus and the Panth had attempted,

though unsuccessfully, to capture the office of the Guru. Had he not intended to abolish personal succession he would have named one of his able and trusted disciples to take his place.

McLeod's assertion that the tradition about the vesting of Guru's authority in Granth Sahib owes its origin not to any actual pronouncement of Guru Gobind Singh but to "an insistent need for maintaining the Panth's cohesion during a later period" must be rejected yet for another reason. The Sikhs, who had become leaderless on the heroic martyrdom of Banda Bahadur had continued to fight against their extermination and met repeated and fierce onslaughts of invaders despite dwindling numbers. They were fired with the spirit instilled in them by the founder of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh, who had trained "the sparrows to hunt the hawks, one man to fight a legion." Had they been in search of a cohesive factor in absence of a personal Guru why would they not give that role to Dasam Granth (which contains considerable martial inspiration) instead of choosing Guru Granth as their Guru in perpetuity? The fact that they owned and revered Granth Sahib as their Guru leaves no doubt that it was because of the injunction of Guru Gobind Singh, whom they could never think of disobeying. It is also clear evidence of the fact that the Sikhs never even entertained the idea of any individual succeeding the Tenth Guru, nor of a successor other than Guru Granth Sahib.

Here we have the benefit of the studies made by two eminent Indian scholars who have dealt with the subject at length. Dr. Ganda Singh, who has devoted his life to research in Sikh History, has examined the question of succession to Guru Gobind Singh in all its details. He has referred all the available material on the subject. On careful appraisal of the contemporary, near-contemporary evidence, unpublished manuscripts, and historical works, including these of Muslim, Hindu and European, he has unreservedly rejected the suggestion that any individual had succeeded the Tenth Master as the Guru of the Sikhs. He unequivocally

asserts that before leaving this world Guru Gobind Singh had installed Granth Sahib as the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs ending the line of personal Gurus.

Professor Harbans Singh of the Punjabi University, Patiala, has examined the issue from another angle as well. Pointing out that from the very inception, right from Guru Nanak himself, it was the Word that was taken as the voice of God and the Guru its revealer, he tells us:

“One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued forever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib to be his successor. It was only through the Word that the Guruship could be made lasting.”³⁴

Professor Harbans Singh’s conclusions are supported by ample historical evidence, including unpublished records like *Bhatt Vahis* that have recently come to light.

IX

Caste and the Sikhs

The Sikh Gurus, right from Guru Nanak, rejected the caste system that had corrupted the Hindu Society, and condemned it in no uncertain terms. In promoting the Brotherhood of man and egalitarian character of revolutionary movement started by him, entry to the Sikhfold was open to all irrespective of caste, community or status in life, and with their participation in the *langar* and *sangat* - the two institutions started by Guru Nanak himself - equality as members of the new religious order was assured. Sudras rubbed shoulders with the Khatri, Brahmins and others in religious congregations and dined together in the common kitchen (*langar*). Guru Arjan not only had the foundation stone of the Sikh temple (*Harimandir*) laid by a Muslim Saint, Mian Mir, but went further and incorporated the compositions of the low caste and some Muslims in the Granth

Sahib, which is now the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs. With the creation of the Khalsa this movement for a casteless society reached its culmination. Out of the first five baptised into this order by Guru Gobind Singh, only one was a Khatri, another a Jat and the rest all from the lower caste. To emphasize that caste had no validity or a place in Sikh society and they were all equals the Guru went further and himself received baptism (*Amrit*) from the hands of these very *panj Piaras* (the Five Beloved).

McLeod while conceding that the Sikh Gurus were “beyond all doubt vigorous and practical denounciators of caste” has accused them of insincerity by gleefully introducing the fib that the Jats bewail the fact that there was never a single Jat Guru, and the Gurus did not marry outside the Khatri fold. Calling this as violation of the Gurus’ own injunction against caste system, he tells us that some critics accuse them of insincerity and asks: “How one can respect a commandant when its promulgators ignore it?”

In the following pages Jagjit Singh, himself a Jat, has examined the Sikh attitude towards caste in all its aspects and he had demonstrated how untenable and unfair is McLeod’s criticism and charge of insincerity against the Gurus.

The Sikh Gurus on the other hand, so says Jagjit Singh, broke away completely from the caste system both ideologically and organizationally, by creating the Sikh Panth outside the caste society. They went further and created institutions like *Langar*, *Sangat*, *Amrit* which not only enabled, but required, the Sikhs from all castes to congregate, worship, interdine and live together, in peace and war without distinction of caste. Since the Hindus had been in the grip of caste system for centuries the progress of the break a way casteless society was bound to be slow. Even among Christians and Muslims, some of those Converted from Brahmins and Khatriis are even now reluctant to marry those who come from lower castes. The mere fact that intermarriages between Jats and non-Jats or

scheduled castes are not common does not mean that the Sikhs believe in caste system. Increasingly Sikhs are marrying irrespective of caste considerations. The difficulty in completely getting rid of the caste influence has been due to the fact that the Sikhs, while setting up a distinct religious order did not break away from the Hindu society out of which most of them had come. If out of a family one became a Sikh, the rest, including his brothers and sisters, remained Hindus, yet they lived together and there was no social segregation. In these circumstances if some Sikhs continued

to be under the old family notions about matrimonial alliances it is unfair to accuse them of non-Sikh conduct. Rejection of caste system cannot be construed as an injunction to marry outside your caste, but as freedom to marry irrespective of caste considerations.

It must not be forgotten that in seeking a bride or a bridegroom quite a number of considerations arise. Suitability is determined, among others, by social position, ability to fit in the new family, religion, education, common outlook on life etc. If the Gurus did not marry outside the Khatri fold it is unfair to accuse them of violation of their own injunction against caste system. For continuation of the family tradition and their mission they had to select a life-partner for themselves or their children after taking into account all the relevant factors. Is it suggested that in order to demonstrate their rejection of the caste system they should have made it a point to marry *Vaishayas* or *Sudras*? In dealing with this question it is unfair to shut our eyes to the bold steps that the Gurus, right from Nanak, took in rooting out untouchability and introducing practices and institutions that promoted egalitarian and casteless society.

McLeod then tells us that the Jat community laments that no Jat was made a Guru. It is for the first time that one learns about such a grouse, and that too, from McLeod. No such grievance has ever been heard before even in private. As it has actually happened, out of the ten Sikh Gurus the last seven had common descent from the same Sodhi family

and only the first and second came from different families. Even the third Guru, Amar Das Bhalla, was related to his successors as the fourth Guru Ram Das was his son-in-law. We must not forget that in choosing their successors the Gurus had to find out who would be most suitable to carry on their mission and command the confidence of the Sikhs. Guru Nanak chose his deserving disciple Lehna (Guru Angad), thus depriving both his sons, notwithstanding the fact that one of them, Baba Sri Chand, was a deeply religious and highly respected youngman devoted entirely to spiritual uplift. It is significant that whenever some Sikh Guru faced opposition to his succession it was only from his close relations who aspired to the august office of the Guru and not from anyone who wanted the succession to be out of the family or for a Jat or another non-Khatri.

The important fact that has to be kept in mind is that right from its inception the Sikh movement unequivocally rejected caste system and strove successfully to keep out its attendant evils. An unbiased observer has only to look around and see what a great distance the Sikhism has traversed. The present day light-hearted talk of Jat and non- Jat constitution of the Panth has nothing to do with the Sikh ideology but is prompted by economic factors and political ambitions of the few.

X

Militarization

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan in 1606 A.D. was a turning point of the Sikh movement. He was the Apostle of Peace and devoted his time to the building up of the Sikh Church. Under him, as Khushwant Singh puts it, the seed sown by Guru Nanak blossomed in its fullness, and men from far and near, including Muslims, flocked to him. Emperor Jehangir could not bear the growing influence of Guru Arjan and resolved to put an end to what he called “this false traffic that lured fools from all over.” Thus Guru Arjan was taken

to Lahore and tortured to death. This shocked the Sikhs. The Guru's son and successor, Guru Hargobind realised that time had come to defend his Sikhs and the Faith with arms. So he invited offerings of arms and horses to train his men as soldiers. At the time of his installation as Guru he girded not one but two swords as defender both of the Faith and temporal interests of his people. The new element that thus moulded the growth of Sikhism reached its culmination when Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, created the Khalsa Brotherhood, making the sword and unshorn hair essential equipment of the Khalsa by including them in the five *kaikas* (Sikh symbols) that he prescribed at the baptism of his *Panj-Piaras* (the Five Beloved) who first responded to the call of the Guru and offered to lay down their heads for him and the Panth.

Dr. McLeod has challenged this traditional and long accepted account of the militarization of the Sikh movement and contends that the arming of the Panth could not have been the result of any decision of Guru Hargobind, but the growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of the cultural patterns of the *jats* who had entered the Panth in large numbers. In putting forward this bold theory McLeod has not only ignored the historical perspective but also the vital factor of ideology and Sikh ethos. At the very outset McLeod assumes that prior to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, *jats* in large numbers had not only entered the Sikh fold but also became so powerful as to divert overnight the course of peaceful religious movement in an entirely different direction. There, however, is no basis for the assumption that the *jats* were the predominant element among the Sikhs when Guru Hargobind became the Guru or that they were assertive enough to change the Course of a peaceful religious movement that had flourished under Guru Arjan. In fact, the testimony of Bhai Gurdas and Mohasanfani is to the Contrary and that finds support from the participants in the pre- Khalsa battles and that of Chamkaur. Again it is significant

that out of the martyrs who were with Guru Tegh Bahadur and among the five *Piaras*, only one was a *jat*, and he too was from Hastanapur, a place outside Punjab. In Banda's campaign the recruits were mostly from the lower castes.

It must not be forgotten that till the martyrdom of Guru Arjan the Sikh movement had a peaceful course for a hundred years of its existence, and during the twenty five years of his pontificate this Apostle of peace had worked ceaselessly to foster amity and goodwill. He not only got the foundation of Harimander Sahib laid by the Muslim Saint Mian Mir but going further included the compositions of Muslims and low castes in the Granth Sahib that is now the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Would the *jats*, who according to McLeod did not enter the Sikh fold empty-handed but carrying their arms, be attracted by this apostle of peace, Guru Arjan, in numbers, or having entered wait till the succession of Hargobind to militarize a peaceful movement and spoil for a fight against the mighty Mughal Empire? No. On the contrary, it was the assumption of the role of the defender of *Miri* and *Piri* that prompted *jats* to join this egalitarian revolutionary movement.

In these pages the thesis of McLeod about the militarization has been examined by *jagjit* Singh in all its aspects and what he says cannot fail to compel us to join issues with McLeod on this point. McLeod's theory proceeds on certain assumptions which are not warranted by facts. Jagjit Singh has rightly pointed out that there is no material to support the assertion that the Jats were the predominant element among the Sikhs when Guru Hargobind decided to militarize, or even later when Guru Gobind Singh fought his battles or when Banda Bahadur came on the scene. Keeping of sword and unshorn hair were not the element of the Jat culture and it was only after Guru Hargobind called upon his Sikhs to bring arms as offerings that his Sikhs responded. Jagjit Singh pertinently asks how is it that those Jats who remained out of the Sikh fold neither retained the peculiar Jat features, upon which McLeod relies, nor

developed the spirit and outlook that distinguished the Sikhs of the Jat origin. On dispassionate study one cannot escape the conclusion that it was the Sikhs ideology and the leadership of the Sikh Gurus, who sacrificed even their lives and those of their near and dear ones, that transformed the disparate elements and moulded them into the Khalsa imbibing the fervour for martyrdom till this day.

These are some of the salient issues raised by Or. McLeod. The others which are also of cardinal nature need to be gone into to elucidate the Sikh Doctrine and assist those interested in the Sikh studies. They will form the subject matter of a companion volume. The Sikh Studies are at a crucial stage and the Sikh, are passing through a very difficult period which faces them with numerous problems. The worth of a particular study will be judged by the objective of the scholar concerned. Now that quite a number of the Sikhs are settling abroad and they are the educated class, they need understanding to make them useful member of the society in which they live. Thus the objective to promote understanding of their religion, history etc. is most welcome. In India itself it becomes increasingly necessary to bring out the distinct contribution made by the Sikhs and their Gurus not only to the national good and Indian society but to human welfare as well. Scholars engaged in such studies, including those who are wedded to the critical methodology, should undertake the job not in a spirit of discovering fallacies, but to strengthen the Sikh Tradition.

XI

Panja Sahib

It is not within the scope of this volume to examine Or. McLeod's conclusions on scrutiny of the various incidents (*sakbis*) of Guru Nanak's life narrated in the *janamsakbis* to which he has devoted 147 pages of his first book *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* and later the entire volume of 300 pages, *Early Sikh Tradition*. The present writer will,

however, like to place before the reader what he has personally observed at the popular and highly venerated Sikh shrine of Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal in the North -Western district of Attock, now in Pakistan about 30 miles from Rawalpindi.

In this volume Or. Noel Q. King on examining McLeod's rejections as "aetiological legend" the *Sakhi* about Panja Sahib and the Sikh tradition associated with it concludes:

"Dr. McLeod who is so outstanding for his exhaustive field work does not seem to have tried to collect oral evidence from the many living Sikhs who have visited Panja Sahib and indeed possess detailed photographs. In addition, Pakistan welcomes New Zealander and though Sikh shrines are carefully sealed off to prevent fanatics damaging them, scholars with persistence and adroit use of resources can get access to most things. It has to be admitted that critical scholarship has here performed less than its best with regard to one of the sacred things for which Sikhs are willing to lay down their lives."

These comments have been occasioned by the fact that McLeod had made much of the varying remarks of some foreign travellers who described the *Panja* (palm impression) found in this shrine differently as "palm-mark etched upon the rock", "an incision cut into it", or a "bas-relief". Dr. King rightly points out that Dr. McLeod, who is anxious to ascertain facts, could have easily gone to the spot and seen for himself what it looked like. Being a New Zealander, who had spent many years in Punjab, he had easy access, especially when engaged in research.

The present writer was born at Rawalpindi and educated there. After doing Law he practised there at the Bar till he shifted to the Lahore High Court towards the end of the year 1942. Every year he used to visit Panja Sahib several times particularly on the annual Baisakhi festival which is even now being celebrated there by Sikhs from all over the world. He distinctly remembers that at the edge of the pool, there

had always been a clear impression of open palm of a hand recessed into the rock, or hand-shaped depression. Visitors to the shrine could not resist the limpid cool water and while taking a dip or bathing would throw water over the palm- impression and collecting it in the palm of their own hand, as it dripped, sip it.

The existing Gurdwara building was erected in the year 1932 (A.D.) after demolishing the old one that had been built by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The palm impression found there before and after reconstruction is the same. There is, however, an important difference in topography. Prior to 1934 the portion of the rock above the palm- impression looked to be a part of the rock that lead to the foot of the hill associated with the memory of Wali Qandhari and it fostered the belief in the Sikh traditional account (*Sakhi*) about this holy place. While constructing the new Gurdwara building, the ground above the Panja was levelled to extend the compound and build *langar*, store houses and accommodation for visitors and others. This was later regretted as it had interfered with the natural surroundings that had historical value. Such thoughtless acts of demolition of historic buildings are even now going on, despite the fact that the Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, a statutory body, is charged with the duty of looking after and maintaining the historic Sikh Gurdwaras and sacred places. One such recent instance is that of Qilla Anandgarh in Anandpur Sahib, the fort from where Guru Gobind Singh fought many battles. Till a few years back the walls of the fort, its parapets, the *baoli*, hideouts with buildings above it were intact. Now, except for the main entrance to the fort, which is also likely to be demolished soon, every building or feature of the fort has been obliterated and its back portion has been levelled to link it with the adjoining hillock on which the Gurdwara Keshgarh stands. Our children and scholars are thus being deprived of the ocular evidence that lends credence to the various incidents recorded in the Sikh history. Soon there will be nothing left at Anandpur Sahib

to connect it with the history of Khalsa, and instead we shall have the recently constructed Gurdwaras with abundance of marble and some modern amenities for the management and visitors.

The *Panja* or the open palm impression on the rock at Panja Sahib can be called a miracle but the fact that it is there cannot be denied. Besides the photographs taken by various persons after the partition of the country, the present writer has in his possession a photograph taken prior to the reconstruction of the Gurdwara in 1932.

It is interesting to note that dealing with Panja Sahib in his *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, McLeod, while rejecting the Janam-sakhi account, could not but concede:

“There is of course, a hand-shaped depression in a rock at Hassan Abdal and the Gurdwara that has been built at the site is regarded as one of the most important of all Sikh temples.”³⁵

It has a foot-note which tells us:

“The present ‘hand-mark’ is unmistakably recessed into the rock, not projecting in relief. It has been worn smooth by touch of innumerable hands.”³⁶

Dealing with it later in his *Early Sikh Tradition*, while sticking to his rejection of the Sikh tradition, he refers to the description of the palm-marks given by G.B. Scott in 1930 and says:

“It was evidently during the course of 1940 that the original representation in relief was eventually replaced by a crude intaglio cut into the rock. The edges which were at first sharp have now been worn smooth.”³⁷

This conjectural conclusion is sought to be supported by the following foot-note:

“This information was supplied to the writer by three informants who visited the shrine at Panja Sahib. According to the first informant the carving in relief was still there in early 1940. The second, who visited the

site later in the same year stated that the hand-mark had been incised but the edges were sharp. The third, whose visit took place in 1964, reported that the edges were smooth."³⁸

For proper appreciation of the matter it is here necessary to remember that the Gurdwara building at Panja Sahib was reconstructed in 1932 and completed within two years. As the present writer has stated he had been visiting this shrine every year till 1942, both before and after its reconstruction. The palm impression on every occasion looked the same. Millions of persons, including a large number of Hindus and other non-Sikhs, had gone there but not a single out of them ever complained or even voiced a suspicion that the original palm impression had been replaced in 1940. Even the local population, which was predominantly Muslim, made no such allegation despite the Muslim League agitation against the Sikhs leading to the communal holocaust of the year 1947.

One thing is, however, clear. There is no allegation even upto this day that the *Panja* was replaced during the reconstruction of the Gurdwara in the year 1932. McLeod says it was much later in 1940. It is pertinent to ask why such a substitution became necessary; and could it be made without protest from the devotees who had been regularly visiting the shrine, and that too in the year 1940? The Gurdwara Management could never have even thought of such a replacement as the Panja is the most sacred relic for the preservation of which no Sikh would have hesitated to lay down his life.

Again if the edges of palm impression were not worn smooth during hundred of years, when millions and millions must have visited this shrine, how could they wear off after 1940, especially in view of the fact that the Shrine was closed for quite a number of years on the partition of the country in 1947. Even when it was reopened to the devotees for a few years before 1964, only once in a year on the Baisakhi festival could a few hundred congregate there for a couple of days.

It is unfortunate that a scholar like McLeod should have sought support from such flimsy props to reject the Sakhi.

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ORIENTALISM, CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND THE SIKH RELIGION

NOEL Q. KING

This paper has been hurriedly written during intensive travelling on field research in India. I will have left India before final editing. I apologise for not giving detailed references and for dealing with so great a theme haphazardly, but something, however halting, has to be said. Western critical scholarship has got itself into a morass and minefield, we, its exponents are playing hop-scotch therein. In this paper I attempt to sound a note of warning, call for a re-consideration of where we are and a more wholistic approach. My specialization is History of Religion (*Relionsgeschichte*) a subject which is still at an early stage of development. The reader should also be aware that I am a follower of a religious *dharmā*, I accept the truth of the message of the Sri Adi Granth Sahib, but I am not a Sikh.

For around two centuries now European Scholars and their colleagues in their outer world in North America and latterly in the Antipodes, have been subjecting the great religions of the world to various canons of "Criticism". The Greek etymology implies balanced judgement but the word has come in common usage to mean a weighing in balances and an almost inevitable decision that the religious tradition is found wanting. One of the first religious books to be subjected to criticism was the Jewish Law, Prophets and Writings which the Christians call the Old Testament. Just as the Christians had come to turn their back on the traditional Jewish exegesis, so the critics ignored the thinking of their predecessors over the previous centuries,

trusting rather to their own “Scientific” understanding of etymology, situation in life, source criticism, and redactor interpretation. Findings and methods from other sciences were applied. Among others the theory from Nordic studies of how myths developed, the hunt for sources and redactors in the Greek epics, Darwin’s theory of evolution, were all applied to the Old Testament. Archaeologists in Palestine, Egypt and Mesopotamia were hard at work. Many parallels to the Old Testament were dug up. My old teacher Professor S.H. Hooke of London who had added the study of tribal anthropology and Jungian psychology to all the academic equipment just enumerated, was at one point dismissed from his post at Toronto in a kind of witch-hunt. He remained throughout a sincere believer and follower of Old Testament teaching as accepted by Christianity. His views expressed, when he was well over eighty, are worth repeating. He said the equipment the critic brings is as yet very crude. Nonetheless God has given us intellect and asks us to use it whatever the cost and as far as it will go. It may be the individual’s tragedy in the process that he loses his faith. He must be humble and remember the limitations of the human mind, respect the common beliefs and loyally remain under the discipline of his religious body even if that discipline turns against him personally. Obscurantists who too easily cry “The faith in danger” must remember the need that reasonable religion has of the critics.

I studied New Testament under Professor R.H. Lightfoot at Oxford. He had carefully sifted German and modernist thought and brought it to the English speaking world. He had to conclude that in the book “We hear but the whisper of (God’s) voice and the outskirts of his way.” Being personally profoundly devout, if one spoke to him, one understood that he meant that God is so great, that the human mind, especially at this point in the development of critical scholarship, cannot by itself get far in knowing Him. My other teacher of New Testament, Professor Geoffrey Lampe, who recently made a good death in the bosom of

his mother, the Church, once to his own surprise found himself one Easter morning on National television being understood as telling five million people that *Jesus* had not risen from the dead. In fact, he had said that first and last belief in *Jesus* and the Resurrection is a response in faith. Sources which gave details of empty tombs, etc., are not of importance as compared with the testimony of the universal Church, and especially the love shown to all the cosmos by the believer.

These men were believers, struggling to think out the problems and opportunities provided by faith and scholarship. But there are many others, post-Christian, *post-Jewish*, who work in a somewhat different way. There are also those who having been at one time fanatically Christian, who sought to be in the forefront by becoming nuns or missionaries, came to lose faith in all religion, especially their own. An extreme case is that of an ex-nun in the United States, who a few years ago published a book carefully worked out in the most traditions of modern critical scholarship to show that foot-binding in China, *sutee* in India, female genital mutilation in Africa and the male domination of gynaecology in modern America were to be linked with the male Christian ministry as a massive plot by males in religion to oppress women. But quite common to-day is the formerly convinced Christian who has become disillusioned and turns to critical scholarship as a kind of worship of the human intellect and a “workaholicism” to dull his or her disappointment and frustration by hours and hours of drudgery over minute points of scholarship. Christianity may expect to have its back flayed for some years to come with studies connected with Nag Hammadi. At that Egyptian village the library of a fifth or later century Coptic monastic group was dug up. The monks obviously kept suspect heretical and gnostic works hidden in a separate place and it was this *cache* which has been found. But now as scholars cash in, they will accuse the Church of suppressing early authentic material, though none of this material can

be definitely proven to be really early and though the Church had no machinery for effectively suppressing anything till quite late in its history. Even so the Church must be grateful to all critical scholarship and not surrender to conservative diehards.

But to turn back to the early days of my critical studies in the late nineteen forties, I was fortunate enough to get a chance to spend a little time listening to Dr. Rudolf Bultmann, the archpriest of critical scholarship in religion. He had been advocating the de-mythologization of religion. For instance, we must remove the myth from Christianity that Christ came down from heaven, became incarnate by Virgin Mary, ascended into Heaven. We must eliminate God-out-there myth and re-clothe the existential truth in language more fit for modern, scientific man. He winced, whether from the brashness of my question or from the arthritis which was painfully coming over him, when I asked what he thought would be the effect of his teaching pastorally, that is, for people whose task was to tend souls. He said he had originally thought these things out when giving pastoral care to young men who were facing National Socialism in its prime. I deeply respected his reply but I remain puzzled as to how it helped people sinking in the myth of Hitler to ask them to turn to a mythless Christ. Myth has to be met on its own terms and understood as such. Considerations of space restrain me from discussing the thinking of the great Dietrich Bonhoeffer who asked for a "religionless" Christianity while in a Nazi jail, and was hanged by them with a piano wire just before the Allied victory. He said man must come of age, stand on his own feet and love God as God, not as a prop for his religiosity.

To conclude these scattered remarks on critical study and Christianity, the two have come to a *modus vivendi*. The broad middle streams of Christianity gratefully accept many things won for them by the Critics. The background and meaning of the Bible is better understood, text criticism has given us a text we know is closer to the autograph than

that of the great fourth century codices. Fundamentalists and die-hards are free at the same time to go their own way and refuse the new freedoms offered. In the dialectic between the two groups and the alternating currents generated, the truth is to be found.

It is apparent from all this that critical scholarship is a native growth in Judaism and Christianity. Every species of critic is more dangerous when it turns the weapons developed in one religion onto another. In addition, if the critics themselves have departed from their own belief, their remarks on other people's sacred things are liable to be affected thereby. If they are disappointed in their own faith, often their bitterness will be expressed in what they say of the faith of others. If they think their own old religion is based on irrationality and nonsense, they will hardly be able to refrain from extending the same courtesies to other people's religions.

With all this in mind, let us turn to listen to what many educated Muslims are saying about western critical scholarship directed towards Islam. Theirs are bitter words and painful to repeat, but, true or false they have to be considered. These Muslims point out that a good number of the leading western Islamists were of Jewish background. They suggest that since they could do little to speak their minds about their own Jewish establishment and the Christianity of the ruling class in their host country, perhaps Islam, under colonial yoke from West Africa to the Philippines, was an easier target. These Muslims also point out that Jewishness aside, the western study of Islam was frequently connected with Imperialism. For example Snouck Hugronje's works on Aceh was directly related to the successful resistance of that part of Sumatra to the Dutch. French Islamists in many parts of Africa and in Syria fall in a similar category.

Among the Christian missionaries who studied Islam, Muslims freely give honour to those who from Raymond Lull to Temple Gairdner and Kenneth Cragg have heard the truth

of the call of the minaret and left their sandals at the mosque gate, but they also remember those who studied so as to deride the authority of the Quran or to bring forward infamous allegations about the life of the Prophet. Laterly, these Muslims note, the critics have begun to use Marxist criteria to study Islam. Muslim history is being interpreted along dialectical materialist lines: class struggle and economics have priority over the Will of God as major springs of History.

Many Hindus welcomed the critical approach. They joined in to try to cleanse their religion of post-Vedic accretions like *Sutee* and the pernicious system of caste. They realized the missionaries were intending to blow up Hinduism by a new land mine — western critical education. They accepted that education and re-embraced a revived, re-invigorated Hinduism. To-day nearly every Hindu reformer will pay elaborate lip-service to the scientific method of evolution. In the meantime, the Hinduism the western scholar of the high summit of European scholarship studied was that of the great books, he did not try to see Hinduism in its context in the life of millions of ordinary people who do not know the *Shastras*. There is something infinitely pathetic in the remark of Max Mueller, the great nineteenth century Indologist of Germany and Oxford. He said his great regret was he had never visited India. Perhaps seeing Hinduism as it is, would have confused his scholarly notion of what it was.

There is also something infinitely pathetic in seeing some Hindu scholars ignoring the continuity of their own great institutions of exegesis and learning. They are turning always to receive back their own religion at western hands. Some of the finest of their scholars till recent times have been at pains always to show that their religion and philosophy has been equal to or surpassing that of the west. Truth to tell Hinduism is incomparable. There is no need to find Darwin's theory or space travel in the Vedas, or to prove Hinduism is monotheist.

Traditional Religions such as African traditional Religion or the religion of “primal” groups in India or Australia or the islands of Pacific have in a way suffered most. While western “civilization” in its various forms has destroyed their ecology, scholars trained in western critical method have written up their religion, looking in it for the noble savage, primordial thought, the primeval basis of all religion – this is to name the nobler elements in the search. Yet basically *homo religious* has maintained the same steady principles and it is unlikely that these will change. The situation at the receiving end of this kind of western scholarship was exemplified for me by a Swahili Mzee (Elder). He said that an American scholar had visited him and said that he (the scholar) was not a follower of any *dini* (religion) and he wanted to investigate the *dini* of the Elder to see whether he could separate the Islamic element in it from the African. The Elder had tried to explain that *dini* could not be separated from *milia* (custom, *dharma*), that religion could only be understood by a man of religion, (*Mtu Za dini*). It was not necessary to have the same religion and way of life but only renegades could pretend they were without these things. The old man had done his best to answer the questions and trusted that those who read the scholar’s account would judge for themselves whether the questioner or the answerer was a lunatic.

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. The Victorians prescribed remarks to do with sex or religion in polite conversation. In academic circles any remarks on persons are taken to be bad taste. It is considered shocking manners to suggest that a scholar's motives can come from anything lower than his or her rational intellectuality. Once when writing to Sirdar Khushwant Singh about "blasphemous critical remarks" he replied concerning the word "blasphemous" "in the academic world there are no holds barred." When speaking of God and other people's beliefs there are apparently no holds barred, but any personal remark about a critic, however true, is considered a hit below the belt. In turning at last to foreign critical scholarship and Sikhism, any apparently personal remarks are not intended personally. They are given critically and objectively and based on the internal evidence of the texts and writings themselves, not on personal knowledge of the scholars themselves.

Turning at last to Sikhism not many Western critically trained scholars have turned their attention to a first-hand study of this religion. Probably the major reason was that in their view the reward of the outcome could hardly repay the investment of time required by learning a regional language. Even when Punjabi had been mastered, it did not mean a scholar could be confident that he or she understood the varied languages and dialects used in the scriptures and related literature. Again, till recently efficient instruments for the study of Punjabi were not available abroad. The study of Sikhism demanded years of residence. While pointing out the difficulties, it is important to emphasize that Sikhism is one of the most open of religions in the world. Outsiders who conform to a few reasonable requirements of good taste and custom are made welcome, everything is put

before them without reserve. Having said these things, it remains to remark that it is still a puzzle why so few foreign scholars have devoted themselves to a study of Sikhism. This is a question Sikhs must answer, especially if they desire to have their religion interpreted to wider world.

Over against officials who were interested in Sikh history or the Sikh utility for colonial purposes, fully equipped foreign critical scholars of religion of an international calibre in effect number but a handful. Dr. Ernst Trumpp of Munich was paid by the India office and then by the colonial government to produce a translation of the *Sri Adi Granth Sahib*. After many years of labour his work was recognised by Max Mueller as being unsuitable for inclusion in his great Sacred Scriptures of the East Series. Dr. Trumpp's general bitterness and disappointment is expressed in his vicious remarks about Sikhism in his Preface. While others in Europe and America had become great names by the exploitation of academic gold-mines which could be worked by graduate slave labor, while the great Professor supervised in the comfort of Berlin or Leipzig or Oxford or Harvard; poor Trumpp had little to show for his years of residence and study. Trumpp also apparently suffered from some racist views and despised his local informants to the extent of insisting on smoking a cigar while reading their scriptures.

Early in this century Macauliffe did much to set right the balance by the respect he showed for Sikhism and the felicity of his work. It remains one of the main gates through which foreigners enter the study of Sikhism. With Dr. C.H. Loehlin we are coming nearer to our own times. He is a Christian missionary of the type which has never been lacking and which does something to make up for the other kind. His deep respect for the Sikh people, his complete lack of any trace of European racism, his total self-giving in love to Sikh religion while he remains loyally Christian, together with his knowledge of the languages and cultures involved, enable him to go deep and reveal to the outside world the importance of Sikh religion to all humankind.

Noticeable is his refusal to discuss anything which might be understood by outsiders in a way derogatory to Sikhism. For him silence at our present stage of understanding is part of scholarship.

In my studies of Sikhism, mostly carried out under difficulties in places like Uganda and California, since I left the Punjab in 1945 and have only been able to stay short terms (through regular visits since, 1965), I have been assisted beyond measure by the publication of Dr. Hew McLeod. Taking just the major four, *Gum Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 1968, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, 1975, *Early Sikh Tradition*, 1980 (all published by Oxford University Press who also patronized Macauliffe) and *The B40 Janam-Sakhi*, 1980, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, they place Dr. McLeod easily in the lead among foreign scholars, past or present. It is unlikely that his ability in language, especially in deciphering the meaning of a manuscript and archaic works will be surpassed. The work is meticulously carried out and based on a careful use of the text-critical, form-critical and other-critical methods developed in the West during the last two centuries. No doubt many studies by highly qualified local scholars will answer the points raised by Dr. McLeod in detail. I am concerned with relating them to a wider world and human context.

In the middle Ages, scholars in Europe communicated in Latin and the mass of believers did not know what was being said. Much European critical scholarship to this day remains the small talk of one academic Mandarin to another till, for instance, a Cambridge Don, become Bishop, write a small book entitled "The Death of God" and it is taken up by the media. We cannot suppose that because some Punjabi farmers have taken to "English" beer they read scholarly works in English. The mass of Sikhs will go on as before. But in the United States Canada New Zealand Australia and Britain, there are many people who want to learn about Sikhism. Oxford University Press commands a

world market and world publicity. Any educated person in the English-speaking world including India wanting to learn about Sikhism must turn to Dr. McLeod's books.

Whatever Dr. McLeod intended many readers will ask his books the wrong questions and get the wrong answers. The books to an uninitiated reader seem to reiterate the notion that a great amount of Sikh belief appears to be based on uncritical religiosity. The reader seeking the well-springs of what Sikhism is will not be assisted. The only successful opponent to thousands of years of passing conquerors must have something that "makes him tick". Nowhere in these books is there an attempt to tell us what it is. The reader wishing to know about the heart of Sikhism will turn to these books and be offered meticulously and exhaustively carried out drills in certain methods of western criticism. Such reader's desires and the purpose of the books differ. The reader will hardly be able to understand the true import of what is being said unless he or she possesses a background knowledge of the history of criticism. Thus the statements that Guru Nanak was not the founder of Sikhism and that the *Janam-Sakhis* are not biography but hagiology, if understood against Dr. McLeod's background in the quest of the Historical Jesus and other such pursuits, is trying to enunciate the basic tenet of critical scholarship. "If you ask an ancient source a question and it gives a nonsense reply, re-think your question." It is an elementary critical statement to say a Gospel is a Gospel not a biography. Technically, it is *Heilsgeschichte* (Salvation-happening) not History. (English is poverty stricken here, it has only one word for *History*). But to say this is not to lessen its historicity, its part in the whole historical future. Now, baldly to re-apply these instruments of study without any explanation to a totally different subject is demanding nonsense replies. A *Janam-Sakhi* is a genre of literature which is *sui generis* and it must be treated as such, according to its own *Sitz im Leben* (Situation in life). Again, when Dr. McLeod says that the Tenth Nanak could not have said and done what

Sikh tradition says he said and did at the founding of the Khalsa in 1699 he is using critical techniques developed originally by critics of the speeches in Thucydides and in the book of Acts. He is trying to get down to the type of “historical bedrock” which American historians are supposed to enjoy with, for instance, what it is alleged Abraham Lincoln said at Gettys-burg, (Anyone knowing American democracy will tell you what historically “government by the people of the people” etc. really means). At one side Dr. McLeod ignores the whole religion-history context. History of this kind can only be asked its own kind of questions but even in his own field of “Secular” history (if there can be such a thing) he ignores the whole findings of the Scandanavian school concerning narratives connected with Holy places and the findings of the Oral Historians in Africa and Papua-New Guinea. There is a living unbroken reliable tradition of the sayings and doings of 1699 quite apart from writing, still alive in the Punjab, which was even more alive five generations ago when western observers came on the scene.

I had intended to leave detailed examples to indigenous scholars. Perhaps they will allow me to treat of one specimen. On pages 92 and 93 of *Early Sikh Tradition* in passing Dr. McLeod dismisses the tradition of the Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal as an “aetiological legend”. That is, a story which has grown up to answer the “what is the cause of” (Greek *aitios*) question, like, “Why has the elephant a long nose”, Dr. McLeod has industriously gathered the scraps of information given by European travellers in the last century and on the basis of one written in 1866 he takes it that the narrative of Guru’s hand on the rock was invented by a *faqir* to save himself from being beaten up by Ranjit Singh’s troops. He makes much of the varying remarks by observers as to whether the hand-mark was etched upon or into the rock. A few chance-written remarks by passers-by and the reports of later visitors is enough to produce the label “invention by tradition.” The story of 1866 on which Dr.

McLeod depends, rather than being an “aetiological legend”, should be classified as a “Sirdarjee Joke.” This is a genus of story invented by people wishing to show Sikhs are as stupid or obstinate as their own water-buffaloes. It is a type of narrative greatly cherished by Anglo-Indian, and Sophisticated Sikhs. We may compare “Jew-boy”, “Pole-ak” and “Paddy” jokes in the U.S.A. It is patently not to be seriously considered as a statement of what was actually said and done. Dr. McLeod who is so outstanding for his exhaustive field-work does not seem to have tried to collect oral evidence from the many living Sikhs who have visited Punja-Sahib and indeed possess detailed photographs. In addition, Pakistan welcomes New Zealanders and though Sikh shrines are carefully sealed off to prevent fanatics damaging them, scholars with persistence and adroit use of resources can get access to most things. It has to be admitted that critical scholarship has here performed less than its best with regard to one of the sacred things for which Sikhs are willing to lay down their lives.

This and other examples lead one to the conclusion that Dr. McLeod’s attitude is not confined to Sikhs or any feature of Sikhism but is for religion and religious phenomena as a whole. Applying his own method of judging by the internal evidence only, it has to be objectively noted and allowed for in any appreciation of his work, that he has absolute faith in the intellectual critical method as he understands it and has passed beyond treating religious criteria on any wider or larger basis. This is not to imply on my side that reason and religion are opposed or that one takes over from another. For me they go hand in hand, but finally the intellect and its methods, as we presently know them, are not perfect nor absolute nor infallible nor do they see things in focus or whole.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that I am not calling for a moratorium on critical scholarship. I have merely tried to point out the bluntness of the critical bludgeon, the need to be humble, considerate and

courteous. I have asked that it be put in a context of the wholeness of the study and of the group being studied. As part of this I would ask that due place be given to the *desbi* home-grown production of critical scholarship. Imports should not prevent the development of the natural product. I must equally emphasize on the other hand that Sikh ism like all the great religions needs critical scholarship if it is to meet the intellectual needs of its increasingly highly educated followers. Perhaps, Dr. McLeod's works stand out so much in this respect because the leading Sikh Scholars writing in English in the Punjab need to keep in the good books of the Establishment and therefore studiously avoid "sticking their necks out". They, as much as Dr. McLeod, have produced the present situation. The young Sikh critical scholar is in no enviable position and he must be helped and encouraged soon at all costs.

For the rest, if I have been unfair personally or have hurt any body's feelings, I beg pardon and apologize in advance. To quote Dr. Hew McLeod, I ask for "sympathetic understanding" .

PART II

NATHISM, VAISNAVISM AND SIKHISM A COMPLETE STUDY

ORIGIN OF SIKH FAITH

DALJEET SINGH

1. The Issue

When Guru Nanak appeared on the Indian scene Nathism and Vaisnavism were the two religious systems popularly known in Northern India. The Nath-Yogis, who had owned Yogic methodology, were an ascetic cult of the ancient Saiva system. Vaisnavism, a system of worship, had a very long history in the country. It was the Gita that for the first time accepted in the orthodox systems, the worship of the Lord as an alternative method of Moksha. Later, Vaisnavism developed its basic doctrine of the Avtarhood of Visnu that tended to absorb within its fold even some of the heterodox systems like Buddhism and Jainism.

A revelatory religion, as Guru Nanak called his system, is by its very nature new. However, the questions before us are whether Nathism or Vaisnavism contributed anything to the fundamentals of Sikhism, whether Guru Nanak accepted and incorporated in his own religion anything from the essentials of the two earlier systems and whether the statement that Vaisnavism and Nathism have no affinity with Sikhism has a valid basis.

In our attempt to sort out and solve this issue we shall first identify the essentials of the three systems of Nathism, Vaisnavism and Sikhism. Secondly, we shall specify the similarities and dissimilarities among these systems in order to determine how far, if at all, these are connected with each other either in their ideology, their methodology, or their world-view.

2. *Principles of Comparative Study*

Before we proceed with the consideration of the subject, it is necessary to indicate the basic principles of such an examination. For evident reasons, the comparison should not only give a clear and correct picture of each system, but it should also bring out the very essentials of it. It is with this object that the following questions have been framed.

- (a) What is the metaphysical view of the system, i.e. whether it is a theism, dualism, pantheism or monism ?
- (b) Whether or not the world is real?
- (c) Is the world a place of suffering and misery, or a meaningful arena of spiritual endeavours?
- (d) What is the spiritual goal of life?
- (e) What methods should be adopted to achieve the goal?
- (f) What is the role in life of the person who has achieved the spiritual goal?
- (g) What is the overall world-view of the system?

It is in the background of these questions that we shall undertake a comparative study of the three systems.

3. *Unity of Perception, Ideology and Activity*

Before we start with the description of the systems, it is essential to emphasize the importance of one point, namely, the unity of perception, ideology and activity. For a true understanding of a religious system, it is vital that we bear this unity in mind.

Let us first explain what we mean by the unity of perception, ideology and activity. Almost every religion owes its origin to the mystic or higher religious experience of some personality or prophet. Actually, it is this experience which forms the real fount of the entire ideology, mission and activities of the mystic. In this sequence, the first stage

is the perception or the religious experience. At the second stage, the saint, naturally, tries to understand and absorb it, and reacts to it. This reaction constitutes both the ideology and the proposed plan of the saint for giving practical shape to the ideology. This ideology and plan are generally understood and interpreted by others from the words expressed or other means of communication resorted to by the saint. The third stage is the life actually lived by the saint. This forms his real response to his higher religious experience - and reflects his ideology and the decisions made thereunder. For, example, if the religious experience of a mystic is that God is all love, is the Shelter of the shelterless and Help of the helpless, the mystic's ideology is that God is the Ocean of virtues and a God of Attributes. In line with it, and as a reaction to this experience, he compulsively frames a plan. of action of love and help to the poor and the needy. Accordingly, the activities undertaken and programmes initiated and executed by the saint are the true reflection and projection of his higher religious experience and the consequent ideology. The fourth Sikh Guru explains the point in a beautiful and apt simile, "While experiencing You, the "I" or ego is gone. The difference of "You" and "I" is obliterated. It is now only "You" flowing out."¹ The activities of the saint are only the external form, projection and shape which the basic experience directs and takes. Such mystics rarely express in words the nature of their religious experience, it being generally ineffable. And, even if they do, the description is too inadequate to form the basis of a rational system. For the same reasons, even the utterances and statements of these persons are not always clear and precise. In fact, these are not meant to be such; nor are these always aimed at laying a comprehensive religious philosophy. It is in the interpretation of these statements that students of religion and others make major errors of understanding and deduction. But, it is the deeds and activities of the person that portray truly and directly his higher religious experience and ideology. All we seek

to stress is, first, the inalienable unity of religious experience, ideology and activities; and, secondly, the activities of the saint alone being the right key to the understanding and appreciation of his perceptions and message. So often, mere statements, taken in their isolation, have been wrongly interpreted, especially by those distant in time and area. Because, howsoever sophisticated, rational tools cannot rise above the prejudices and predilections of the person employing them.

Scholars, trained in a behaviouristic, or mechanical methodology, have generally a tendency to trace one religious development from a preceding one. But, trying to build such a chain of ratiocination is a virtual denial of the validity, the very novelty, and the free character of the religious experience. Hence, the need for adhering to the principle of the unity of experience, ideology and activity, and of understanding and interpreting a religious message purely from the activities of its author. Otherwise, so often students of religion fall into the error of picking up seemingly common utterances of two religious pioneers and then of trying to relate them to a common source or a connecting bond. Mere words and statements, unrelated to the deeds of their author are quite likely to be misunderstood and misintepreted. Deeds alone are the true index of the ideology of the author.

NATHISM

DALJEET SINGH

As the words Nath Yogis indicate, Nathism is a Saiva cult employing fundamentally Yogic ideology and methodology.

1. HISTORY OF THE SECT

Saivism's combination with Yoga has probably the longest religious history in the country. Seals of Siva in a Yogic pose have been found in the Indus Valley excavation. Siva is generally believed to be a pre-Rig-Vedic and Non--Aryan God.² He is also mentioned as a god in the Vedas, Upanisads and the Mahabharata.³ He is a feared god in the Rig Veda.⁴ Lord Krishna acknowledged his greatness and got a boon from him.⁵ The Nath Yogis belong to an ascetic group of Saivism. Asceticism, as a spiritual tool to gain supernatural powers, has been accepted by all the old systems like Jainism, Yoga, Saivism and the Vedic religion. In the Rig Veda, the hairy Muni in ecstasy is extolled when he drinks poison with Rudra.⁶ The oldest Saiva system is the Pasupata. It has been mentioned in Atharvasiras Upanisad and the Mahabharata.⁷ The Nath Yogis are not only directly connected with it, but are also a part of the group called Lakula that has directly developed from the parent Pasupata. This group includes the Kanphata Yogis, the Kala Mukhas, the Kapalikas, and Aghorpanthies⁸ etc. In this group, four elements are basic and common, namely, asceticism, and renunciation of the world, Yogic methodology with emphasis on Mantra Yoga and Hath Yoga, the combination and worship of male and female deities, and the goal of

gaining powers, liberation from the world and merger with Siva. The Kapalikas are the precursors of Gorakhnathis.⁹ Rather, there is no material difference between the two except that Gorakhnathis are comparatively a little moderate in their practices.

In all these systems there is emphasis on the combination of the male and female energies of Siva and Sakti, Linga and Yoni, Purusa and Prakirti¹⁰, Bindu & Nada, etc. The female part is represented by Uma, Parvati, Durga and Sakti. The group is noted for its wild, erotic and abhorrent practices and blood sacrifices.¹¹

As is well known, all Yoga, especially Hath Yoga, is generally done in order to gain miraculous physical and psychological powers. It is very old belief that the Yogi can do anything and is the master of nature.¹² The four elements mentioned above have been present in these systems from the earliest times. The worship of Linga and Yoni was there in the Lakula.¹³ Group including Kanphatas. The Kapalika system which is nearest to the Nathas has been mentioned in the Upanisads.¹⁴ The sect existed before the Christian era and the time of Kena Upanisad. The Kanphata line started with Matsyendra Natha, who is the first historical Nath. Gorakhnath is probably the third Nath, though some say that six Nathas intervened between the two.¹⁵ It is generally believed that Gorakhnath appeared any time between the 11th and the 14th century.

But according to Briggs, who has considered all evidence on the point, he lived in the 12th century A.D.¹⁶

2. *LEGENDARY HISTORY* It is common in India that whenever a cult breaks away from the parent sect, the devotees of the new cult create numerous legends about its author by giving him both the highest spiritual status and the greatest antiquity. The legendary history of Gorakhnath is very variant. One legend says that he is the original deity and Siva, Brahma and Visnu are his disciples;¹⁷ another version calls him the Avatara

of Siva,¹⁸ who appears in all Yugas. In the Satyuga, he appeared at Tilla in Jhelum district, now in Pakistan.¹⁹ But, the generally accepted legend about the Naths is that once Siva was imparting to Parvati the secret Mantra for spiritual realization Matsyendra Natha, who was lying as a fish nearby, heard and grasped the Mantra.²⁰ Though Lord Siva is supposed to be the first Nath (Adinath) Matsyendra Natha is the first human Nath. In that lineage Gorakhnath is probably the third or the ninth²¹ Nath to get the secret Mantra. In the course of time this Mantra, it is believed was received by Janeshvara, the famous commentator of the Gita, Chaitanya and Tukaram.²² It is this secret Mantra which is possessed by the Naths of this cult.

3. THE METAPHYSICAL VIEW AND APPROACH TO THE WORLD

Saivism has a variety of metaphysical views regarding the world. In the Pasupata system, the parent system of Naths, Ishwara and Pradhana are the cause of everything. Pradhana produces the world, or effects (Karya), including souls. The effects are of three kinds, the soul (Pasu), 'Cognition' and 'organs'. The 'effects' are dependent on Siva, who is the cause of everything. But the effect, the created soul, is eternal. Siva is the original cause, on which the effects depend. In the Pasupata system, the chief aim is to gain powers. The world, though real, is considered to be fetters, from the bondage of which release has to be sought.²³ In essence, thus, the Naths accept the philosophy and approach of Yoga, which is dualistic and seeks the liberation of Purusa from the meshes of Prakriti. In Nathism, too, the world is deemed to be a place of misery which has to be renounced as an entanglement.²⁴ Irrespective of Whether Nathism is dualistic or monistic, its approach to the world remains the same as that of the Yoga. It is said that Siva, being fed up with creation, cut his organ. That is why the Yogis are ascetic and are associated with the cremation

grounds. The ashes on the body of the Nath represent cremation ashes. Siva is called Maha Yogi and has been shown in the garb of a Yogi. The Nath Yogis too take a vow of celibacy and turn complete back to the world of man.

4. *THE GOAL*

Being basically akin to Yoga, Naths have a goal which, even though slightly variant in its description, is, in essence, the same as in Yoga. In Yoga the goal is three fold; to gain power, to get liberated from the world, and to seek isolation. In Nathism, the first two objects of the goal are the same.²⁵ The final state is called Kaivalya or isolation of Purusha in a state of mindless unconciousness. In Nathism, too, the final goal is of complete dissociation from the world, involving a wholly passive and blissful union with, or merger in, Siva.²⁶ The difference in the goals is in name only. In both cases, it is a state of complete inactivity. In one case, the Purusha shines in its own light; in the case of Nathism, the soul shines in the eternal light of Siva. In both cases, the primary object is to gain powers and liberation from the oppression of the world.²⁷

5. *ORGANISATION, METHODOLOGY AND DISCIPLINE*

Let us now give the rationale, the routine and the practices of the religious life of the Naths and the physical and spiritual discipline observed by them.

(i) The organisation

The Nath system being ascetic and monastic, they have a number of monasteries all over the country. The important centres are Tilla (Jhelum district, Pakistan), Hinglaj (Baluchistan), Dhinodhar (Kuchh), Gorakhpur and Devi Pattan, (U.P.), etc. All Yogis are members of one monastery or the other, and each monastery is headed by a Pir or Guru. Since even Muslims are accepted in the faith (at one time

there were over 38000 Muslim Naths), the heads of the centres at Hinglaj and Tilla, which are situated in the Muslim areas, are called Pirs.²⁸ Actually, the head of the important monastery at Hinglaj was a Muslim, and the complaint was that visitors to that centre were converted to Islam.²⁹ Every person initiated among the Naths is accepted by a Guru of some monastery, of which the new entrant becomes a member. There are twelve sects of Kanphatas.³⁰ Each was organised by a disciple of Gorakhnath. The new entrant has to take three important vows. He has to be celibate. Further, he undertakes not to engage himself in any business, employment or profession and has to sustain himself by begging for his food. Thirdly, he has to observe Ahimsa,³¹ The Yogi is advised to live up a place where the area is not disturbed, the king is good and alms are freely available.³² There he has to choose a solitary place for his meditation and Yoga. After the Yogi is accepted as a probationer, he is supposed to walk on both sides of the river Narbada. The period of probation may extend to anything from one year to a such longer period. When the person is finally accepted as a Yogi, his ears are split. By it a mystic channel or Nadi is opened Up.³³ The Yogi travels barefooted. Except for the four rainy months, the Yogi is on the move to different Nath monasteries and other Hindu places of pilgrimage. He wears the scantiest of clothes and goes almost naked. He rubs ashes on his body and wears earrings in his split ears. The *Mudras* should preferably be of the horns of a Rhino. The Yogi wears a necklace of Rudraksha beads and also a special thread. In addition, he carries a whistle. These three items are called the Sali.³⁴ The loss of any of these items involves stoppage of food till it is replaced. The daily routine involves begging, and at that time he wears kerchiefs round his arms. The Mudra is so important that, if the same is broken the Yogi would not take food; nor can he perform religious rites or talk to his fellow Yogis till the same is substituted.³⁵ The Naths bury their dead.

(ii) Monasteries and places of worship

It is of religious significance and merit to visit Nath monasteries, particularly, Tilla, Hinglaj, Dhinodhar, etc., and sacred Hindu rivers and places of pilgrimage like Haridwar, Prayag, Ganga, Godawari, Benaras, Ajudhia, Brindaban, Badrinath, Kedarnath and Pushkar, etc. At the monasteries, there are temples, images and pictures of Hindu gods and religious personalities like Dattatreya, Lord Krishna and Gopies, Lord Ram Chandra, Hanuman, Lakshman and others. Siva, in the form of Bhairon, as the chief deity, is worshipped.³⁶ Homage is paid to Hindu gods. Dattatreya and Hanuman are also worshipped by the Kanphatas. In Bengal the Naths worship both Siva and Visnu. At their centres, blood sacrifices are done at the Bhairon temple and at tombs.³⁷

(iii) Caste and social distinctions

In theory only twice born are initiated as Naths.³⁸ At Tilla, the recruits are only from the first three castes. But elsewhere, all castes, except some very low castes like Meghwalis and Dheds, are accepted.³⁹ Women are generally not initiated except widows. Hindu Naths do not eat with Muslim Naths.⁴⁰ Nor do Hindu Naths go for begging to Muslim houses or houses of lower castes,⁴¹ "None but a Brahmin ascetic can cook the meals and serve them at any of the ascetic centres extant today, whether Saiva or Vaisnava. Likewise, the worship of the deity remains his privilege and preserve."⁴² At Dhinodhar monastery, the higher castes are given uncooked food. The other castes are fed at the monastery hall, but, lower castes and Muslims get food outside the monastery in the open.⁴³ Naths do not sit and eat with their women folk, not even with women Nath panthis.⁴⁴ Many Naths do marry, but they are held in contempt. The other Naths do not smoke with them till they have paid a penalty.⁴⁵

(iv) Religious discipline

The Nath Yogis have four prominent elements of their discipline: (a) asceticism, (b) ritualism, (c) Yogic methodology, and (d) the combination of male and female energies and the raising of the Kundalini with a view to union with Lord Siva. In order to understand these features, we shall briefly trace the history of each of them and indicate the Nath practice. It is relevant to understand that, despite the lapse of time and the modern environment, the Naths have not even slightly modified their practices which continue as of old.⁴⁶

(a) Asceticism: Asceticism is a typically ancient Indian institution. It is believed to be an Indian contribution to world cultures, since asceticism was unknown to the ancient Iranian, Babylonian or Egyptian cultures.⁴⁷ It appears to belong to the pre-Aryan or the Saramanic tradition. Harappan seals represent Siva in an ascetic pose. Jainism particularly extols the power and value of Tapas. In the Rig Veda, too, the force and merit of Tapas has been recognised. The Satpatha Brahmnas say that God created the earth through Tapas. The epics and the Upanisads, too, accept the significance and supernatural powers of asceticism.⁴⁸ This is especially so from the time of Kena Upanisad. Manu has prescribed the conditions and rules for the austere life.⁴⁹ In the Rig Veda, the hairy muni in ecstasy is praised as having divine power who could drink with Rudra from a poison cup.⁵⁰ Sbetaketu was an Upanisadic philosopher, lawgiver and Jnani, a contemporary of Yajnavalkya. He too was an ascetic,⁵¹ Sanaka, to whom libation are offered as a Vedic sage, was a Brahamacharya.⁵² There were many other ascetic Hindu sages. Even before the time of Buddha the theory of four ashramas provided that half the period of life should be devoted to ascetic living. Dattatreya, deemed to be an incarnation of Visnu, was a celibate. Even Yohnavalkya says that wise men, without becoming householders, straight away take to the life of mendicants. It was considered the right and proper course for spiritual

endeavour and self-realisation⁵³, Chandogya goes a step further, calling “Such brahmacharya” as not only one of the pillars of righteousness but as a state that ensures Brahma realization.”⁵⁴ Manduka Upanisad too recommends Sanyasa for final salvation. Even Yajnavalkya says, “Having known Him, one becomes a Muni, sage or wise one. Desiring the same end, recluses renounce the world. For that very purpose, wise men of old used not to desire progeny.” “With this thought, they used to take to the life of mendicancy.” “For, desire for progeny is desire for goods.” “Brahmins having known Him, practise the life of mendicants.” “There are schools of asceticism which have raised the physical part of it to be an ideal in itself, whether as a contortious activity or as the esoteric Hath Yoga.”⁵⁵ It is thus clear that both in the pre-Aryan Sramanic tradition and the Vedic-Upanisadic tradition, asceticism, celibacy and other-worldliness have been taken to be the principal means of salvation and knowledge. Buddha did strike a mean path; but with him, too, world was a Dukkha and monasticism became a basic part of his system for Nirvana. It is this tradition of asceticism and liberation from the miseries of the world that the Nath Yogis accept as an integral part of their system, because the vows of Nath Yogis accept as an integral part of their system, because the vows of Nath Yogis provide for celibacy and non-engagement in any business or employment. Siva, who is called the Maha Yogi, is always associated with wilderness and cremation grounds. That is why the Nath Yogis have the ritual of rubbing ashes on the body, representing thereby death to the world.⁵⁶

(b) *Ritualism and Formalism*: Ritualism has a definite place and value in the system. Certain months, December to April, are considered auspicious for initiation into the *system*.⁵⁷ At initiation, the disciple sits in a particular posture and faces north. Mantras are read at the time of initiation and splitting the ears. These are supposed to have distinct potency and value in preventing pain and bleeding in the

process. Rhino ear-rings are preferred because it is a sacred animal.⁵⁸ The cutting of the ear has great potency and makes a person immortal.⁵⁹ In case the split ear is mutilated, the Nath is excommunicated.⁶⁰ In earlier years, he either died or was buried alive. If a Mudra is lost, the Yogi must substitute it before he can take food, perform religious rites or talk to his fellow Yogis.⁶¹

As we shall mention under the sub-head Yoga, Mantra Yoga has a definite value in achieving spiritual advancement. Belief in the mystic potency of words and letters and their repetition is an integral part of the system. This is so especially regarding the word Om.

Fasting is considered very efficacious. It removes sins. Fasting on Shivratri is particularly meritorious and makes a person immortal.⁶² May be, because of the black colour of Bhairon, black buck, snakes and even black dogs are venerated.⁶³ Nag Panchami is celebrated by the Naths.

Animal and blood sacrifices at the temple of Bhairon and some tombs is a common feature. At the annual fair at Devi Pattan, 20 buffalos, 250 goats and 250 pigs were sacrificed on one day only. The fair opens on the arrival of the Nath Pir from Nepal who presides over the function.⁶⁴ The mark of blood is applied to the devotees. Kalaki Purana, which is a scripture of the Saktas, has a chapter on human sacrifices.⁶⁵ The Goraknathis have some practices similar to this group. Naths serve as Pujaris at the Sakti temples. Gorakhnath is said to have substituted animal sacrifice for human sacrifice.⁶⁶

At Hinglaj, linga-yoni mark is put on the visiting Yogis. They also worship Linga and Yoni.⁶⁷ Visits to Nath monasteries and Hindu sacred places are regarded as of distinct religious merit. A visit to Hinglaj monastery is necessary to make a person perfect.⁶⁸

The Naths accept and recognize Hindu beliefs in gods and goddesses, good and bad spirits, auspicious and inauspicious days, and many other superstitions.⁶⁹

(c) *Yogic practices*: Saivism and Yoga have an ancient

bond or combination. The Harrappan seals show Siva in a Yogic pose. Both are a part of the Saramanic tradition. Dasgupta writes that Yoga arose as the means of deliverance of the hermits from the oppressive environment and the misery of the world. Its theory envisages that, as in the case of Jainism and Sankhya, the combination of the material and spiritual elements is a bondage, and release from the world has to be sought by breaking this combination. Another object is a state of eternal quiet, isolation and bliss.

The basic Yogic discipline is the one detailed by patanjali in the period about 300 A.D. For Yoga, celibacy is essential. This discipline is eight fold, involving Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharna, dhyana and samadhi. It includes use of the word Om, fasts, concentration, one-point meditation and stoppage of mental processes, creating unconsciousness. As from the ancient times, the general and primary aim of Yoga is to gain miraculous powers. The Yogi is the master of three worlds and can control the evolution of gunas of Prakriti.⁷⁰ Such powers are called Siddhis. Yogis, who have attained those powers, are called Siddhas. Naths are closely associated with Siddhas whose principal aim is to gain power. For, Gorakhnath is not only one of the nine Naths, but he is counted as one of the eighty four Siddhas.⁷¹ He is supposed to be their teacher.

Dasgupta enumerates four kinds of Yoga: Raj Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga and Hath Yoga.⁷² Raj Yoga deals with the mind and its psychic powers and the intellectual processes. Mantra Yoga employs the repetition of sacred texts, words and letters. This Yoga almost enters the realm of magic. Laya Yoga is quietest. It involves elimination of mental processes and of inducement of trances and unconsciousness, leading to the final state ending in permanent quiet of the mind. The fourth is Hath or Kundalini Yoga. The method is mainly physical and in its practice it uses Pranayama. The aim is the same, namely, Samadhi, isolation or union with Siva. The practice of Kundalini Yoga also employs others Yogas, including

Mantra and Laya Yoga. In fact, the practice of anyone of the Yogas also involves the use of the methods of the other Yogas. The general methods used are the ones indicated by patanjali. The difference is only of emphasis. For, no kind of Yoga is exclusive in its character. The Naths mainly stress upon Mantra Yoga and Hath Yoga.⁷³

The three most important religious texts of the Naths are Gorakhsataka, Gorakhsa Paddhati and Hath Yoga Pradipika. The first of them is the most revered work of Naths. It is attributed to Gorakhnath himself as also Hath Yoga pradipika. It suggests 84 postures and six stages of Yoga, and gives 100 verses by the knowledge of which the highest state is attained.⁷⁴ It prescribes Asanas and gaze between the eyes and on the tip of the nose. There are nine doors and those are presided over by five deities. During the Yogic practice, Linga and Yoni are mentioned to appear, accompanied with great light. By seeing this light, death is overcome. According to the discipline, the Nath must repeat 1008 names of God every day.⁷⁵ The Yogi sees 72000 nadis below the naval. In Gorakhsataka the nadis Ida, Pingala, Susumana, Gandhari, etc. and their courses are indicated. The Prana is connected through Ida, Pingala and Susmana. The repetition of the word 'hamsa' is prescribed. By the repetition of the Mantra 21,600 times a day, the Yogi gains liberation in a year's time or so.⁷⁶ By the practice of Yoga poison can be digested. The secret of Mahanrudra practice should not be told to anyone. He who knows Khetari Mudra is not troubled by death. The Bindu is of two kinds, white (Semen) and blood red (menstrual fluid). Bindu is Siva and Rajas is Sakti. By uniting the two, the highest state is achieved. Om is the supreme light in which three worlds, three Vedas, three accents and three gods are situated. In Om is three fold knowledge, Sakti, etc. Om is the light in the elements of which the world, bhuh, bhavah, soah and the three divinities of Sun, moon and fire exist. Om, the seed, should be repeated and uttered. Whether pure and impure, whoever repeats it is not affected by sin. Pranayama,

while meditating on the Sun and Moon, is recommended. In this text, the Yogic system, involving Pranayama, six circles, three channels and Kundalini and Nada and Bindu, is detailed. The ten chief Nadis are Ida, Pingla, Susmana, Gandhari, Hastijihva, Pusa, Yarasvani, Alambusa, Kuhus and Samkhini. These terminate in ten openings. The first three Nadis are the important ones in raising the Kundalini. Susmana extends to the tenth opening. It is the path of enjoyment and bliss in which male and female elements unite. Kundalini is raised through the six chakras. Indra, Brahma and Kali with four-hands, a staff, wine, skull and spear are involved in Kundalini symbolism. The final goal of Kundalini is to reach the top of the head at Sahasrara, the place of final bliss and union with Siva. There is Sunya, the place of Ishvara, the abode of Brahma. The union of Rajas and Bindu (Siva and Sakti) is the aim of Yoga. The thrills of the physical reactions in the process of Yoga are called religious experiences.

The aims, of Yoga are immobility of body and mental processes, the ecstatic experiences of union of Rajas (Kundalini) and Bindu (Siva) at the various levels and the six chakras in the body, supernatural powers, and final release and bliss. All these are secured by Asanas, Mudra, Bhandas, Pranayama, retention of breath and Bindu, breath control, cleaning of Nadis and miscellaneous practices. The other physical yogic methods adopted are Dhoti, Basti, Neti, Trataka, Nauli, Kapala Ghati, etc. By pranayama, Kundalini is directed to Susmana. During the process, one hears internal sounds (Anahata nad) is a year's time. Mental processes are brought to a stand still. There are many varieties in the use of Mudra, Asana, Pranayama, etc. By this Yoga, all physical, psychic and mystic powers are gained, and finally Siva is enjoyed in eternal bliss. In wrath the Yogi can move the three worlds. The union of Bindu and Rajas in the throat yields supernatural power. It is the gateway to final release. The Sahasrara is the true world, where one has the highest bliss. Mind is dissolved and unconsciousness

follows. It is the fountain head of all creation, where Kundalini enjoys Paramatman and bliss.⁷⁷ This is the Yoga system prescribed in the Nath system. It involves all kinds of Yogas, but the stress is on Hath Yoga and Mantra Yoga.

The question now is whether Hath Yoga is a later innovation, or it is basically a variety of the old and original Yogic system. We find that Hath Yoga, in its fundamental form, including the system of Nadis and Kundalini, is very old. It was known to the Chandogya Upanisad, which says that the soul departed through the Chakras gains immortality.⁷⁸ Not only is there a reference to Susmana nadi, but the theory of Nadi and its spiritual value is given also in the Maitri Upanisad. Tessitorie writes: "The close alliance of Kanphata system to the Yoga, both of patanjali and the Upanisadas, is visible from the prominent part given to the Yoga proxis as well as to the mystical theory, to the circles in the body (chakra, Kausala), arteries (nala), vital air (pavana) and breaths (hamsa)."⁷⁹ Similarly, Svetasvatara mentions the great gains of Pranayama. All this only shows that the Yoga variety practised by the Nath Yogis is nothing new. The system in its essentials was known in the ancient and the Unpanisadic times. There is nothing fundamentally Tantric about it. In fact, the Tantric systems assume the basis of Hath, Mantra, and Raj Yogas. Even the Non-Tantric Vaisnava works detail the Hath Yoga. After his survey, Ghurye also concludes that Hath Yoga in all its essentials is an ancient or an Upanisadic system.⁸⁰

(d) The combination of male and female forces: The fourth element of Nath fundamental is the emphasis on the union of male and female energies, Siva and Sakti, to achieve liberation.

Both in the Hath Yoga Pradipika and Gorakhsa Paddhati, which are Nath texts (the former is also attributed to Gorakhnath),⁸¹ it has been stated that the highest state can be attained both by asceticism and restraint. and by sex indulgence. One of the methods prescribed for achieving eternal bliss or Siddhi is Vajroli, Sahjoli or Amroli. These sex

practices, conducted in the company of a woman, lead both to Moksha and enjoyment. Mudras and Bandhas are similar to Asanas in their efficacy. Great powers are obtained by such like practices. Gheranda names 25 methods, including Vajroli, which confer magic and spiritual powers.⁸² By Khetari Mudra one gets ecstatic experiences beyond the range of senses, one becomes deathless, and Karma becomes inoperative.⁸³ The mind and Prana are dissolved in Samadhi. In fact, Unmani, Manomani, Asunya, Amaratva, Laya, Baramapada, Advaita, Sahaja Niranjana, Jivan mukti and Turya denote the same or the final state of being or achievement.⁸⁴ It means bliss, isolation, union or merger with Siva or the Absolute. This is the final state in all Yogas, including Kundalini Yoga. “By this Yoga, Siva appears as the vast ocean of bliss and knowledge, destroying the misery of the world, and the end is the state of the unmoving flames of light in the inner soul, a body of bliss and knowledge.” “While hard discipline and austerity have their place in the system, many of the practices are concerned with sex functions and experiences.”⁸⁵ Drugs also induce ecstatic states and there are methods for it. Both Rig Veda and Patanjali are aware of their use and utility patanjali says, “Perfections proceed from birth, or from drugs, or from spells, or from self-castigation, or from concentration.”⁸⁶ There are three classes of practitioners; Pasu, the one seeking self control; Vira, the one who has gained self control and powers; and the Divya, who has reached the final state. He is then free from all rules of virtue and vice. He can do anything and indulge in anything he likes.⁸⁷

About Nathism Briggs concludes, “The essence of the Hath Yoga is physical exercise and manipulations, quite mechanical. If it is charged against the exposition found in the preceding pages that it is overburdened with interpretations on too Iowa plane, it must be said in reply that both the practice and the outlook of the Yogis confirm this point of view. The historical background of the cult of Gorakhnath points in the same direction. The high religious

value to man-woman relations was insisted upon. The first Chaitanya Sahajya movement confirms this point, as does Gorakhnath's early affiliation with Vajrayana Buddhists." "While Vaisnavite movement emphasises love in the consort of the divine, the Saivite lays stress on her power or energy."⁸⁸

We are not inclined to agree with the view that this aspect of Nath Yoga arose under Tantric influence and led to Nada-Bindu combination. Even Briggs concedes, while referring to the times of Vedas: "And it is clear that from ancient times drugs and sex stimulations were used for the same ends of ecstasy and trance."⁸⁹ The view of Tantric influence has arisen largely because of a suggestion that, before being converted to Nathism by Matsyendra Nath, Gorakhnath was a Vajrayana Buddhist. Apart from the fact that the suggestion is far from confirmed, this view displays quite an ignorance of the history of Yogic methods and Nathism. We have already seen that Kanphatas are a part of the Lakula group of the Saiva or the Pasupata system, of which Aghoris, Kalamukhas and Kapilkas are a part. In fact, Kapilkas are the nearest to Kanphatas, the essentials of the two cults being the same and similar. As such, this development of the Naths has to be traced to the Pasupata and the earlier systems, which are much older than Tantric Buddhism.

In the Harappan seal, Siva is shown with his generative organ erect.⁹⁰ Besides, there is the ancient legend, probably leading to the turn towards celibacy and asceticism, in which Siva cuts his organ and becomes a Yogi, Siva-Yoni worship is mentioned in the⁹¹ Vedic literature.

Barnett found a reference to Saiva Yogis or Vratyas Occuring in the Atharva Veda. "He travels in a bullock cart, with a harlot, a musician, two carriers, and two footmen, and professes Saiva magic."⁹² Hauer says that these Vratyas, followers of Rudra, Siva and Yoga, stand included in the Brahmanic system and are mentioned in the Atharva Veda. These persons like Yogis stand erect for a year and go over

the country (Like later Yogis) cursing and blessing the people. They are accompanied by a woman. The couple represent the male god and female goddess, Siva and Sakti.⁹³ In the Mahabharata, too, Siva is mentioned with an erect organ. In fact, he is also named as such in the Mahabharata. Bhandarkar draws pointed attention to the fact that Siva, in the form of Lakulisa, is portrayed with his organ erect. And it is in this form of Lakulisa that he is the tutelary deity of the Pasupatas.⁹⁴ Bhandarkar further connects this portrayal of Siva with a similar seal-armlet discovered at Mohen-jodaro. Thus this sex symbolism and combination of male and female forces is both Vedic and pre-Vedic. And in all its erotic symbolism and manifestations, it continued in the Kapilkas. This group is referred to in the works of the 1st century A.D. Bhandarkar believes that this sect is mentioned in the Kena and Maitri Upanisads and is older than them. In the old Soma sect, Siva is represented as always with his consort Uma.⁹⁵ The Kapilkas are known for their methods of sense indulgence for spiritual advancement. In a dramatic skit of the 7th century A.D., Kapilka and Kapalini ridicule the systems of a Jain Muni and a Buddhist Bhikkhu and extol their method of spiritual attainment through enjoyment of wine and woman. Ultimately, the Jain and the Buddhist are converted to the ways of the Kapilka.⁹⁶ This shows that the Saiva systems hardly needed Buddhist influence for accepting erotic practices. It could rather be the other way round. The parent Pasupata system of this group is the oldest Saiva system, being mentioned in the Atharva Veda, Mahabharata and Atharvasiras Upanisad.⁹⁷ Till recently, at the Amarnath Temple, Nath Yogis danced naked, and women wore only a single garment.⁹⁸

Another important point is that Dattatreya is one of the chief deities worshipped by the Nathas. He is a Hindu deity, who is an Avatara of Visnu and is mentioned in more than one list of his incarnations. He was a celibate with miraculous powers, and gave self-realising knowledge to great persons like Alarka and Prahlada. He is referred to in

the Upanisads and is considered to be Jnani and a paramahansa. Dattatreya is the only incarnation who has a cult following him and has temples devoted to his worship. All through, the Puranic account “depicts him as always in ecstasy, surrounded by women, drinking wine and indulging in sex.” In one puranic account, “he demands flesh and wine in a human skull.”⁹⁹ And he is one of the chief deities whom Nath Yogis worship.

The Hindu works also recognize that the highest achievement can also be made through wine and women. Hindu Tantra is supposed to be the 5th Veda for Kalyuga.¹⁰⁰ In fact, Tantric systems themselves depend on Raj, Mantra and Hath Yogas, which are older systems.¹⁰¹ The Mantra Yoga, as is known, is closely allied with the Vedic theory that words, verses, letters and symbols have mysterious powers and that man and the world are subject to their influence.

Ghurye has collected a mass of evidence to dispel the suggestion of Tantric influence on the Nath panthis. He writes, “As Tantric literature is fairly recent, it may be supposed by our readers that the Jogi order is of recent origin. This impression must now be countered.” “Fundamentally the Jogis represent the oldest school of Indian ascetism.”¹⁰² The Yogis are the residue of the ancient Saivite sects.¹⁰³ Zimmer also, in his broad survey of Tantric systems, concludes, “and in the deep philosophy of the Tantric, we have another sign of the resurgence of the religiosity of the non-Aryan, pre-Aryan matriarchal tradition of Dravidian times.”¹⁰⁴

Another significant fact which clearly shows the link of Gorakhnathis with the ancient Pasupata or Saiva system is the wild and abhorrent nature of the two sects. The author of the Dabistan writes that Gorkhnathis use filtered excreta. He himself saw a Gorakhnathi eating the rotten flesh of a corpse. This practice is deemed meritorious. Two other reasons also show the lack of Nath

connection with Tantric Buddhism and its antiquity as a system. It is admitted that Gorakhnath introduced some moderation in the Naths, both in regard to blood sacrifices and sex practices, compared to the extreme and older Saiva sects like the Kapalikas, and Kalamukhas (though Aghorpanthis, also followers of Gorakhnath, are very extreme in their practices). Had he really the Vajarayana background, which according to Briggs is one of the most degraded religious groups, the Naths would have been more licentious and erotic in their practices than the Kapalikas. This they are not. Hence the improbability of Gorakhnath's being originally a Vajaryana.

Secondly, old religious systems like Hinduism, in order to maintain a semblance of continuity, develop a number of internal contradictions. Because, while attempt is made to accept and absorb new developments, the older beliefs are not shed. This feature of contradictory practices is typically present in the Naths. Gorakhnathis, while they take a vow of ahimsa, also indulge in blood sacrifices at their monasteries. Many of the Naths eat meat except pork and beef. On the one hand, there is a vow of asceticism and all concern with the world is given up by rejecting all business and employment. On the other hand, the chief aim is to gain power over the forces of the body, nature and the world. On the one hand, the Nath takes a vow of celibacy. On the other hand, sex-symbolism, erotic practices and licensed indulgence are recognized as the path of spiritual achievement. And the person who has reached the spiritual height is above virtue and vice, being free to indulge in anything forbidden to the seeker.¹⁰⁵⁻
¹⁰⁶ Such strong contrasts in Nath beliefs and practices clearly indicate an old tradition that has developed over a long period of time. It is not a new cult with a unified system of doctrines and disciplines.

There is, thus, overwhelming evidence to conclude the direct lineage of the Nath cult from the oldest pre-Vedic and Vedic traditions through the Saiva systems of Pasupata and

Kapilkas, with both of which all its essentials are common. All the world over, ascetic or monastic systems, whether Hindu, Saiva, Vaisnava, or Buddhist, at one point or the other, lead to male and female symbolism, and consequent erotic practices, ultimately recognising sensual indulgence as a means to salvation. We should also like to emphasize that, where creative energies are not yoked to life-affirming, constructive and virtuous deeds, sects insisting on celibacy or adopting sex symbolism almost always degenerate into accepting erotic, licentious or abhorrent practices. This has happened both inside and outside India. On this issue, we agree with Briggs that, whereas female divinities have arisen all over and in all ages, nowhere in the world has male and female symbolism been able for long to keep itself on a high plane.¹⁰⁷

6. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE WORLD-VIEW OF THE NATH YOGI

The Yogi, whether liberated or otherwise, has no social responsibility. By his very basic vows he cuts himself off from the world. The liberated person is either above virtue and sin, or stops all physical and psychological processes, entering a state of mindless unconsciousness. His mystic union involves eternal bliss and rest. The question of any consequent activity does not arise. He has no social responsibility towards his fellow beings.¹⁰⁸ The Yogi is under a vow that he will not earn his living and would instead beg for his food, that being a part of his routine at the monastery. For his meditation, he is enjoined to select a place which is not socially disturbed and where alms are freely available. Evidently, this world-view is categorically life-denying and negative. It is wholly opposed to the world-view of life affirmation. The world is a place of misery, release from it can be sought by completely dissolving all physical and psychological processes of life. Applying the test of the unity of perception, ideology and activity, the entire

system and life of the Yogi unmistakably point towards a world-view of withdrawal from life. While the Nath Yogi expects the social system to provide him with abundant alms and an undisturbed solitude and socio-political environment, he, on his part, feels altogether no responsibility towards the society on which he depends.¹⁰⁹ In short, in its approach to the world, its ethics, methodology, discipline and its goals, it is typically a world-view of what Schweitzer calls life-negation.

VAISNAVISM

DALJEET SINGH

Vaisnavism has an extremely chequered history. The ancient systems of India were either dualistic, involving a multiplicity of Purusas without the concept of God in the theistic sense, or were ritualistic (Vedic), without the concept of a Commander issuing the Vedic commands. In the Upanisadic system Brahman was conceived primarily in the monistic or in the pantheistic sense. The predominant view which was Vedantic (Advaita of Sankara) envisaged that the world was not real. In this system naturally there was no place for devotion or a system of love as contemplated in a theism with a God of Attributes. As against it, in the Vedic system every thing including heaven could be obtained by the performance of rituals and sacrifices. In such a climate and age, the growth of a system of worship and devotion could come only by the flow of a side stream and not as indigenous to the Vedic system itself. As an independent mystic system, with doctrines and a philosophy of its own, it crystallised mainly in the post Sankara period, especially when the Alvar saints in the south and other Vaisnava saints came up in the north, the east and the west of India. In order to understand the content and import of the Vaisnava system, it is necessary briefly to trace its long history.

It is now commonly believed that originally four streams of thought joined to form the early Vaisnava system of the pre-Christian era. Probably, the oldest of them was the worship of Vasudeva who was the god of a tribe called Vrsni. As would be expected from the author of an opposing

creed, the Buddhistic text referring to the worship of Vasudeva mentions it along with over half a dozen other minor systems of worship, including the worship of a cow, a horse, an elephant, a crow, etc. Vasudeva was a member of the Vrsni race or Satvatas. This system with other accretions was called the Bhagavata system.

The second stream of thought was connected with the name of Narayana, who is mentioned as a god in the Vedic system. Nara, Narayana, Hari, sons of Dharma, are referred to as forms of the Supreme. But, apart from reference to them as gods and the ritualistic use of the related hymns, there was no system of their separate worship in the period of Vedas and Brahmanas when ritualism was supreme. This system was extremely meticulous and elaborate and required the services of priests to perform the rituals. It is later that the worship of Narayana appeared, presumably from the lore of the Vedic gods. Later still arose the worship of Hari as a side or subsidiary growth. Originally, this worship had not emancipated itself from the religion of sacrifices. In course of time both these streams, of the worship of Vasudeva and of Narayana and Hari, appear to have joined and mingled, to an extent, with each other, though their complete identification with each other had not taken place even upto the time of the Bhagavad Gita.

The third stream of thought arose from the Upanisads themselves. The Rig-Veda, the Upanisads, and the Bhagavad Gita are believed to be mere compilations of variant and unreconciled religious thoughts, as these occurred to different sages from time to time.¹ These were handed down orally. Later, these were incorporated into books for the use of the individual Vedic schools. Thus, even in the Upanisads, e.g. in the Chandogya Upanisad, occurs the name of Krishna, which name was later associated with Vasudeva as Krishna Vasudeva. In the Upanisads, especially the later Upanisads, the idea of a Controller of the universe had also appeared. But, as seen already, it is there entirely

in the context of the monistic or pantheistic Brahman, the Vedic ritualism, and the caste system, which had been accepted by the Upanisadic thought as a part of their overall system. This is the third source of there being a Supreme deity that is incharge of the world. Though Visnu was also a Vedic deity, the theory of his incarnation had not been advanced in the Vedic times. All the same, his worship constituted the fourth stream that formed the system of Vaisnavism. Simultaneously, started forming its omnibus doctrine of incarnation to include and absorb every old or new religious development in the country. These four streams contributed to the thought of the Bhagavad Gita, which, being an eclectic compilation,² drew heavily on the religious systems of Sankhya Yoga, Vedic Ritualism, Bhagavatism, the Upanisads, and the worship of Narayana and Visnu that had been in vogue then. Till then neither the identification of Vasudeva and Narayana had taken place, nor had his being the incarnation of Visnu been accepted. Pancaratra or Bhagavata school is the original source of Vaisnavism. It espouses the cause of devotion to Vasudeva and his several forms. The Gita has no organic connection with this system which had been there since the fourth century B.C. It is the chief source of Vaisnavism, being prior to the Gita.

It is practically a settled view that the Gita is of composite origin. Admittedly, it suggests different doctrines. The path of Jnana or knowledge, the path of ritualism or Karman and the path of modified Sankhya are recommended as a means to the achievement of the goal. In addition, the path of worship is suggested as an alternative method of Moksha. It is not the type of worship or Bhakti which we find in the Bhagavata Puran, or as described and defined by Sandilya more than ten centuries later.³ While formal worship of the deity is suggested, the metaphysical position is somewhat puzzling, as both pantheistic and dualistic views are indicated. As also stated in some of the Upanisads, God divides himself and forms the various beings of the

world. In this sense, souls are considered identical with God. At the same time, the dualism of Sankhya and co-eternal Prakriti are recognized.⁴ The goal is an eternal life of bliss, a sort of Nirvana in Brahman.⁵

It has often been asserted that the Bhagavad Gita gave rise to theistic thought. The issue needs to be examined. In the Gita, Arjuna is asked to fight on without regard to the fruit as this was the caste duty of Kshatriya.⁶ These thoughts about disinterested action appear in the Sankhya- Yoga system, as also in the Katha and Brahadaranyaka Upanisads, where it is stated that, when all desires are uprooted, one attains to Brahman. In the Sankhya system, the Purusa must dissociate itself from the motivated activities of the co-eternal Prakriti. Thus, arising both from the Upanisadic idea of Brahman and the system of dualistic Sankhya, all motivation for any action has to be eliminated. While the strength of will and the power of the mind follow from Yoga, the caste duty to fight in war follows the command of the Rig-Vedic religion. The path of knowledge is from the Sankhya and of Karma (Yajnas) from the *Rig* Veda. In the Sankhya, all desires and action are the activities of Prakriti. Hence the way to liberation is a realisation by the 'Purusa' that no activity is his. To dissociate oneself from that activity, is the aim of life. The so-called method of unattached action is, thus, simply another way of expressing, in a new phrase, the same idea of disentanglement of Purusa from Prakriti. Man should not be attached to actions in the world. He should, instead, withdraw himself (the Purusa) from all activities, which are only the phases and forms of Prakriti with which Purusa should not concern himself.

In the Mahabharata the prominent gods are Siva and Visnu. It would be relevant to record briefly the contents of the Gita and the systems it suggests, it being also the first formal exposition of the Ekantika or Bhakti Dharma. It is stated in Chapter IV of the Gita that 'those who know the incarnations and the celestial deeds of Bhagavata are released from the body and are not born again'; that 'Yajna

of knowledge is the best' since by it one sees all things in one self and God.' As was also done by the Upanisads, the system of Yajnas or sacrifices is rationalised. Restraint, discipline and knowledge are all deemed to be Yajnas, or sacrifices. Sankhya and Yoga are linked with Sanyasa and Karam Yoga or meditational ritualism. By following either, one gets the fruits of both. All worship and austerities should be devoted to God. This knowledge leads to peace. By the Yoga practices one gets tranquility in Bhagavata; The devotees of Lord are of four kinds. Of these, the Jnani is the best. He who dies while remembering Lord Krishna attains to his condition. By the Yoga practices, concentration and meditation, and by uttering 'Om' and remembering Krishna, one gets Moksha. There is no return from that stage. Those who die while the sun is in the northern course go to Brahman. Those who die while the sun is in the southern course go to the moon from which the soul returns. By Yoga practices one reaches Aksara (Brahman), the highest goal. By the meditation of syllable Om, the soul hits the target of Brahman. The system is made theistic by Brahman being called Bhagavata. The whole world is described as in Bhagvat. Those who perform sacrifices and rituals attain heaven thereby, i.e. the value of rituals is granted. The actions dedicated to God do not bind one. By this one becomes a Sanyasin and goes to Bhagavata. One who adores Krishna single-mindedly becomes holy, even if one were wicked before. Even the Vaisyas, the Sudras and women can worship Bhagavata. From heaven reached by rituals one returns. But there is no return by full devotion to Bhagvata. Those who meditate on Bhagavata reach him quickly. Those who meditate on Brahman reach there but with difficulty. If one cannot meditate and concentrate on Bhagavata, nor can remember him, one should do disinterested deeds. But, to this method the third place is given in the order of preference as a mode of salvation.

The dualism of Sankhya is virtually accepted. It is admitted that Prakriti and Purusa are co-eternal. All changes,

qualities and actions belong to Prakriti, which is the cause of all of them, while Purusa, who is inactive, suffers. In this body is 'Purusa', the Supreme Soul. By meditation one can see it and withdraw Purusa. One can attain to the final stage by Sankhya-Yoga, and also by Karam Yoga. Others can do so by meditation. Though the Sankhya system and all the details of the working of Prakriti and the inactivity of Purusa are accepted in entirety, the atheism of Sankhya is avoided from being mentioned. It is also accepted by implication that since Purusa does not take part in the activities of Prakriti, man is absolved of all moral responsibility. Hence the emphasis is on concentration, meditation, mechanical remembering, withdrawal, ritualism and knowledge, but not on ethical conduct as the foremost and the only way of salvation.

Two classes of men, bad and good, are mentioned. Among the first category are included men who do not care for God or morality, or those who follow other religions or philosophical systems. The diet taken and the modes of worship sacrifices and austerities practised by one differ according to one's faith and nature, which are of three kinds, featured by goodness, activity and ignorance. It is laid down that the duties of a man vary according to his caste. The doing of the caste duties of another caste, howsoever well done, is not as good as the doing of one's own caste duties, even though without quality and worth.⁷ Anyone who surrenders himself to Him would be freed of all sin.

It has been felt that the idea of action, without regard to its fruit, is prior to the Gita. The idea has been found, in one form or the other, in the Chandogya, the Brhadaranyaka, the Maitri and the Isa Upanisads. It is there even in the Sankhya. On the side of all phenomenal change, the Sankhya system and its twenty-four principles of change are accepted; so are Yoga principles and its meditation. "The idea of love for God does not show itself in any prominent way in the early Sanskrit literature except in the Pancaratra literature." "It is the contemplative union with God that we

find in the Gita, and the transition to it from the state of Yoga concentration is not difficult to understand.”⁸ In Yoga liberation is sought by the destruction of mind through psychical exercises. Later the devotee seeks to attain liberation through the special grace of God, which he can hope to acquire by contemplative union. In the Vishnu purana the only case of devotion is of Prahlad’s love for God.⁹ The earlier literature does not emphasize the feeling element in devotion. The kind of Bhakti or love, which appeared in the post Sankara-Ramanuj period, is not there. In the times of the Upanisads and the Gita, and even of Ramanuj all that is meant by Bhakti or devotion is ‘upasana’, or meditation and concentration on God.¹⁰

The ideas of the worship and the grace of God are there. But the same were present, though in a faint form, even in the Upanisads like the Brhadaranyaka, the Katha and the Manduka. The first of them calls Him the ruler of all, His presence being inside everyone. By doing good or bad, He does not *become* better or worse. By knowing him one *becomes* a sage. He is known through the Vedas, worship and austerities. In the other Upanisads, the idea of soul being the doer of every thing is there. Only he does good deeds whom He favours and wants to elevate, i.e. the dependence of man on God is expressed.

It is necessary here to indicate the mode of worship of the Bhagavata system which became, in conjunction with streams from the other schools of thought, the chief base of worship of the Supreme One. Pancaratra Samhita is the book on which is based the method of worship. The system is somewhat ritualistic and prescribes ‘Mantras’ variously arranged. Many rites are also indicated in the Satvata Samhita. Sankaracharya refers to the system of worship as follows: (1) Going to the temple with mind fixed on the deity, (2) collecting materials for worship, (3) actual worship, (4) the muttering of ‘Mantras’ and (5) Yoga or meditation. By worship in this manner for a hundred years all sins are destroyed. As to the method of worship of Hari,

six steps have been indicated: (1) Remembering him, (2) the uttering of his name, (3) salutation, (4) resorting to his feet, (5) constant worship with devotion and (6) the surrender of the soul. In the later period of Bhagavata Purana three more modes are mentioned: (1) Hearing His praise, (2) servitude and (3) companionship.

It is significant that all modes of worship are devotional ritualistic and formal without any reference to social and moral conduct.

From the above analysis by Bhandarkar, it is clear that the Bhagavad Gita gave few new religious ideas. In fact, it records all kinds of divergent systems within one compilation. The overall system and approach remain, by and large, orthodox and traditional. The duality and co-eternal character of Purusa and Prakriti are accepted, as also the priority of the system of meditation, Yoga and concentration. Generally, the system is conservative, and it is clearly mentioned that the Lord came to fulfil the law and not to supplant it. The rigidity and the immobility of the caste system are sanctified and stressed, in so far as one must do one's own caste duties and not those of other castes. "Of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, O Parantapa, the duties have been distributed according to qualities born of their own natures." "Ploughing, protection of kine, and trade are the Vaishya duty, born of his own nature. Action of the nature of service is the Sudra duty born of his own nature." "Better is ones' own duty though destitute of merits than the well-executed duty of another. He who doeth the duty laid down by his own nature incurreth not sin." "Congenital duty, O son of Kunti, though defective, ought not to be abandoned."¹¹ Further, the sacrificial system is also regarded as a valid path. Religions like Buddhism, Jainism, etc. are, by implication, deprecated as bad. What is suggested is the worship of Bhagavata. This system had existed already. Except for the purposes of worship, the status of Sudras and women, put in the same class, is kept where it was in the Brahmanical system. The worship

recommended is also of a formal nature in the sense that even remembrance at the time of death absolved one of all sins and brought salvation. The utility of the ritualistic system and the idea of the isolation of Purusa from the activity of the co-eternal Prakriti having been accepted, these are tagged to the existing system of worship of Vasudeva Krishna. There is one distinct advancement from the Brahmanical system. Women and Sudras are admitted to the path of worship of Vasudeva, though not in other fields where the rigidity of the caste system is confirmed. Modern research, however, indicates that this concession was the result of Buddhist influence since Buddhist monasteries had been opened for women and Sudras.¹² Ramanuja defines devotion (Bhakti) as “un-broken contemplation of God, as smooth and ceaseless as the flow of oil.” It is this contemplative union with God that we find in the Gita. “Even Prahlada’s devotion was a concentration on God and a serene contemplation forming union with God.”¹³ In fact, the word Bhakti, as in the system of the Upanisads or of Ramanuja, only means mere meditation (Upasana) and not the loving devotion or love, which idea is simply not there. Self-surrender in the Gita does not mean an ideal of love or personal relationship. It is the ideal of contentment, non-attachment and self-control. It is the idea of the old Yoga of Patanjali, where also this discipline of self-surrender is known.¹⁴

It is, therefore, important to understand that the mystic system of love, as in the case of Mahayana or of Sufism or of the Bhakti saints like Kabir, Namdev and others, is simply not there in the Gita, either as an idea or as a base for future development. It is much later in the Bhagavat Purana that the different forms of emotional Bhakti are mentioned. In fact, as we also know from the Sutras of Sandilya, the Bhakti system of love or mystic intuition through love did not exist before Sandilya. The Gita sought to introduce nothing radical or heterodox. It tended only to consolidate and bring in one compilation variant (and on points even mutually

opposing) systems like the worship of Bhagvata; the ritualism and caste duties of the Vedic religion, the dualism of Sankhya Yoga and its mode of isolation of Purusa from the activities of the Prakriti; the meditation of Yoga, and the monism and pantheism of the Upanisads. According to Dasgupta, “the great solution of the Gita is the compromise it advances 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 stage of life, i.e. the prescribed stages of four ashrams.”¹⁵ The Gita laid down different paths of Moksha. But they were all old systems. While it gave priority to the path of Jnana and the meditational processes of Yoga, and accepted the ritualistic mysticism of the Vedas, it also approved of the meditational devotion of the Bhagavata system.

Before we deal with further developments in Vaisnavism and indicate the chief Vaisnava schools of Bhakti that arose upto the time of the radical Bhakti of Kabir, it will be useful, briefly, to state the chief features of Vaisnavism as it emerged from the period of the Gita. The biggest contribution of the great Gita is that it gave formal sanction to the path of worship as a means of salvation and admitted women and Sudras to it. But, it was only an alternative path to Moksha. The other paths recognised by the Gita had their own priorities. The ideal, by the very nature of things, was merger or salvation from the empirical world with the object of never returning to it. In life all one had to do was to perform one’s caste duties that had been assigned under the Vedic and orthodox scriptures. Their authority was fully recognized as also of the overall social structure it prescribed. In the due course, the identity between the cult of worship of Narayana and Vasudeva was established. In the Upanisad period Visnu rose to a senior position from being a junior god in the Rig Vedic period. Even in some parts of Mahabharata, the divinity of Vasudeva Krishna had not

been generally accepted. In the course of time, the four streams of Vasudeva (the historic god), Visnu (the Vedic God), Narayana (the cosmic god), and the Upanisad idea of a supreme Soul combined to form one religion. To this was added the fifth stream of Gopala Krishna from the Ahir race. Till about the Christian era, the story of the boyhood of Gokula Krishna was not known. But later on, Gopala Krishna was also identified with Vasudeva Krishna. It has been seen that the Gita, which introduced the idea of God, was not organically connected with the worship of Vasudeva and his forms.

By this time, however, the doctrine of incarnation of Visnu had also been formed. This gave an impetus to the attempt at the integration, with one system, of the various religious systems and modes of worship, even though very divergent in their historical origin creeds or aims. The only thing common among them was the general acceptance of the Vedic scriptures and the status quo in the old social order. In fact, the object of the theory of incarnation was to absorb and assimilate, within the old system, all new religious doctrines and developments, even though heterodox. It is in the post Vedic period that the theory of incarnation of Visnu came to be formed. The idea is that God takes the human form in order to save man. All 'avatars' are supposed to be the different forms of Visnu. The theory is a note-worthy feature of Hinduism. It enables it to absorb other creeds by declaring their gods or prophets as the manifestation of the Supreme the God or Visnu.¹⁶ In the Gita Lord Krishna says that those who worship other gods also worship me, though imperfectly. The number of avataras of Visnu, rose from time to time, including the boar, the man-lion, the dwarf, Rama, swan, tortoise, and Vasudeva-Krishna. In the Bhagvat-Purana this number rose to twenty three. The mythical Kapila, the author of the dualistic Sankhya system without a God, is included as an Avatara, as also the Rsabha, the first Tirthankra of the Jainas; By the eighth century A.D., Buddha is also accepted in the list of Avataras. It appears

that in Vaisnavism or the Bhagavata religion, the purity of the monotheistic doctrine was hardly the concern of any one. Similarly, in the apparently synthetic attempt of the Bhagavad Gita, the elements of the dualistic systems like the Sankhya and Yoga were included both for meditational purposes and for explaining changes in life as the activity of the co-eternal Prakriti. Among the Avataras, authors of the non-theistic systems of Buddhism, Jainism and Sankhya were also included. Evidently, to the authors of Vaisnavism, the only concern was to accept and to show Visnu or Vasudeva as the supreme god. They were unconcerned with the unity or purity of doctrine and theology, or with the modes of worship and the prescribed religious practices. In fact, heterogeneous doctrines and authors of heterodox, non-theistic and dualistic systems were owned. It is important to understand that, as against the equality and unity of man before God almost inherent in any monotheistic system, the grading of the caste system and the social and religious segregation of the Sudras were kept intact duly sanctioned and approved. In addition, Vedic ritualism and the authority of the Vedas were accepted. All this was maintained not only in the earlier Vaisnava systems, but also in the Vashist Advaita of Ramanuj and the later Vaisnavism.

Lord Rama was taken to be an Avatara probably in the early centuries of the Christian era, though there was then no separate cult in his name. It was later, near the 11th Century A.D. that the cult of Lord Rama actually came in existence. Here, too, there are manuals giving the mode of worship of the deity, by means of Mantras, formulae and magic circles, quite like those prescribed in the Satvata-Samhita for the worship of Vasudeva.

Next we come to the period of Sandilya and Bhagavata Purana in the eleventh Century A.D. The Bhakti these two describe is not the worship of or meditation on God as in the Gita. Nor is it a formal singing. It is a deep affection for God. Even His Maya cannot bind man to the world.

According to Vallabha, God invokes love in man. It is a favour bestowed by Him (pusti). In the emotional type of Bhakti, the devotee in heart and soul feels a spiritual intoxication and joy. As in the case of Chaitanya, he ‘sings, laughs, dances and weeps.’ He is no longer a person of the world.¹⁷

It is in the Bhagavata Purana that we first find the idea of devotion as the supreme source of bliss. It becomes the highest goal. So it substitutes the place of wisdom or philosophical knowledge. Bhakti is believed to destroy all the past sins. Thus, Bhakti also becomes a Mantra, a magic. But no moral action is stressed. The Bhakti of Bhagavata Purana is not the old contemplative meditation of God. It is the upsurge of feelings and emotions of love of God.¹⁸ The Bhagavata Purana mentions nine modes of worship. Each of these can lead to Moksha.¹⁹ These include listening to the praise of God, the reading of the sacred books, the repeating of God’s name, remembering him, etc. The repeating of God’s name can bring deliverance. These modes are ritualistic and magical and no moral action is stressed. Idol worship is accepted. Sandilya’s definition of Bhakti not only prescribes it as the only mode of worship, but also distinguishes it from the types of worship prevalent earlier than his period and from Bhakti as indicated in the Gita. These old modes of worship, like the offering of flowers (as mentioned in the Gita), indicate only ‘Sradha’ or faith. Bhakti is a loving affection. It is neither knowledge nor action. Sandilya and his commenmtor, Svapnesvara, attack the Vedanta doctrine that liberation or salvation arises from knowledge of the Soul. “The true method is ‘bhakti’, or devotional faith, directed to the Lord. This is the immediate cause of salvation. Knowledge is an auxiliary to bhakti, and may become useful by washing away the filth of unbelief. But it will not itself abolish the viel which exists between the soul and the Supreme.” “In the highest form it Cbhakti) is affection fixed upon the Lord. It is an affection directed to a person, not mere belief in a system. Affection

is its essence. It is not mere knowledge of God, for it is possible that even those who hate Him may have knowledge of Him. Nor is it knowing the Lord as an object of worship, etc., for these are outward acts, and bhakti is not necessarily present to them. It is simply an affection. It follows knowledge of the greatness and other attributes of the Adorable One, but is not that knowledge. The particular knowledge which it follows is that there is a promise of immortality to him who abides (i.e. has bhakti) in Him. 'Abiding' is something more than mere knowledge. Moreover, affection is unselfish. It is not a wish. It is expressed by the phrase "I love, I have an affection for, and yet I do not wish for", since wish refers only to what one has not obtained, but affection refers equally to what is obtained and what is not obtained."

"Bhakti is not an action (a 'work'). It does not depend, as knowledge does, upon an effort of the will. Hence, as it is not an action, its fruit (beautitude) is endless. Every action, on the other hand, ultimately comes to an end, so that everything gained by works ultimately perishes." "The means are knowledge, concentration, etc. The end is Bhakti. "

"Knowledge is subsidiary to bhakti." "Moreover, knowledge is, not essential, though a means, and an important one. Affection occurs even in the absence of knowledge."

"Bhakti (or faith) is not 'sraddha' (or belief). Belief may be merely subsidiary to ceremonial works, not so faith. Belief is a preliminary subsidiary to faith, but is not faith."²⁰ This is Sandilya's definition of Bhakti.

Even the Bhagavata Purana is aware of the three methods of knowledge, works and devotion, and accepts their validity, as also of the Vedic scriptures and the prescribed social system.²¹ The goal of life and the role of Jiwan-mukta remain, as before, otherworldly.

It is also significant to mention that the Sankhya idea of Prakriti was so much owned by Vaisnavism that later Sita,

as the consort of Lord Rama, who is the inactive soul, has been deemed to be responsible for the entire activity. The same acceptance is also evident from the emergence of the entire world from Shakti, the consort of Siva in Saivism.

Further development of Vaisnavism started in the South, far away from the earlier centres. Dr. Tara Chand feels that this took place under the impact of Islam. But, this issue is not relevant to our purpose since we are mainly concerned with the nature and content of this development. A chain of Alwar saints appeared, extending over a long period. It is claimed that they arose both before and after Sankara. The favourite deity of Kullasekhara, an historically known Alwar saint of the twelfth century, is Lord Rama. and not Lord Krishna. This new growth spread to the north, the east and the west. In the following pages, starting with Ramanuja we shall briefly indicate the systems and the views of all the chief exponents and saints of this new Vaisnava ' Bhakti movement. The radical system of saints like Kabir, Namdev and others, is entirely different and is, thus, outside the scope of this essay.

Ramanuja: Among the Alwars were two classes, the saints, who composed the devotional songs, and the Acharyas, who were the philosophers and teachers of the doctrine. May be, the challenge came from the success of the Advaita of Sankara. This eliminated the need and importance of all devotional worship. He deemed the world to be illusory. For him Brahman alone was real. In the face of it, the basis for the cult of idol and devotional worship was being eroded. Ramanuja therefore, in pursuance of the direction of his guru, took upon himself this task of tracing from the scriptures, the Upanisads and the Brahma Sutras, the justification and basis for this religion of worship prevalent in his time. In his system the world is real and there are three eternal principles of Brahman of God (Oshvara), individual souls and the world (Prakriti). The individual soul and the insensate world are deemed to be the attributes or body of Brahman, just as the soul has a

human body. The three elements are different but the embodied parts, though different, are one. These three parts are inseparable and eternal. Before creation the body of the Supreme Soul is in a subtle form, but with creation it develops. At that time matter and souls are in Him, in an unmanifest form. It is something like a Platonic idea. Later, He has them in His body in a manifest form.²² Thus Brahman or God is both the material and the efficient cause of the world and controls it from within. The entire development is from the mundane egg. The soul and the world are a mode of the Supreme, eternal but dependent on Him. Man is identical with the All-embracing God. The system of changes of Prakriti for the creation of Ahankara, activity, etc., is the same as in Sankhya, except that God is there to guide it. Ishvara has a wonderful celestial body with Lakshmi as His consort. Ishvara appears in five forms: (1) as Narayana or Para-Vasudeva, he lives, adorned with ornaments and gems, in Vaikuntha on a throne surrounded by Sesa (serpent), Garuda and other delivered souls; (2) as his four forms in the world, including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship him; (3) as the ten Avataras, fish, tortoise and others, (4) as present in each being even when one goes to heaven or hell; and (5) as in the idols kept in the houses. Unlike Sankara, Ramanuja takes the ritualism of the

Vedas and the Brahma Vidya of the Upanisada as equally important. Rituals are not for a lower class of people nor do they express a lower truth. He thinks that rituals prescribe the method of worship. These he accepts fully, as also the caste system. The doctrine relating to Brahman shows the nature of God, and both together (rituals and Brahma Vidya) form one doctrine. They are not addressed to different persons as is believed by Sankara. Karma Marga for Ramanuja includes the Vedic rituals, the worship of idols, as given in the Agamas, and the repeating of Mantras.²³

Souls are of three kinds: (1) the bound ones, (2) the delivered ones, and (3) the eternal souls like Garuda. Of the bound ones, some seek wealth and others seek heaven.

They perform all rites, sacrifices and pilgrimages. Some of them are devotees of Bhagavat and some worship other gods and Avataras. Of those who desire deliverance, some seek the consciousness of the pure soul only (Kevalin) and others eternal bliss. Of the latter, some seek God through Bhakti. They first study the Vedic mysticism. and the philosophy of sacrifices and rites. But, this Bhakti is open to the three higher castes only and not to Sadhus. The caste system is maintained intact.

Those who cannot do the Bhakti of the type mentioned above, can resort to 'Prapatti', or surrender to God, after renouncing the world. This system is open to all classes. For the efficacy of Bhakti, 'Karm yoga' and 'Jnana yoga' are essential. The first is the performance of all prescribed acts, rituals, sacrifices, ceremonies, pilgrimages and the worship of idols. Jnana yoga is the gaining of cognitive knowledge of one's being separate from Prakriti and being an Attribute of God. These two preparatory steps lead to Bhakti which consists in meditations, accompanied by the Yoga practices of Yama, Niyama, etc. These methods include: (1) the use of un-polluted and un-prohibited food, (2) chastity, (3) constant practice, (4) performing the rites and sacrifices according to one's means, (5) virtuous acts of truth, compassion, Ahimsa, uprightness, (6) hopefulness and (7) absence of datedness. Bhakti, as done by these seven means, leads to one's seeing God. As against it, 'Prapatti' involves complete self-surrender. In the Padma-Purana seven other modes of worship are also suggested. They are all ritualistic and formal, e.g. (1) the imprinting of marks on the body and the forehead, (2) the repeating of Mantras (3) the drinking of water used for washing the feet of the idol of Hari, (4) the eating of the cooked food offered to the idol, (5) the service of devotees, (6) the observing of fasts on the fixed days of the lunar month, (7) the laying of Tulsi leaves on the idol; etc.

This Bhakti has no ethical bias or emphasis. It is a Bhakti of a formal and emotional nature without the kind of love

that fructifies into a moral life for the service of man. On the basis of the study of Alwar saints, Hooper asserts that there is no necessary connection between Bhakti and character. In this regard, he particularly cites the example of one Alwar saint, Tirumangai.²⁴ Maitra who has discussed the problem of Hindu ethics and the problem of ideal life in all Hindu schools of orthodox philosophy, including that of the Vaishesika, the Purva Mimansa, Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhava and Vallabhacharya, comes to the conclusion that a common feature of all these doctrines of ideal life or Moksha is “the conception of the ideal as a negation, or atleast as a transcendence, of the empirical life proper, and that this state is thus a super-moral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral ideal.” And after achieving the state of Moksha, there is hardly anything to be done. It is a negative and quietist ideal without any activity, except that in the case of Ramanuja’s system one has to do unconditional scriptural works like the daily rituals, bathing in the Ganges on the day of lunar or solar eclipse, etc. As such, in the orthodox Hindu systems, the negative ideal or goal has been accepted. It is a transcendental state of deliverance from all the struggles of life. It is generally and essentially a state of quiescence.²⁵ In all these systems including that of the Vishnu Purana, release from the bondage of the world is sought.

Ramanuja’s Bhakti does not mean boundless love; it only involves Upasanas or meditations. The goal is attainable in this life. The actual goal is achieved after death and the soul then has a direct vision of Truth as its own essence. It is a doctrine of identity. Upto the end one must carry on ritualistic duties and duties of one’s station in life; i.e. the caste duties.²⁶

We have detailed Ramanuja’s system, since it is one of oldest and the most typical of the theistic schools that emerged after the onslaughts of the Vedantic school of Sankara. Like the Bhagavad Gita, its theism, if at all it may be so called, is seemingly synthetic and incorporates

practically all the chief elements of the Sankhya, the Yoga and the Vedic ritualism. The world and souls are the body of Brahman both in their manifest and unmanifest forms. On the metaphysical side, the system is broadly pantheistic, God being the material cause of the world, and Ishvara, the souls and the material world being the constituents of Brahman. In a way, the system is also pluralistic, as souls and Prakriti are eternal. In addition, the socio-religious sanctity of the caste system is accepted. It makes no departure from the earlier socio-religious systems. Rather, a justification is afforded for the continuance of the Brahmanical system for the worship of images. For purposes of Bhakti the world has virtually to be given up and celibacy maintained. Full sanction is given to faith in the Vedic scriptures and the observance of Vedic rites and other prescribed pilgrimages and fasts. The world activity, including all moral life, is virtually a movement of the eternal Prakriti, from the bondage of which release is sought by resort to Yoga and meditational methods. The cultivation of virtues has no social content. As in all the Yogic systems, virtues are practised entirely with a view to preparation and personal discipline for meditation. Virtuous acts, as such, have no social ends or validity. They serve purely as aids to meditation. In the social fields one has to do one's caste duties, and the word 'Karma' includes all Vedic rituals, idol worship, and other ceremonies.

The ideal is the attainment of Narayana, the enjoyment of bliss and deliverance from the world. As indicated already, the system of training is the Karma Yoga, the Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga (meditations). Though the house-holder could follow the path of salvation, the Sanyas Ashram prescribed in the Upanisads leads to speedy salvation. The person who has made the final achievement, is also obliged to perform all the rituals (Karma) like fasting and baths prescribed in the Vedas for a normal being.

Madhva : In Madhva's system the separate existence of God, souls and the material world is assumed. And though

God is the efficient cause of the world, the same is due to the movement of eternal Prakriti which is its material cause. The system is thus dualistic with a plural number of souls. In substance, the Sankhya system is accepted, except for the addition of a Personal God. In the system of Madhava, God is a substance, and the doctrine of incarnation is believed. In his qualities and actions, the Avatara is identical with God. Lakshmi is distinct from God but is dependent upon Him. She is co-extensive or co-eternal with God. Souls are of three kinds: (a) those fit for attaining bliss, (b) those eternally undergoing transmigration, (c) those fit for darkness only. Creation begins when god disturbs the equilibrium of Prakriti. As for the world activity, the Sankhya system is virtually accepted. Moksha can be attained through service but only by a soul fit for it.

There are eighteen methods that help salvation, including (1) Vairgya or renunciation of the world and its pleasures, (2) self control, (3) self-surrender, (4) acquaintance with the lore, (5) attendance on the guru, (6) knowledge got from the guru or a Vaisnava and reflection on it, (7) devotion to God, (8) sympathy for inferiors and love for equals, (9) the performance of Vedic rites without the desire for fruit, (10) the avoidance of prohibited acts or sins, (11) the knowledge of Visnu being the highest, and of the distinctions between God and the world, Prakriti and Purusas, God and individuals, etc., (12) worship or Upasana, the hearing of Sastras, meditation, etc. These steps lead to the direct knowledge of God which is cognitive. The followers of Madhava use special marks, created sometimes even by heated metal, leaving permanent scars on the body.

In this system God cannot be exhaustively known even by revelation. He is apprehensible by the mind but is not fully comprehensible. The presence of the last two classes of souls, that are not redeemable and are doomed to misery and darkness, is something extremely incongruous in a theistic system. For it virtually limits the scope of human freedom and divine grace.²⁷ As no progress is envisaged for

these souls, the system is rather deterministic. The distinction of one soul from the other remains even after Moksha. The ideal is the attainment of bliss. For release, the knowledge of God is more essential than self-knowledge. Both are obtained through the study of the scriptures. For the knowledge of God, meditation and reflection under a guru are necessary. The realisation of God's greatness and goodness is the means to salvation. Like Ramanuja, Madhava rejects the ideal of Jivan-mukta, and feels that scriptural duties and those of one's station in life should be done throughout life.²⁸ As in the case of Sankara, performance of any worldly duties or moral acts by the spiritually enlightened person is unnecessary. In short, here too the ideal of salvation is other-worldly. One has no socio-political role. The caste and ritual duties are accepted and the ritual system is adhered to till the end of one's life. Madhava and Ramanuja, in a way, reject the idea of Jivanmukta. For, they feel that complete knowledge and bliss are realized more after death than in life.²⁹ The goal is achieved by doing scriptural duties, the study of scriptures and meditation.

Nimbarka: Nimbarka's system is monistic and also, in a way pluralistic. He feels that the world, souls and God are both distinct and identical (Bheda-Abheda). The first two have no independent existence, but are dependent on God. His recommendations for the modes of Bhakti are practically the same as of Ramanuja. He believes that Brahman had in it the rudiments of the world. By manifestation Brahman becomes the material cause of the world. The souls are numberless. Soul's knowledge depends on God. But, by Contact. with Maya or Prakriti, its form is distorted. Prakriti is eternal. The nature of soul can be known by the grace Incarnation, the caste system and Sankhya are accepted. The approach is other worldly. The object is for the soul to know, by dissociation from Prakriti and by the grace of God its Own nature. The worship recommended is that of Radha-Krishna. This worship is more devotional than that in the

case of Ramanuja, but the other worldly approach remains. Since the individual soul is distorted by its contact with Prakriti, naturally the mystic way is that of ascetic withdrawal from life.

Ramananda : All systems prior to Ramananda, including that of Sankara, excluded the Sudras from their fold. They had to do the duties prescribed for their low castes and rise in status so as to be born as Brahmins. Then alone they could tread the path of the Vaisnava Bhakti. Ramananda's reform extended to the effect that lower castes, if admitted to the Vaisnava fold and if devotees of Visnu, could dine with the other disciples. For the rest, the system is the same as of Ramanuja and his deity was Rama with Sita as his consort.

Tulsidas: Though a disciple of Ramananda, Tulsidas's philosophy leans towards spiritual monism. Like other saints of Vaisnavism, he accepts the rigidity of the caste system, even though his guru Ramananda had to an extent relaxed it for admitted Vaisnavas. He is conservative and otherworldly. In his system there is no emphasis on socio-moral conduct. God's grace is the main instrument to bring about Moksha and the destruction of all sins.

Vallabha: In Vallabha's system the devotee can continue to be a householder. God has Himself become the world and the individual souls, because the Supreme Soul was not happy while all alone. He decided to become many. In all these cases the world view is pantheistic. The world is real, but salvation is only through Bhakti. Though one need not give up the householder's life, the method of worship is entirely ritualistic and ceremonial. Apart from the devotion of singing and praising God, the conductor of worship should rise early, drink the washings of the feet of the idol, utter the names of Govardhana and others, remember the river Yamuna, etc. Similarly, at other times of the day, there should be image worship and the feeding of the deity, accompanied by other ceremonies, like Arti,

the ringing of bells, the blowing of the conch shell, bathing, dressing and the feeding of the idol.

There are no public temples, but each guru, who is a householder, maintains a private temple at his own house. At eight fixed intervals during the day the devotee should visit the temple of the guru. The best stage of salvation is that of joining the sport of Krishna and Radha in the highest place of heaven, called Goloka. Vallabha's system is not known for any new ideas except that he has excessively ritualised Bhakti and made it open to householders. Bhandarkar believes that Vallabha's devotion appears more dramatic than real. Ultimately, such forms of Vaisnavism gained unsavoury reputation, especially the systems where Krishna and his consort were worshipped.

Chaitanya: Born in Bengal, Chaitanya was a devotee of Radha and Krishna. He developed the emotional side of the Bhakti of Krishna and his consort. He composed songs, did fervent singing and ecstatic dancing. This was his method of approach to God. His disciples included persons of all castes and even Muslims. For him the deeply emotional singing of the praises of God (Radha-Krishna) was the only method of Bhakti and salvation. While singing, the devotees would laugh, weep, jump and embrace each other in a state of emotional outburst. Chaitanya became an ascetic and a Sanyasi. His loud singing became so charged with feeling that he even swooned under the intensity of his emotion. For Chaitanya, Krishna is the highest god who is so beautiful that he excites love in the hearts of all. The Vedantic theory of Chaitanya is that of Nimbarka, or of identity with a difference between the soul and God (Bheda-Abheda). God Krishna, can be approached by love alone. When, through continuous love, the soul becomes one with God, it becomes unconscious of its individual existence, and becomes as it were, absorbed in Him. In spirit the soul is one with God. God appears in finite spirits. Thus, the soul is identical with God. The goal of life is the bliss of union in which the soul loses its consciousness. But actually they

remain distinct. Most of 'Advaitas', followers of Chaitanya, observe caste distinctions'; but those who are recluses or Bairagis do not do so. The teachers of this system are all celibates. The type of Bhakti the Bhagavat Purana preaches, is illustrated by the life of Chaitanya. Chaitanya mentions different kinds of love; (a) love with awe and reverence for his greatness, it is the peaceful, calm and tender love (Shanta); (b) love with the submission of the heart like that of a servant's (Dasya) for his master; (c) the love of God as a friend (Sakhya); and (d) the deepest love as of the wife for her husband (Madhura). The last kind is the sweetest and the deepest as for a beloved. Love is God's very nature. He loves man.³⁰

The Brahmanical Indians cherish four values, Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The final goal is Moksha. The other three are the lower ideals. Of course, Dharma is a preparatory ideal and it means nothing beyond doing the duties of the station of one's life or caste duties. Since the Upanisads, Moksha has been the final ideal. At the time of the Upanisads the concept of Jivan-mukta emerged. It was felt that the evil of Samsara carries with it the seeds of destruction. In any case, this ideal of renunciation, leading to Moksha or liberation, ultimately came to be the accepted ideal. Though Jivan-mukta was also assumed, he too in that state completely cuts himself off from all worldly life. This is the view according to Yajnavalkya and Sankara. In the other group of Ramanuja and Madhava, the scriptural and ritualistic duties have to be carried out by everyone to the end of one's days. The highest bliss and union are reached only after death. Bhakti being only an alternative method of Moksha, it has been felt that Bhakti Marga, or the devotional method of Moksha, is only for those for whom the idea of a Personal God has a special appeal. We have had brief picture of various Vaisnava developments and different schools of its thought. Let us indicate briefly the chief features of this mystic system.

(1) The overall world view is either pantheistic or dualistic, where the co-eternal Prakriti is assumed. In the former case the world and souls are the body or qualities of Brahman. Brahman is both the material and the efficient cause of the world. In the latter case, it is virtually the Sankhya-Yoga system with the addition of Ishvara as a God of Attributes. Generally speaking, the soul forms a part of Brahman. Even if the ideas of worship between man and God, and the creature and the Creator, are mentioned, there is basic identity between the soul and Brahman, the former being a part of the latter. In theism the world is the creation of God. It is different from God, nor is the world co-eternal with Him. Hence, whatever name one may give to the Vaisnava system, it is not theistic in the normal sense of the word.

(2) There is belief in the Vedas and their ritualistic mysticism. The social order and other practices enjoined by them, are accepted. While each sect puts its own interpretation on the Vedas, including the Upanisads, there is implicit faith in their scriptural sanctity and all that they stand for.

(3) The caste system and its social prohibitions are strictly adhered to. Ramanand was the only person who made some marginal relaxation but that too was only in regard to those who had been admitted to his Vaisnava faith as the disciples of Visnu. Socially the caste system was accepted.

(4) The world is deemed to be real. But, in view of the Sankhya- Yoga background and the ideal of Moksha or liberation from Samsara, the entire approach and the attitude are other worldly.

(5) The goal is of Moksha. It means the return of the soul for merger in Brahman, or to its original state of purity, bliss and union with God, without involvement in the world

of man. The aim is not the service of God or man, nor is it the carrying out of His will in the world. None of these matters receives any priority, the ideal being that of salvation (Moksha) from the tangles of the world.

(6) As such, there is no stress on the moral life except for purposes of personal purity and aid to meditation.

(7) In some cases the final achievement is made after death. In life, the Jiwan-mukta has no social role to play, except that he is still obliged to follow all the prescribed ritualistic duties.

(8) The theory of Avatara is accepted and idol worship is practised.

(9) During the earlier period of Vaisnavism, the path of worship was only an alternative way of deliverance from the world. This path was not even the first in the order of priority. Later, when it was recognised as the chief mode of salvation, the worship contemplated was only meditational, formal or ritualistic. In the case of Chaitanya the worship became extremely emotional in character.

The above in brief are the history and content of the Vaisnava system. It has four fundamentals. Its basic scriptures are the Vedas and the Upanisads which are also the foundations of the extreme ritualism of the original Vedic system (Purva Mimamsa). The monism of Sankara, downgrading the world as illusory, and the otherworldly meditational mysticism of the Upanisads were virtually maintained in so far as social activity in the world never had any value or validity. For the first time the Gita included the heterodox Bhagvatism in the Hindu fold and linked its system of worship to the scriptural authority of the Vedas. Another result was that the Vedic Caste system was wholly accepted by this system of Bhakti and became the second fundamental of Vaisnavism to which it adhered completely. Ramanand's modifications in the dietary regulations were made only as a personal reaction to his own conduct having been subjected to severe criticism by his colleagues and Guru for his having violated some caste rules. This slight

change in the rules about eating, only involved a virtual post-facto justification of his own conduct, without in the least affecting the basis or the rigidity of the caste system. This is also clear from the fact that Tulsidas, the chief disciple of Ramanand strictly believed in the sanctity and the rigid observance of the caste system. The theory of Avatarhood, the third fundamental of Vaisnavism, was as we have seen, only an omniverous method of absorbing all kinds of divergent and heterodox system in the Hindu fold. The ritualism of the Vedic religion became its fourth fundamental. In fact, Bhakti itself was completely formalised and ritualised. The methods of worship almost became a system of Mantras. This devotion towards the deity never turned towards love of one's fellow beings. In fact, the fundamental acceptance of the inequity of the Caste system and the formalism of Bhakti stood as a complete bar to any transformation of the love of God into the service or love of man and suffering humanity. That is also the reason that good conduct never involved any act of social morality or any activity to solve the difficulties and problems of man or his social life. Moral life, at best, meant only a sense of ritualistic or formal piety without the least reaction to any social evil, injustice or cruelty much less to any political oppression or tyranny. Accordingly, as was observed by Hooper, Vaisnava Bhakti never involved any change in the socio-moral approach, character or values of the devotee.

SIKHISM

DALJEET SINGH

In Sikhism, we shall base our views on the hymns of the Gurus embodied in the Guru Granth, the most revered and authenticated scripture in the world, since it was compiled and edited by the Guru himself.

In order to have a comprehensive understanding of Sikhism, we shall, apart from answering the various questions we have posed earlier, deal with all aspects of its world-view and its theological concepts, including those about Reality, the place and role of man in the universe, ethics and the moral life, and the human goal. The Sikh Gurus are uncompromising monotheists. In the very opening line of the Guru Granth, God is described by Guru Nanak as “By the Grace of the Sole One, Self-existent and Immanent, the Creator Person, without Fear or Unconditioned, Without enmity or Un-contradicted. The Timeless One, Un-incarnated, Self-created and Enlightener.”¹ God is never born, nor changes. The becoming world is His creation, and not his emanation, nor is it identical with Him.

1. *THE CONCEPT OF GOD*

We shall first indicate, briefly, the kind of God that is envisaged in Sikhism. That would clarify not only the metaphysical position, but also some of its theological concepts and other issues. In their hymns, the Gurus describe God in numerous ways, referring to His social, political, aesthetic, metaphysical, ethical and other attributes. But six aspects of God need particular mention. These will

explain the concept of God in Sikhism and enable us to understand the significance, origin and course of Sikh traditions, institutions and practices.

(i) Creator

God is the Creator. The universe is His creation. The very concept of a Creator-God implies a universe as the creation of God and different from Him. The universe is in time and space. It is changing and becoming. The Creator is different from the creation which is limited and conditioned. He is not the material cause of the universe. But, no independent Prakriti is assumed. He creates everything.

The universe is not illusory or unreal. But, as God is Limitless and Omnipresent, the creation is in God but not God. "God created the world of life, planted Naam (Immanent God) therein and made it the place of righteousness."²² "The Self-Existent God manifested Himself as Naam."²³ "He creates all, fills all, and is yet separate."²⁴ There are many hymns in the Guru Granth which mention that God was there even before He created the Universe. He being Transcendent, "He is the Sole-creator. There is no second one."²⁵ "God was by Himself and there was nothing else."²⁶

"In the region of Truth, God creates perpetually, watches His creation with a Benevolent eye."²⁷ "He is happy about it, and deliberates over it, directing it with His Will."²⁷ God is Ever-Creative, Ever-New, Ever-Fresh, and Blooming (Nit--Navan, Navtan).

The above gives a clear idea of the creative activity of God and the cosmological aspect of His creation.

(ii) Transcendent and Immanent

God is both Transcendent and Immanent. He is both in the universe and outside it. The Self-Created or Transcendent God was always there.

(a) *Transcendent*: While time and space, force and change are the aspects of the becoming universe, God is Eternal, Self-existent. He cannot be conceived or explained in empirical terms. His Limitlessness and Timelessness cannot be understood in terms of space and temporal time. He is beyond space and beyond time. The Gurus have cautioned us against the pitfalls and inadequacy of human logic to comprehend the Timeless One. He is Entirely Different. “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.”⁸ That state of God is not to be envisaged in terms of limitless space or time, but in terms of spacelessness and timelessness. The nature of God transcends all known categories with which we describe the universe. The Creator of these limited or relative categories cannot be judged by the yard-stick of those created limitations within which we move, perceive, conceive, live and assess. The Gurus describe Him as Wondrous, Infinite, Unfathomable, Unknowable, Indescribable, Ineffable and Immeasurable. We can at best assess things only by our limited and relative thought methods and measures. We cannot completely comprehend God who is beyond us, unconditioned and unfettered by any dimensions and limits. He is ‘Wholly Other’ as described by Otto. “The mind alone can never know Him.”⁹

(b) *Immanent*: The immanent aspect of God has been variously described as His Will that directs the universe, His Word that informs the universe, and His Naam that not only creates the entire universe but sustains and governs it. “God creates the universe, takes His abode in it and sustains it.”¹⁰ God creates the universe and becomes Immanent in it, being at the same time Transcendent. “He that permeates all hearts is Transcendent too.”¹¹ “Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and is separate too.”¹² God is

both Transcendent and Immanent. This immanence of God is only a symbolic way of expressing God's connection with the world. When the world was not there the question of His Immanence did not arise. When "there was no form, the Word (Immanence) in essence abided in the Transcendent God."¹³

The Immanence of God emphasises the spiritual and meaningful character of the universe and life's capacity for relationship with God. The term Transcendent describes Him as "Wholly Other". His immanence indicates God's Love for His creation. It is called His Naam, Will and Sabad. His immanence gives relevance, authenticity, direction and sanction to the entire moral and spiritual life of man and his institutions. It also emphasises God's capacity for revelation, His nearness to man and His deep and abiding interest in the world. It is on this Immanence that most of the theistic institutions are based. For, where God is only Transcendent and Unapproachable, all moral and spiritual life, and yearning would become pointless and irrelevant. God being both Transcendent and Immanent, does not mean that there are two parts, stages, or phases of God. It is the Transcendent God who is everywhere in each heart, place and particle. It is He who is both Transcendent and Immanent. "The same God is Sargun and Nirgun, Nirankar and Self Absorbed (Sun Samadhi)."¹⁴ "Sargun and Nirgun are created by Naam."¹⁵ He is both Nirankar (Formless) and Akar (In Form); He is the One, both Nirgun and Sargun." The Gurus repeatedly emphasis that He is One and we only give Him different names. It would be highly inappropriate to confuse the Gurus' concept of Sargun and Nirgun (One Transcendent cum Immanent God) with the Advaitic meaning of these terms or with the idea of Ishvara. These Advaitic concepts have distinct connotation of phases, stages or transformation. These have been clearly repudiated by the Gurus' concept of One God. Sankara deems Ishvara to be a lower stage of development which has to be transcended in order to reach the goal or Brahman. For Ramanuja God is virtually pantheistic. The world and souls

are the body and qualities of Brahman. This is an entirely different concept from that of the One Creator God of the Gurus.. He is simultaneously Transcendent and Immanent. The Gurus never accept the Advaitic concepts of Sargun and Nirgun. Similarly, in the hymn of Sach khand, the Guru calls the Nirankar as One who deliberates, creates and directs. He is Benevolent, Gracious and is delighted to see His creation. But Nirankar literally means the “Formless One”. *This* word too has distinct Advaitic meanings. The hymn referred to above repudiates that concept and adds that, in the Sach khand, God commands endless numbers of forms, universes and regions.

(iii) God of Attributes

God is the ‘Ocean of Attributes, Values and Virtues.’ This aspect of God is of extreme relevance to the moral life. Since all attributes are only relative, a God of Attributes lays down the standard and the ideals for which man has to work. He is always Benevolent.” “You are my Mother, You are my Father, You are my Protector everywhere.”¹⁶ “He relieves the suffering of the downtrodden; He is the Succour of the succourless.”¹⁷ “God is eyes to the blind, riches to the poor, Nanak, He is the Ocean of virtues.”¹⁸

This Attributive aspect (Immanence) inextricably links God with the universe. It establishes beyond doubt the character and direction of God’s Will and Immanence. This leads to four important inferences. First, attributes and values can have a place only in a becoming, relative or spacio-temporal world, since all perfection is state of all qualities are relative. A God of attributes has, thus, a meaning only in relation to the changing world of man. Evidently, for the expression of attributes, a changing universe is essential and becomes an integral part of the plan of God. Thus, God and the universe are conjoint and inter-linked, the latter depending on the former. It is impossible to think of a God of Attributes in the absence of a relative or changing world. That is why when God was by Himself, the question of ‘Love

and devotion, of good or bad actions, or of the saved or Saviour' could not arise, there being nothing other than Him. Secondly, and this is the most important inference, virtues and attributes emphatically indicate, apart from the standard of ethical values and moral life, the direction in which human efforts should be made. These point out the purposes for which the Will of God works. Thirdly, it indicates the perpetual interest of God in man and the universe. It, in a way, gives status and authenticity to life and the universe which is decried or down-graded in many other religious traditions. In addition, there is the benevolent character of God. Not only is He the Creator and Sustainer of life, He nurtures and develops it with a loving care. He has also been called the Enlightener (Guru or Guide) of man. "He rewards your efforts and acknowledges your deeds", "Life of life."¹⁹ "God rewards all efforts to become divine."²⁰ It gives a preeminent meaning to life and optimism, hope and confidence to man in the achievement of his ideals. Man knows the direction in which he should move, and he has also the assurance that there is some one to guide and help him with love. Lastly, it gives validity and spiritual sanctity to the moral life which in many other systems is deemed to be an entanglement. At best, some systems accept it as the preparatory method of purity for the spiritual life to be attained. But, in Sikh theology this attributive aspect of God gives spiritual character to the moral life *per se*.

(iv) God has a Will

Everything is governed by His Will. This is the burden of so many hymns in the Guru Granth. "Everything happens within the ambit of His Will."²¹ A God of Will, naturally, pre-supposes that He wants the universe to move not chaotically but with a Purpose. Just like the Attributes of God, God's Will too can be exercised only in a changing world and towards a goal. The very idea of a Will implies a direction and an aim. This, too, re-emphasises the same features and

points as stated in regard to a God of Attributes. The direction is governed by the Attributes of God and the Purpose, as we shall see later, is to evolve a God-centred man from a self-centred individual. This concept is central to Sikh theology. Here we add a word of explanation. A God of Will does not at all mean a deterministic world, because God is creative and all movement in life is towards a creative freedom.

(v) God does not incarnate

God has been mentioned as one who never takes birth nor takes form. The fifth Guru says, “May that mouth bum which says that God has incarnated.”²² “God alone is the One who is not born of a woman.”²³ The Gurus have definitely decried belief in the theory of incarnation. In order to dispel such ideas they have stated that He created countless Brahmas, Sivas and Vishnus. “The Formless, One, alone, Nanak, is without fear; many are Ramas as the dust of His feet, and many Krishnas. Many are their stories and many are the Vedas.”²⁴ Here, too, the idea that God never takes the human form has a distinct meaning and import. First, it shows that God is Wholly Other. For a God that is Transcendent and Unknowable, the question of His taking the human form does not arise. Secondly, all pantheistic and like implications, as flowing from the idea of a God who takes the human form, have to be discarded. Besides, the concept has three other corollaries too. The first is that man can never become God. This also involves that God and man are not identical but are different. Secondly, it indicates that the aim of spiritual effort is not merger in God, as under some other systems, but to have a union or relation with Him. This has a crucial significance in determining the human goal and in showing that the entity of man is distinct from that of God. The two can never be one, though man can b~ in tune with Him. Thirdly, it inter alia shows that spiritual activity does not stop after the final achievement. The superman has a role to perform in carrying out the

Will of God. Consequently, so long as the universe is there and the Will of God is in operation, the activities and duties of the super-man too do not come to an end.

(vi) God of Grace

In the Moolmantra, God is called Gracious and Enlightener. A God of Will and a God of Grace have a meaning only in a becoming world wherein alone His Grace and Will can operate. Grace implies that God's Will is Free, undermined by any outside law. In addition, it also stresses the Love and Benevolence of God towards man and the universe which are different from Him. For a Gracious Being can bestow His Grace only on something other than Himself. It has been repeatedly stressed that all final approval of man is an act of God's Grace. "O Nanak, the intellect is of no avail, one is approved only by His Grace."²⁵ The grace aspect of God also fortifies the truth of the other implications as described earlier in relation to a God of Will and Attributes. In addition, it implies that God is Wholly Free and Creative. He is not governed by the empirical laws known to us. It also dispels the idea that the world is deterministic. His activity is, therefore, incomprehensible except in terms of His Grace or Freedom.

(vii) Naam

For any student of Sikh theology, it is necessary to understand the meaning and implication of the term 'Naam'. Sikhism has often been called the Naam Marga or the way of Naam. The Sikh Gurus have given the word Naam, a distinct and significant meaning which is far different from that of the mere 'Naam' or psychic factors as understood by 'Naam-Roopa' in the traditional literature. A clear doctrine about Naam has been laid down.

"Naam sustains all regions and universes, all thought knowledge and consciousness, all skies and stars, all forces and substances, all continents and spheres. He,

on whom is His Grace, is yoked to Naam and he reaches the highest state of development.”²⁶ “Naam is the Creator of everything. To be divorced from Naam is death.”²⁷ “Naam gives form to everything and through Naam comes all Wisdom or Light.” “Naam extends to all creation. There is no place or space where Naam is not.”²⁸ “Naam is the ‘Nine Treasures’ and Nectar (Amrit); It permeates the body.”²⁹ “Naam, the immaculate, is unfathomable, how can it be known? Naam is within us, how to get to it ? The perfect Guru awakens your heart to the vision of Naam. It is by the Grace of God that one meets such an enlightener.”³⁰

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 they refer to it as the Highest Power, creating, informing, supporting and working the entire universe. In short, Naam is the Reality, supporting and directing the created worlds. There are numerous verses in the Guru Granth where Naam and God have been described synonymously. The highest state of man is mentioned as the one when he lives and works in tune with God or Naam, often called as God’s Naam. Therefore, God and Naam are Real, Eternal and Unfathomable. The Gurus have repeatedly emphasized that God is one “Ek- Oankaar”, and no second entity at all is postulated. “My Lord is the only One. He is the Only One, (Understand) brother, He is the Only One.”³¹ This unambiguously brings out that God and Naam are one and the same. Naam may be called the immanent or qualitative aspect of God. Accordingly, Naam is the Creative and Dynamic Immanence of God, the Reality sustaining, working and directing the manifest world of force and form.

2. *THE WORLD*

Sikhism proclaims 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.” “God created the world and permeated it with His Light.” 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. His Immanence in this world guarantees its being a place of righteous activity. “True are thy worlds and thy universes; true are the forms Thou createst. True are thy deeds.”²³² “True is He, True is His Creation.”²³³

The world being real, creative work and virtuous deeds are of fundamental importance. “The Guru contemplates God by word, thought and deed.”²³⁴ “Earth is the true abode of righteousness.”²³⁵ “Youth and continence are true deeds, not fasting and rituals.”²³⁶ “Good, righteousness, virtue and the giving up vice are the ways to realize the essence of God.”²³⁷

The above excerpts affirm unambiguously the reality and significance of human life. Practices involving direct or indirect rejection or despising of life have been denounced. There is a hymn in the Guru Granth by Farid which would seem to suggest that the world is not real or is a place of suffering. While recording it in the Guru Granth, the fifth Guru has introduced, along with it, another hymn of his own, which is a clarification to dispel the contrary impression. He writes, “Beauteous, O Farid, are the gardens of earth and the human body.”²³⁸ The Guru further states that “deride not the world as it is the creation of God.”²³⁹

This emphatic assertion about the authenticity of the world is a clear departure from the Indian religious tradition. The Gurus were extremely conscious of this fundamental change they were making. That is why both in their lives and in their hymns, they have been laying stress on this aspect of their spiritual thesis, lest they should be misunderstood on this basic issue. Living in this world is not a bondage for them but a rare opportunity. Not only is God benevolently developing and guiding 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.”⁴⁰ The persistent interest of God in the creative movement is also obvious from the fact that the Gurus call Him Protector, Father, King-Emperor and a Just Administrator.

While discussing the concept of God of Attributes, Will and Grace, we have indicated its far-reaching implications about the reality of the world and the spiritual primacy of moral life therein. These aspects of God intimately connect Him with the world which is their only field of operation. For all these reasons, the Gurus call the world real. Consequently, their message and mission also relate to this world, wherein alone their mission could be fulfilled. No feeling or prayer has been expressed with greater depth and intensity than the one for the ‘gift of Naam.’ 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 God or Naam and ask for its gift or link with it, and, yet, decline to toe the line of God, viz, of nurturing and advancing the processes of creativity and construction in the world instead of being a recluse or a drop out? It is for this reason that the Gurus have strongly condemned all ascetic and escapist practices. “One reaches not Truth by remaining motionless like trees and stones, nor by being sawn alive.”⁴¹

In India, the ideal of four Ashramas has been a scripturally recognised spiritual way of life. Of these, the last two, namely, the Vanprastha and the Sanyasa Ashramas distinctly enjoin an otherworldly approach to life. The householder’s duties were not believed to be conducive to higher spiritual attainments. That is why, one had to renounce worldly activities and take to the life of the hermit and Sanyasin. As against it, all the Sikh Gurus, excepting the eighth Guru, who passed away at an early age, were married householders. Till the last days of their lives, they worked creatively and carried out their mission in the social

and political fields. Seen in the context of Indian tradition, the ideals and institutions of Sikhism are entirely different. For the Gurus the world is a place of beauty. Men's struggle therein provides an opportunity for their progress. Hence the arena of man's and mystic's work has to be in life and life alone. It is only the challenges of life that enable man to show and test his moral and spiritual strength and stature. It is this conduct that forms the basis of his assessment. Here it would be pertinent to recall the Guru's dictum that "God is not attained by despising the world."⁴²

3. *THE DOCTRINE OF HAUMEN*

Having explained their ideas about God and the reality of world and life, the Gurus proceed to describe, (a) the existing state of man and the causes of his pains and problems, (b) the right path for his spiritual progress and the solution of his difficulties, and (c) the goal of man and the characteristics of the ideal life.

The word Man-mukh (self-centred person) indicates the normal state of man in which his self-will and animal propensities dominate, and Gurmllkh (God-centred one or supermen) describes the ideal man or the highest level of mystic achievement and consciousness. The progress from Man-mukh to Gur-mukh, or from a self-centred person to a God-centred one, constitutes the entire spiritual story. The Gurus feel that, at the present level, man's main limitations and problems arise from his Haumen. No understanding of the Guru's system is possible without knowing fully the significance and implications of the doctrine of Haumen, which is fundamental to its structure.

1. *Haumen*

Haumen cannot be adequately translated. The word ego would be the nearest to its meaning. Haumen is the conscious subject, the "I" of the normal Individual psyche. It is the director of all one's organs, including the nervous

system. The word Ahankara is different, for it represents a concept in a dualistic system like the Sankhya in which Ahankara is the transformation of the eternal Prakriti. The Gurus assume no such Prakriti. For them Haumen is the self-centred human individuality. It is the self, the ego, the 'stream of consciousness' or the centre of control of all, working in any being or unit of life.

2. *Haumen God-created*

The Gurus say that "the world came into being by individuation."⁴³ Evidently, for the growth of life, this creation of an individual self or Haumen in every being was essential. There could be no animal life without there being in each organism a centre of consciousness or autonomy. It is this Haumen which has enabled the evolution of life from the smallest being to the extremely complicated biological structure of man. It is impossible to conceive of a being without the centre of its functioning and control.

Every man is equipped with many kinds of organs and faculties. These faculties, including his thoughts, are subservient to his individuality, self or ego. Throughout the evolution of life over millions of years, this ego has been the instrument and guardian of his security, welfare and progress. Without a deep commitment to the interests, preservation and progress of the self, to the exclusion of every other being or self, life could never survive the battle against challenges from the entire environment. This ego has been the best guarantee for securing both the survival and the progress of life from amoeba to man.

3. *The Problem of Haumen*

What has been the surest means of life's survival and progress has now, according to the Gurus, become "the great disease" of man.⁴⁴ The struggle against the elements and other-species having been considerably won, man finds himself quite unequipped and helpless before the other

intra-species struggle between man and man. The Gurus repeatedly emphasise that this Haumen, is the greatest problem of man. Just as it is impossible for one's stomach or liver to digest food for another person, in the same way it is impossible for one's thought-system to be anything but self-centred, the same being subservient to the individual self. It is this organic condition of man that the Gurus call Haumen or self-centredness.

True, certain altruistic tendencies have been developed as the result of cultural conditioning over the years. But, this altruism is only superficial or conditioned. Spontaneous altruism is constitutionally and psychologically impossible in the animal-man. The moment the struggle for existence becomes keen, the basic self-centredness of man is unmasked. Honesty is the best policy so long as it works to one's well being, otherwise the fangs of self-centredness become bared in their naked ugliness. This is the spectacle we witness everyday in the behaviour of individuals, groups, classes, societies and nations. According to the Gurus' concept of God, He is the Father and all persons are his children. "He belongs to all and all belong to Him." "There is one Father and we are His Children." "Let all be called high, to me no one appears low. One potter has fashioned all vessels and one light pervades the whole universe."⁴⁵ The way to God, according to the Gurus, is to realise and accept this idea of the brotherhood of man and express it truthfully in our conduct. "One cannot be a Yogi by mere wishing. The real Yoga lies in treating alike all beings." But, Haumen or self-centredness is the chief hurdle in the way of man's progress. "God is within us, but is not known because of the curtain of Haumen (ego) in between." "Husband (God) and wife (soul) live side by side, but the impregnable wall of Haumen (ego) separates them." It is Haumen which plagues man's conduct and life. It is the irony of human culture that some of the antisocial and anti-human institutions like those of slavery and property, class and national divisions, caste and pollution, inequality

of status and sexes, political dominance and territorial aggrandisement have been created because of the vices arising from Haumen.

4. SOLUTION

Having diagnosed the disease and its cause, the Sikh Gurus feel confident that the hurdle of Haumen can be overcome. In fact, the entire message of the Sikh Gurus is meant to solve this problem. There is a crusade to enable man to rise above his present level and remove the hurdles and solve the problems that face him.

1. *The Way out*

Here the Gurus explain their system and suggest the solution. It is this solution which is the basis of their religious system, and institutions.

God or Naam is the ocean of values. The remedy, according to the Gurus, is that we should be guided by God-consciousness and not by self-centredness. Such a God-centred person is called a Gurmukh. "God created individuation but by forgetting Naam we come to grief." "Naam and Haumen are opposed to each other. The two cannot be at the same place."⁴⁶ It is a verse of the highest significance, meaning and implications. Let us amplify it.

The Gurus accept life in toto. They call it as the only opportunity for man to play his destined role. In most other religious systems, spiritual mystic living and worldly life are considered as opposed to each other. This is the lesson derived from the system of four Ashramas. In Buddhism, too, Nirvana and Samsara are opposed to each other. It is not so in Sikhism. Here only egoism, not the worldly life as such, is opposed to the spiritual life. The way to God is through life, not through its renunciation.

The second corollary of the idea is that self-centredness must be substituted by God-centredness. In the Guru Granth two types of human beings have been mentioned, the Man-

nrukh and the Gurmukh. The man who is self-centred is far from God. “Haumen (ego) is a deep malady. The remedy is to attune one to Naam by God’s Grace.” “With fear of God in mind one loses egoism.” “Drive out lust and anger, be the servant of all and see the Lord in all hearts.” “Spontaneous service of others characterises the God-centred person.”²⁴⁷

The third corollary is that far from giving up worldly life, the same is essential for the mystic, seeker and the God-centred person. The very word God-centred assumes activity on the part of the person. Since God is creative, the God-centred too has to be creative. Only self-centredness is substituted by God-consciousness. In fact, life and its activities alone reveal the distinction between a self-centred man and a God-centred one. Hence, “he who destroys evil becomes a perfect man.” “Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of Naam to sprout.” “Our deeds alone bear witness unto our life.”²⁴⁸

These hymns indicate that the way to higher achievement lies in being altruistic or moral instead of being self-centred. Except for some conditioned or calculated altruism, a self-centred person cannot be spontaneously altruistic. The solution really consists in transferring the control of the mind from Haumen to Naam, the Dynamic and Attributive Immanence of God. God-consciousness involves neither inactivity nor withdrawal from life, but wholehearted and spontaneous altruistic deeds. Just as Haumen and Naam are opposed to each other, in the same manner God-centredness and inactivity are a contradiction in terms.

2. *Link with God possible*

The Gurus assert the presence of a Higher Power or God in man and that it is possible for man to become conscious of Him, and to develop a relationship, or a new state of consciousness. The Gurus stress that God pervades all hearts and one can attune oneself to Him. While we are in the normal ego-state we are unconscious of this Immanence of

God in us. “Where there is egoism, God is not; where there is God, there cannot be any egoism.” “God unites seeker with Himself.” “God pervades the heart and one gives up ego and evil” “By His Grace God comes in body and mind.”⁷⁴⁹ It means that the entire psyche of such a person is guided by God-consciousness. “By Naam is the mind illumined.”⁷⁵⁰

These hymns emphasise that the way to solve our problems and difficulties is to establish a relation with God. This presence of God in us has variously been described as Naam, Guru, Word, Light and Will.

3. *The final cure of Haumen*

True, it is only virtuous and altruistic deeds that lead one away from the life of Haumen and towards the path of Naam or God-centredness. But, ultimately it is only God’s Grace that unites one with Naam. By this union a new and higher centre of consciousness is gained, called God-consciousness. “With God’s Grace is the ultimate insignia of approval conferred on man.”⁷⁵¹ While one has to work altruistically to seek Grace, the same by its very nature cannot be earned. The very idea of effort for achievement raises a sense of pride. And pride becomes suicidal and self-defeating from the point of view of receiving Grace. Besides, the idea of merit, if seen from the logical angle, is somewhat deterministic. It is contrary to the very concept of God-consciousness which involves creativity and freedom. One can never achieve the final stage of creative freedom by deterministic methods. The achievement of God-centredness has, by its very nature, to be an act of the grace of the wholly free and Creative Being. God alone is the final judge of human progress. But, this should not suggest any idea of arbitrariness and fatalism. It only invokes man to be progressively moral, responsible, creative and free. For Grace itself is an aspect of the Creative and the Free.

4. *The mission of Gurus*

On the issue, as to what is his message and mission, Guru Nanak is extremely precise and concise. His message is that it is man's destiny, and of man alone, to remedy the malady of Haumen and uplift himself into a new being and consciousness. The Guru puts the question as to "how the wall of falsehood intervening between us and Reality can be removed and gives the categoric reply that "It can be done by carrying out God's Will." This is the gist of Guru Nanak's message. In the Sidh Gosht, he specifies his life's mission just in one line. His object, he says, is with the help of other God-centred persons, to make everyone cross this sea of difficulty, i.e. to make every Manmukh a Gurmukh. In the Guru's eyes Man-mukh is not in a hopeless state of mind. The Guru's message and mission are thus related to man so as to elevate him, because he alone has the capacity for a higher life.

Here it is essential to mention two things. The Gurus have repeatedly indicated a continuing process of development, evolution and progress in the empirical world. Further, they clearly point out that progress from egoistic man to the superman or God-centred man is not only possible, but is in accordance with the purpose of God. The Gurus have stated that individuation was created by God. There has been gradual growth from small organisms to animals, and finally to the animal-man, with his subtle sense of discrimination and introspection. "For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births an insect, for several births a fish and animal." "After ages you have the glory of being a man."⁵² He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom." "O man, you are supreme of God's creation; now is your opportunity. You may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."⁵³

Further progress of this egoistic man depends entirely on the deeds of the individual. Till man had appeared 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 life. But, the Gurus emphasise the opportunity available to man to grow into a super-man.

The Gurus repeatedly address man to give up his egocentric activities and thereby to rise to his full stature. "After ages, this invaluable opportunity of human birth is available, but one loses it for nothing." "You have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your only opportunity to meet God."⁵⁴ This is how we understand Guru Nanak's reply to the Sidhas that his mission was, with the help of other God conscious persons, to assist man to grow into a superman. He wanted thereby to help the process of evolution and creativity to supermanship, flowering into a beautiful world of God.

5. GOAL AND GURMUKH

The goal represents the crucial aspect of a religion. For, it evidently governs, colours and determines the entire structure of the system, its concepts, institutions and discipline. Secondly, it is in this field that the Gurus have made a completely radical departure from the general religious tradition, more especially from the Indian tradition. Thirdly, we find that many misunderstandings about the ideology, growth and history of Sikhism, arise from a causal or inadequate knowledge of the human goal laid down by the Gurus.

1. *Goal*

The Gurus have explained their views by enunciating different doctrines. All of the point to the same conclusion about the ideal life.

(a) *Righteous deeds alone the basis of assessment:* In the first hymn of Cosmography, Guru Nanak gives what should be the role of man on earth which has been declared to be a place for the practice of righteousness. The ideal

prescribes the performance of virtuous deeds and not of ritualism, Yogic meditations and asceticism. It has been clearly stressed that the assessment of man will be made on the basis and character of his deeds. The same idea has been repeated in the Guru Granth in numerous hymns like, “With God only the deeds one does in this world count. For, “through virtue is one enlightened.”²⁵⁵

(b) Higher than Truth is Truthful Living: In the following words Guru Nanak has stated an extremely important dictum of Sikhism. “Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living.”²⁵⁶ It is just a symbolic way of emphasizing that the ideal is to live the active life of truth and not only to know Truth as an end in itself. It is the God-centred man who shows what is truthful living. The goal is to live on active and creative life. “True living is living God in life.”²⁵⁷

(c) Carry out the Will of God: Guru Nanak declares that the goal of man cannot be reached through the intellect or wisdom, howsoever one may try, nor can it be achieved by the ascetic practices. The Guru raises specifically the question as to how one can be a true human being, a Sachara or an ideal man. To this the Guru provides a clear-cut answer: “By carrying out the Will of God.” The Gurus conceive of God as a God of Will. He is a Dynamic Creative God whose Ever-creative and Attributive Will is operative in the World with a direction and a purpose. For man, therefore, the ideal life is to carry out His Will. It is the ideal of doing creative activity in the universe as God’s instrument. That is why, in Sikhism, the goal of personal salvation is excluded. The Gurus declare that it is possible for man to know His Will. The goal is not only to establish union with God, nor only to know His Will, but, after having done that, to carry it out. The ideal is not blissful union as an end in itself, but union with a view both to knowing His Will and carrying it out. It is the same thing as saying that the ideal is not to know the Truth but to live the life of Truth.

(d) *God-conscious man*: On the question of Haumen, we come to the conclusion that activities of the ordinary self-centred man are the cause of all social evils and conflicts. As against it, the Gurus hold out the God-centred man to be the ideal. Because of his new consciousness he is full of virtues as attributed to God. The mystic ideal is of active God-consciousness. All exhortations to man are to achieve this supermanship by the practice of virtues. “In the soil of your body sow the seed of godly deeds. In that field God sprouts.”

(e) *Link with Naam*: For the Gurus, Naam is engaged in directing the world to become a place of values, harmony and beauty. A very large number of hymns in the’ Guru Granth request for one’s being united with Naam. “He reaches the highest stage whom God benevolently yokes to His Naam.” “To be imbued with Naam is the essence of True living.” Pray, link me to God.”⁵⁸

Accordingly, the ideal of Sikhism is to be yoked, attuned or linked to Naam. 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. To be linked to Naam only means to become its instrument and share the responsibility of a creative and virtuous development in the world. The practice of Naam and its ethics, is both the ideal and “the sovereign remedy for all ills and evils.”

The Gurus have laid down these five doctrines prescribing the goal in Sikhism. Whether it is the ideal of God-consciousness or of carrying out the Will of God, or the gift of Naam, in essence all of them convey the same spiritual truth. Again, whether it is the ideal of righteous deeds or of truthful living, the discipline and direction are exactly the same. We, therefore, come to the obvious conclusion that in Sikhism, the goal is of creative and moral activity and that spiritual life and moral life are virtually synonymous and coextensive. One inevitably leads to the other. All training for spiritual life or for seeking God’s Grace

is through moral life. There is no dichotomy between the two kinds of life. This is evidently the basic plank in Sikhism. Life on earth is a single spiritual or religious venture. It has to be availed of as a God-sent opportunity for spiritual growth. No segment of life is unimportant, nor can anyone be divorced or excluded from the spiritual field. Life's divisions into spiritual life, social life and political life are man-made, arbitrary and untenable. Life being a single whole, has to be lived spiritually or morally. No part of life is taboo to the spiritual man. The mystic cannot afford to ignore any section of life as unbecoming for him; nor can he spurn to aid any man whatever be his situation.

(f) The ideal to make everyone a Superman: Human goal is to lead a righteous and a God-centred life. But God-centredness has one more implication. In the Sidh Gosht, Guru Nanak has clearly specified that his mission is to remove man's alienation from God. Guru Nanak thus explains as to what he means by 'carrying out His Will' and executing God's mission of creating a society of God-centred men. "The God-conscious man achieves the goal and makes all others do so."⁵⁹ That is exactly the reason why the Gurus have described themselves as the 'Servants of God', 'Soldiers in God's Legion', or 'wrestlers in the cause of God'; God is the creator of the universe. Invariably the Gurus pray that their lives may be devoted to the service of God. "May I have millions of hands to serve Thee. Service is the way to cross the hurdles of life." "Be ever alert in the service of God. Serve God every moment and relax not."⁶⁰ As the world is the authentic creation of God, supported by His Immanence, the service of God means the service of His creation, namely, this world, this life and man, "Service in the world leads to approval in the Court of God."⁶¹

In Sikhism, the highest religious attainment is to become God's instrument in making every human being God-centred. It is the creative state from which altruistic activities start Spontaneously.

2. *Gurmukh*

The Gurus' description of the Gurmukh gives a concise picture of their concepts about the goal of man, the ideal life, their value system and their entire approach to the world and life.

(a) *He is godly, and has all virtues and no Haumen:* The Gurmukh is free from Haumen and all the vices, insecurity and problems that ego creates. "He who knows His Will, his ego goes."⁶² God is truth but the superman lives Truth. God is the Ocean of Virtues. The supermen translate these virtues in life and live them. "He (Gurmukh) is the ocean of virtues, pure and truthful." "He deals in the virtues of God." He is "shelter of the shelterless." "God is Compassionate, Merciful and Support of the earth; and so is the nature of saints." The Gurmukh "saves all and removes pain." "He becomes like Him with whom imbued." "He lives truth, he loves single mindedly." He sees God in all hearts; "he treats all alike." His is not a conditioned, calculated or a rationalised practice of virtues. But, "He practices good spontaneously; he is the fountain spring of benevolence."⁶³

(b) *He carries out His Will:* God has a Will. The superman carries out that Will. His mind is filled with Naam; "true mind is imbued with Word, he serves truth, practices truth and earns truth." "Imbued by His Will, he carries it out."⁶⁴ The Soldiers of God act as He Wills." "Wonderful is His Will; one knows it only if one walks in His Will. Then alone one knows how to lead the life of truth."⁶⁵ This point is of fundamental importance namely, that he who carries out His Will alone knows it; and he who knows it must carry it out. The two activities are not separate but simultaneous because a Will known is essentially a Will carried out. "They who know His Will carry it out."⁶⁶

(c) *He is the servant of God and man:* They "dedicate life to Him"; He is "a combatant in the cause of God"; he is the servant of God." The Guru calls as "the slave of all creation."⁶⁷ The Guru prays; "the world is sick, O save it by

any means you please.⁶⁸

This is a prayer of catholic import. He prays for all men and not for a few persons here or there. The Guru is anguished to witness the troubles of man. Hence his prayer. He does not want God to help men only through him. The Guru has made no claim to exclusive prophethood. He wants everyone to be saved by any means God may be pleased to use. Nothing could be more expressive of the anonymity and humility of the Guru and his deep extrovert concern for man and his problems.

(d) He partakes actively in all fields of life: God, the source of all values and virtues, “is milk to the child, staff to the blind and help to the poor, and is protector of the weak.” It is important to understand that the Gurmukh’s virtues are not merely personal, pious and preparatory, meant to secure salvation for him. But his role is positive and dynamic vis a vis, evil and human problems in all fields. He compromises not with evil, nor yields to it. “God’s hero is he who fights for the oppressed.”⁶⁹

(e) He aims to make all others God-centred: There is another important feature of the Gurmukh. “He unites himself with God and unites others too with Him”; “The servants of God salvage all.” “He is emancipated and emancipates others.”⁷⁰ In the Guru’s system, the ideal to make everyone a superman remains the foremost aim of the Gurmukh. This priority, therefore, becomes the very reason why the Gurmukh deals with all men and participates in all fields and aspects of life. The emphasis on this ideal of making everyone God-centred is so great that the Guru goes to the extent of saying that “God established the earth for the sake of God-centred persons.” This, in essence, means that the creation or evolution of the superman on earth is the purpose of god towards which all life is moving.

6. THE DISCIPLINE

The Gurus have prescribed three principal modes of

discipline for the seeker: (a) company of God-centred persons, (b) moral life or service of man, and (c) prayer and remembering God. These modes of training are not ascetic methods, but lay down a code of conduct to be practised throughout the entire course of one's life.

(a) Company of God-centred persons

The Gurus have paid glowing tributes to the superman. Obviously, the society of the ideal man is of inestimable value for the training of the seeker, both as a model and as a guide. His influence is the best for shaping man's growing personality and providing him with strength and direction in times of stress and strain. "Just as the Harind (Castor plant) imbibes the fragrance of the Chandan tree, the fallen are emancipated by the saints." "In good company one becomes good."⁷¹ It is the role of the mystic to help every man to be a God-centred person. The seeker thus grows in a receptive and kindly atmosphere because "God sends saints to reveal God's nearness to man."⁷²

(b) Moral life and service

In the Gurus system moral and spiritual values are for the enrichment of the world. Spiritual discipline aims at enabling man to face life in a righteous way and to accept the responsibilities of a creative life. As such, a householder's life is an essential moral responsibility of man. The seeker's training has to take place during the course of normal life

and not in a monastery. The psyche can be properly conditioned only when it is subject to the stresses and strains of the social environment of man. No one can learn to swim outside the pool.

This is exactly the reason that the Gurus excluded ascetics from the Sikh fold and condemned all ritualistic, yogic and other-worldly practices and austerities. For, moral disciplining can alone be the foundation of spiritual growth. Altruism is opposed to all the biologic, instinctive and

rationalistic urges and aspirations of man. Virtues have come to occupy a certain amount of cultural respect and prestige. Men practise them not because it is in their nature to do so, but because their sense of pride is served by such a performance. It is not a cynical statement, but represents the biologic state of man. It goes to the credit of culture, and more so to the appearance of mystics from time to time that, during its growth, the egoistic or the power instinct of man gets conditioned to the practice of virtues. It is not a constitutional change in man but is the mere conditioning of the egoistic psyche to moral ends. But, as it is not a change in the guiding consciousness of man, ego satisfaction remains the underlying motive of human activity. In this state, the base of moral life remains shaky and the search for moral ends is just temporary. We are not questioning the validity or superiority of the moral life, we are only indicating its constitutional weakness. The way out is to develop a higher consciousness. "God created first Himself, then Haumen, third Maya and the fourth state of poise and bliss."⁷³ One has to rise to this fourth stage of supermanship. Keeping in view the character and role of the superman, it is obvious that progress is possible only through moral life.

"Singing and dancing in ecstasy are no worship; love and the giving up of ego are the ways of real worship."⁷⁴ "Drive out selfishness and one is fulfilled." "Where the weak are cared, there is showered God's mercy"; "Evil separates, good deeds unite"; "service in the world is the way to be fulfilled."⁷⁵ There is, indeed, no spiritual progress without active moral functioning. The service of God is a synonyms for the service of man. Altruistic and moral activities have the highest priority in the discipline of the seeker. The demands of moral life invite the greatest of sacrifices. But, this service or moral life, has no reference to service in the temples or monastries, or to some prescribed or ritualistic acts of piety.

God's interest in the moral development of man can be

gauged from the fact that He takes cognizance of and “rewards even an iota of good deed”, it being “His innermost nature to help the erring.” “With self-control and discipline, we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God.” “Continue to work with your limbs and at the same time remain attuned to God.” Salvation is attained while laughing, playing and living a full life.⁷⁶

(e) Remembering God and Prayer

In the Guru Granth, there is considerable emphasis on remembering God. But, this remembering of God is by itself not enough to link oneself with Him. This contemplation does not mean yogic practices for the achievement of the so-called bliss as an end in itself. We are unaware of any hymn in the Guru Granth recommending yogic practices or any tradition in this regard. Nor are we aware of any hymn in the Guru Granth which, apart from recommending prayer and keeping the fear of God always in one’s mind, directs the practice of day-long meditations in seclusion and away from the day’s work. There are clear hymns against the use of such a course as a means to spiritual advancement. “Every one repeats God’s name, but such repetition is not the way to God.” “With guile in heart, he practices guile but mutters God’s name. He is pounding husk and is in darkness and pain.”⁷⁷ These verses deny the utility of any mechanical means of worship or mere repetition of words or hymns. 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 direction and ideals. That is why, in the hymns of the Guru Granth, the stress is not on any mechanical repetition. The words used for the purpose are like, “Naam living in one’s being’ (*Kare Pargaas*), Being imbued’ (*Ratte*) with Naam. 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. Just as in the case of ‘doing the Will of God’ and ‘being yoked to Naam’, ‘remembering’ is also linked with the subsequent decisions to be made. ‘By dwelling on the Word, mind flows to serve others.’⁷⁸ Evidently, remembrance of God is a kind of preparation for the virtuous activities to be undertaken in life. It is actually the character of the subsequent deeds that will be the test of the man and the preparation he has made for his moral and spiritual progress.

Prayer

Prayer, as in any other theistic system, finds a place of eminence in the Guru Granth. Prayer has a triple function. Prayer, on the one hand, expresses the humility and insignificance of the devotee. On the other hand, it reminds man of his need of continuous search for God and His Lofty greatness. Secondly, it represents a perpetual seeking for His Grace which is purely an Act of God. Finally, it is a humble attempt at communication with God so as to draw upon His Light and Energy in order to lift and elevate oneself and restore one’s sagging energies in the fight against evil and for the positive expression of love.

“My energies are exhausted and I am helpless. But O’ God, with thy Grace nothing is difficult for me to accomplish.” Such a prayer is not a repetitive formula or practice, nor is it an end in itself. It is really a preparation for the moral activity to be undertaken in the world. In fact, it is inalienably linked with subsequent activity. In the Guru’s system, while prayer has a fundamental value, it is, like knowing God’s Will, an integral part of the creative deed. Prayer that leads to no activity is no prayer at all. In this sense prayer is an internal urge or act, the essential part of which is the external creative expression in life. Without its external operation, the internal activity remains still-born and invalid. The very fact that the Gurus started no monastic system shows conclusively that they never advocated prayer as an independent mode of spiritual training. “One is

emancipated while laughing and playing in life.” “The God-centred lives truth while a house-holder.”⁹⁹

ETHICS

Here we shall briefly recapitulate the principles of Sikh ethics.

1. *Principles*

- (a) God is the Creator. We are all His children, equal in His Eye. This lays the basis for human brotherhood and the equality of man.
- (b) The world is real. It is not a vale of tears or a bondage. The object of life is not to secure release from it but to strive towards the goal of a truly moral or spiritual living.
- (c) God, as the Ocean of Attributes and Values, is carrying out a progressive movement from comparative imperfection to comparative perfection and towards a world of harmony in which all beings are treated alike and as equals. It is a development for the growth of values. Simultaneously, it is a movement from comparative necessity to freedom, from being the helpless object of the laws of casualty and determinism towards being a free and responsible centre of creative activity.
- (d) Haumen of man obstructs his vision in seeing things in their true colour and perspective and in realising the underlying unity and brotherhood of man. This is the fundamental failing of man. Practically, all manifestations of this vice involve encroachment on the rights of one's fellow beings. All social vices result from it. As against it God-consciousness is the greatest social virtue, since it directs every activity towards the good of all and not towards self-interest alone. This brings out the basically social character and approach of Sikhism. It explains the social trends of its ethics and the social concern

of its institutions and traditions. All vices involving aggression against the rights, liberties and well being of one's fellow beings have to be avoided. All virtues flowing from the idea of the brotherhood of man and safeguarding and securing the equal rights of all have to be practised.

We find that all these four ideas are not only inter-connected and supplementary, but they represent only the different facets of a single integrated concept.

2. *Standard*

The standard of Guru's ethics is a unitary view of life, in which all beings have to be treated as equals and evil has to be fought against. God's soldiers try to be like Him and fight evil. Human actions have to be judged by this standard. We may also call this ethics as the ethics of Naam.

On the issue of means, spiritual systems may be divided into three categories. The first category, like Jainism, Sankhya and Yoga, believes that social or moral life has no meaning. All spiritual effort should be directed inwards. Some preparatory and pious acts may be done; but the aim should be to withdraw from life and seek an ultimate change in the make up of man. In these systems socio-moral life *per se* has no significance. Social morality and the change of environment for social ends are practically excluded. To the second category belong spiritual systems like Buddhism. They too are virtually disinterested in changing the environment in order to serve social objectives. All the same, for the layman and the seeker, they prescribe moral laws and duties. But, at the same time, they impose certain limitations on the means that can be employed for a moral end.

Sikhism does not belong to either of these two categories. It clearly envisages the manipulation of the environment for achieving moral and social aims. In any system, where moral life has an independent validity and

an importance of its own as a desirable end, the making of environmental, organisational and constitutional changes in order to have a moral effect would ipso facto be justified. The standard is the unity of life and to treat all as equals. Every act that satisfies this standard is moral.

The Gurus contemplate that life should be organised and environment changed so that the growth of moral life is promoted. It is logically impossible to construct anything without at the same time destroying and remoulding the existing environment. Human reason and intellect, we know, can be used both for good and evil. Similarly, force too can be used for beneficial and for bad purposes. Man has the option to use reason and force for right or wrong objectives. Actually, it is the way one exercises this discretion that becomes the basis of moral judgement. God has been defined not only as “Helper of the weak”, but also as “the Destroyer of the tyrant” and the oppressor.”

The Gurus clearly deprecate evil and oppressive institutions. In the social field, caste prejudices have been severely criticised since they form the basis of discrimination between man and man. In the field of politics, the oppression of the rulers, the tyranny of the invaders and the corruption of the officials have been condemned. Similarly, the pseudo-religious practices and idleness of yogis and ascetics and the hypocrisy of priests and Brahmins have been exposed. The latter pretend not to take polluted food during the day but suck the blood of man at night. The amassing of wealth and property has been denounced by saying that wealth cannot be gathered without resort to evil means. This criticism of the evil institutions of man, both social and political, is not a mere verbal exercise. It evidently implies that the Gurus contemplate and suggest the re-construction and creation of alternative moral institutions. Naturally, alternative human institutions can come up only by the substitution, re-moulding or destruction of the old and unwanted organisations. The lives of the Gurus are a

clear pointer that, in their system, change of environment to improve the moral climate in all fields is clearly envisaged and sanctioned.

The Gurus say that God-consciousness consists in treating all as one's equals. "God's riches are for all men but men try to grab them for themselves." Hence inequality in treatment, including arbitrary distribution in wealth, is immoral. Any encroachment on the rights of others or any infringement of this spiritual law is immoral. Just as all property is theft, every encroachment on the rights of others is aggression or violence. It is contrary to the very law of physics and inherently impossible that violence or aggression could be undone or resisted without an equal and opposite use of force. In the world of God all progress is change. And no change is possible without necessary force to impel or cause it. As such, all action and activity, howsoever good, involve the use of force because action and force are synonymous. Action not involving the use of force is a contradiction in terms. In the system of the Gurus; so long as the end is spiritual and not self-centred, the use of necessary force is justified.

"Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating. They know not what is flesh and what is non-flesh, and in what lies or does not lie a sin."⁸⁰ This verse clearly implies that so long as one works in the midst of social life, any arbitrary prejudices about meat-eating or violence being evil as such are unjustified. Life is dynamic and involves at every step the use of force. The basis of all form is force, and, consequently, of all becoming and progress. It would, therefore, be mere sophistry and sheer ignorance of the reality to talk of performing a righteous or moral act without the use of force of one kind or the other.

Guru Nanak has expressed in detail⁸¹ his views concerning the issue of means and the cant about meat-eating. He chides the Brahmins not only for their pretence about meat-eating, but also for their considering some acts of supposed pollution as sinful and impure. The Guru

describes how the ways and processes of life involve the transformation and the use of the flesh. He further explains that life is present in every grain of our food and even in the fire-wood and the cow-dung which the Brahmins use for the purposes of purification. The Guru exposes the fallacy that life is possible without the use of force or killing. He means that immorality does not lie in the use of force, which is inevitable for all living, whether moral or immoral, but it lies in the direction or the purpose for which force is used. Force used for a good purpose is moral.

It might be argued that great pacifists like Mahatma Gandhi successfully employed non-violence as the means of bringing about socio-political changes. But, it is now well-known that when the Mahatma had to face a major challenge of his life, he found himself completely helpless. The Mahatma was the greatest exponent of non-violence in modern times. When the Second World War began, the pacifists of the world looked up to him for some lead. But, the Mahatma could furnish no non-violent or effective remedy. Ahimsa could be of little help to him in stopping the holocaust. The situation became so frustrating for the Mahatma that a number of times he thought of committing suicide, so that, if he could do nothing to stop the destruction, he would at least not live to see the misery caused by it.⁸² The other two occasions, when he had to discard Ahimsa as a tool, are more well known; namely, when he agreed to the Congress accepting the execution of the war effort, and again when in 1947 he acquiesced in sending the Indian troops to Kashmir so as to repel the Pakistani attack. All we wish to emphasize is that since Sikhism, as a spiritual system contemplated socio-political changes and involvement as a part of its religious mission, it was Guru Nanak who specifically rejected Ahimsa as an unalterable means of religious and social functioning. This clarifies the problem of means and related moral issues. Every activity has to be judged on the basis of the principles and the standard of Sikh ethics. So long as human action

measures up to these two yard-sticks, the use of force is not barred. To see God in all hearts and to treat all men as equal is the ideal and also the basis of Sikh ethics. As this ideal can be achieved only by right living, there has to be a distinct orientation and education in creating new attitudes towards the social life and the physical world. In this context, the Gurus have pointed out the institutional and other social manifestations of this evil. It is this social aspect which is important.

The caste system and the resultant institutions of extreme inequality or segregation and notions of pollution rigidly governed the entire social, economic and political life in the country. Similarly, inequality of sexes had also received religious sanction. "The Vedas make a wrong distinction of caste." "No one should take pride in caste; foolish man ! be not proud of caste; this pride leads to multifarious evils. They make distinctions of four castes, but all are born of God." "The whole world is made of the same elements. Then why make distinctions ?"⁸³ "They talk of pollution and warn others not to touch their food lest it should be defiled. But their own bodies are impure."⁸⁴ "Why call women impure when without woman there would be none ?"⁸⁵

Both about the use of force for moral purposes and the status of women Gurus' ideas were extremely radical. For them both force and reason are neutral tools which the egoist man has used and abused for centuries. But it does not mean that on that account these tools, without the Correct use of which there would be no social life or progress, have not to be used for moral and righteous causes, similarly, the Gurus never considered women to be evil. In fact, they said that there would be no human life without Woman. The third guru made women in-charge of some of his preaching centres. Considering the fact that in other systems women were either looked down upon, or assigned a junior place (The Pope has even now refused to ordain women as priests). This was a change the social,

moral and religious implications of which were, indeed, enormous. Next comes the question of economic inequality. This too has been criticised by the Guru. "God's bounty belongs to all, but in the world it is mal-distributed." "Man gathers riches by making others miserable." Riches cannot be gathered without sin and these do not keep company after death."⁸⁶

The Gurus denounce every kind of renunciation of the world. They commend honest work and the production of goods as the moral and spiritual duty of man. "O Yogi, are you not ashamed of begging from door to door for your food?" "The man incapable of earning a living gets his ears split (to become a Yogi or 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 right way who earns his living by hard work and shares his earning with others."⁸⁷ The Guru felt that fear, hypocrisy, ritualism, caste distinctions, other worldliness and parasitic living were evils that had been corroding the religious life of man. In regard to all of them an attempt was made to remould individual attitudes so as to enable men, in pursuit of their ideals, to face and reshape life boldly and develop the capacity to react against social and political wrongs.

COMPARISON OF NATHISM, VAISNAVISM AND SIKHISM

DALJEET SINGH

NATHISM AND SIKHISM

We find that the answers of Nathism and Sikhism to the seven issues indicated by us are mostly opposed in their implications. Sikhism is a theism. Nathism being a Saiva cult also claims to be such, but leans more towards pantheism. In both cases the world is taken to be real. But, here ends the apparent similarity. As we probe further, sharp divergences begin. The two systems have entirely different methodologies, goals and world views. In Nathism the world is a misery and liberation from it has to be sought by vows of celibacy, Ahimsa, and non-participation in the affairs of man. The Nath cuts himself off from the world as far as he can because his goal is liberation from it. Once liberated, the superman merges in Siva in peace and bliss. The discipline to reach the goal is all formal, ritualistic and Yogic.

The Sikh Gurus feel very differently. They say that “by despising the world one gets not to God.” They consider the world to be a beautiful place for all spiritual endeavours. As such, participation in the activities of man becomes essential. The responsibilities of the householder’s life are freely accepted. God being the Ocean of virtues, He shows His deep interest in the world and man. Therefore, in Sikhism the superman has to be the instrument of God in alleviating man’s sufferings and solving his problems. God’s Will is Attributive and man’s goal is always to carry it out. The Sikh prayer is not for liberation from the world, but

for being given millions of hands to serve Him, for, God showers His Grace where the weak are helped. As to the spiritual discipline, there is only one method, the way of good deeds, and deeds alone. The Gurus do not believe in Ahimsa, nor do they preclude the use of force when necessary. The lives of Gurus clearly show that. Applying the test of the unity of perception, ideology and activities, this is the only inference we could draw from the lives of the Gurus. Accordingly, we conclude that the two systems hold diametrically opposite world views.

Not only is the contrast between the two systems glaringly evident, but every student of the Guru Granth knows, that Nathism is one of the few systems the approach, the methodology, the formalism and the goal of which have been strongly criticised by the Gurus. There are numerous hymns in which the ways and the ideals of the Naths have been denounced and the right ways and approach indicated. For example, in the following hymns the Gurus reject the otherworldliness, asceticism, and formalism of the Naths and, instead, recommend that virtues should be cultivated and practised.

“Instead of wearing Mudras and carrying a beggar’s bag and staff and rubbing ashes on the body, one should cultivate contentment and self respect, do effort and always keep God in mind.” “One has to control one’s mind, treat all beings as of one status and salute Him alone.”¹ Again, “The spiritual path (yog) does not lie in wearing Mudras in ears, and a necklace of beads, nor does it lie in keeping a staff and a horn, nor in rubbing ashes on the body and making a close shave of the head. Real Yog (spiritual way) is to remain tranquil and balanced among the turmoils of the world.” “The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk, but by actually treating all men alike and as one’s equal. Yog does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation, or in roaming all over places, in visiting places of pilgrimages, but in remaining balanced and God-centred while doing the affairs of the world.”²

The Yogic methods have also been clearly rejected. “Neoli and other yogic methods are useless. The only thing worthwhile is the love of God and to keep Him in one’s mind.”³³ “The rubbing of ashes on the body and other rituals have no meaning, unless vices and egoism are given up and the heart is imbued with God.”³⁴ The Gurus lay’ down that “no worship of God is possible without the practice of virtues.”³⁵ “God lives in the hearts of those who avoid the property and women of others.”³⁶

In the Guru’s system, “to lead the house-holder’s life truly is the best one from among all the religious paths.”³⁷ The Guru deprecates the Yogi who gives up the world and then is not ashamed of begging from door to door.

In Nathism celibacy is essential. Woman, as in the other Hindu systems, is deemed to be a temptress. The Naths would not sit and eat with even Nath women. But in the Guru’s system, down-grading the woman has been denounced⁸ and she is deemed to be an equal partner in man’s spiritual venture. When the third Guru organised districts of religious administration, women too were selected⁹ to head them. All this was wholly contrary to the entire Indian tradition in which woman has been given only a secondary place and has generally been considered to be an impediment in the spiritual path. In all ascetic and monastic systems woman has been dubbed as evil. That is so even in systems that renounce the world either on account of Bhakti or devotion or for other reasons. But in the Guru’s system her role is significant and equal to that of man.

The Gurus emphatically reject the other-worldly approach of the Naths. They deprecate renunciation of the world and one who does not earn his living. In all the hymns of the Gurus, the emphasis is on shedding vice and on virtuous living. “The householder who is benevolent, merciful and disciplined is the purest of persons. ⁴⁰ To give up vice and to practise righteousness and virtuous are the ways to realize the essence of God.”¹¹

A confusion has arisen in the minds of some students of religion because the Gurus have used some words in their hymns which have also been employed by the authors of other religious books, but with a different meaning and import. For example, the Guru says that at the final stage of spiritual achievement one gets the bliss of “Anhad Sabad” or unstruck music. But this “Anhad Sabad”, as the Gurus call it, has nothing to do with the “Anhad Sabad”, as used by the Nath Yogis. In the Hath Yoga “Anhad Sabad” is a sound which the Yogi hears when the Kundalini is raised through the Nadis and the Chakras in the body. This is a sound which appears at a far lower stage of the Yogic exercise than the final one of bliss when the union of Kundalini takes place with Siva at the Sahasrara, in the top of the head. As such, the “Anhad Sabad” of the Nath, as Dr. Jodh Singh has also stated, has nothing to do with the “Anhad Sabad” of the Gurus which indicates the bliss one gets at the time of the final spiritual achievement. In fact, the Gurus have described this ultimate state in Sikhism with many other terms like “Nirbana”, “Turya”, “Mukti”, “Sahj” etc. But, these words have quite different import and implications in the other religious systems where too these terms have been employed. A close study of the Guru Granth makes it clear what are really the contents and meanings of these terms. These are Gurus’ own and are quite variant from the way other systems use them. For example, Buddhist “Nirvana” is entirely different from what the Gurus conceive and convey by this term. They only mean union with Naam. Sometimes, the Gurus’ use of these terms is only metaphoric. Therefore, the use of some words, also employed by the Nath Yogis, does not mean that the Gurus accept the Hath Yoga methods. In fact, the Gurus definitely reject and denounce them. Though McLeod appears to have been misled in his conclusions by the use of some such terms, yet even he concedes that the Guru Granth does not mention the system of Ida, Susumana, Pingla, Chakra and pranayama which is fundamental to the Hath Yoga methodology. The Guru

Granth clearly records, "I shall sing and imbibe the name of God and achieve the highest stage; I reject the methods of Ida, Pingla and Susumana and of the union of the Sun and the Moon (as in Hath Yoga, the sun representing Siva, and the moon, the Kundalini). I shall reach Him otherwise."¹²

One more point of contrast. In Nathism the method of sense indulgence is accepted as an alternative discipline for spiritual attainments. In the Guru Granth there is not the faintest suggestion of this kind. Rather, Nath celibacy and its ill effects are denounced. "He carries a beggar's bowl by giving up the world and women. But overpowered by passion, he is infatuated by women of others."¹³

In short, Nathism and Sikhism present opposite world views. It is the compulsions and implications of each world view that lead the two systems to move in different directions and to give opposing answers, practically, to each of the seven issues raised by us. The fundamental difference is that Nathism rejects the world and life as misery. But, Sikhism accepts them as spiritually meaningful. Therefore, in Nathism withdrawal from the world, asceticism, Ahimsa, celibacy, the downgrading of women, solitude, yogic methodology, etc., become naturally essential. But, in Sikhism, God being Attributive, virtuous participation in the world, the house-holder's life and responsibilities, the consequent raising of the status of women and the love and service of man in all spheres of his life become logically necessary. Because, here the key test of spiritual growth and stature is the deeds of the person and whether or not the person earns his living, shares his income with others, and treats everyone as his equal. In one case, the goal is merger or union with Siva, involving eternal peace and bliss without any role for the superman. In the other case, the goal is always to carry out the Attributive Will of God and a continuous virtuous endeavour to solve the problems of man. There is hardly a meeting ground between the two systems.

VAISNAVISM AND SIKHISM

Our survey and history of the system shows that Vaisnavism is, in every way, a part and parcel of the Brahmnical complex. As of all other Hindu systems Vedas and Upanisads are its scriptures. The answers of Vaisnavism to the seven issues are opposed to those given by Sikhism. Crooke and other authorities define the four essentials of Hinduism as belief in the scriptural authority of Vedas, the theory of Avatara hood: the caste system, and veneration for the cow.¹⁴ These are also the four fundamentals of Vaisnavism. In addition, it has faith in the mystic potency of words and Mantras. The theory of the Avatars of Visnu is infact, a Vaisnava creation and not a part of the earlier Vedic religions. Probably because of its faith in the Vedic system, Bhakti in Vaisnavism is basically formal and ritualistic, without its ever fructifying into virtuous deed in the social field. The Vaisnava Bhakti remains confined to meditational practices and formal and devotional idol worship in the temples.

But, Sikhism clearly denies the four principles of Vaisnava Bhakti. Not only is the scriptural authority of the Vedas and Upanisads repudiated, but the following hymn is critical of the Vedic caste. "The distinctions of high and low castes and colour, hell and heaven introduced by the Vedas are misleading."¹⁵ There are numerous hymns clearly denying the Avatara character of all Vaisnava gods.

Having rejected the fundamentals of Vaisnavism the question of any similarity between the two systems does not arise. While Sikhism is strictly theistic, Vaisnavism is, broadly speaking, pantheistic. In Vaisnavism the emphasis is merely on formal devotional methods of worship divorced from deeds. And this devotion involves an otherworldly life, leaning towards Sanyasa and celibacy. In Sikhism the path is entirely different. Sheer devotional dancing is considered to be of no consequence. It is virtuous deeds which are of the essence of the Sikh spiritual life. "With God, only the deeds one does in the world, are of any avail."¹⁶ "Vice is

our enemy and virtue the only friend. “¹⁷

The Vaisnava saints were too preoccupied with formal devotion to enter the social field. Not even one of them did so, nor did their devotional system permit it, much less prescribe it.

As against it, the Gurus insist on virtuous deeds so as to seek the Grace of God. The first Guru started the organisation of the Sikh panth. As soon as the organisation was sizeable enough, it was the fifth Guru who took the initiative, by helping Khusro, and provoked the wrath of Jahangir. This socio-political confrontation was continued by all the subsequent Gurus. The sixth Guru fought battles with the Imperial forces. The seventh Guru attempted to come to the military aid of Dara, the rebel against the then Emperor. The eighth Guru died very young. Aurangzeb suggested to the ninth Guru not to dabble in the socio-political field. But he rejected this suggestion and sought martyrdom by openly coming to the aid of Kashmiri Pandits in defiance of the Imperial policy of religious persecution. The tenth Guru's creation of the Khalsa and confrontation with the Empire is well known.

There is another major difference between the two. Vaisnavism accepts the sensual path as an alternative spiritual approach but Sikhism rejects it outright. The conclusion is evident that there is an obvious contrast between Vaisnavism and Sikhism on all the essentials of the two systems and the issues stated by us.

NATHISM, VAISNAVISM AND SIKHISM

Nathism and Vaisnavism, as we have surveyed and discussed, squarely fall within the ambit of the old Indian traditions, namely, Sramanic, Upanisadic, Vedantic or Yogic. In all these traditions world is deemed to be a misery or Mithya (illusory), and the spiritual value of Sanyasa, asceticism, celibacy and Yogic methodology is recognised. “To steer clear of the esoterism and mysticism of austerities,

self-mortification, and the general negativism of such cults and sects as those of Jain Sanyasis, of Nathpanthis, Aghora panthis, Kapalikas and other kindred sects on the one hand, and of the orders of the emotionally oriented and surcharged Vaisnavas of the Bhakti movement surrendering abjectly and absolutely as much to the Personal God as to the established social order, was not a very easy task in the context of the time and the space we are speaking of. But this is exactly what the Sikh gurus seem to have been aiming at, and evidence at our disposal leaves no room for doubt that they succeeded to a very large extent in doing so.”¹⁸ “Neither the leaders of the Bhakti movement, nor of the Nathpanthis and the Sant Synthesis attempted to do what Guru Nanak did, not in any systematic manner at any rate. These leaders seem to have been individuals working out for their own problems and towards achieving their personal religious and spiritual aims and aspirations.”¹⁹

The contrast between the non-participation of Nath Yogis and Vaisnava saints in the socio-political field and the repeated entry and confrontation of the Sikh Gurus in defence and aid of righteous causes in this sphere is not just incidental. The truth is that non-entry in one case and the acceptance of social responsibility in the other case are the compulsive consequences of the ideologies and objectives of the respective religious systems. Saivism and Vaisnavism apart, purely devotional spiritual systems have appeared in all ages the world over, in Greece, Germany, France, Spain, England, Iran and the Middle East. Nowhere the devotional mystics, whether Greek, Christian, Sufi or Indian have ever partaken in the social field as the Sikh Gurus did one after the other.

In Sikhism to be a man is a very great privilege, since he has the glorious opportunity of not only knowing the truth, but also more glorious responsibility of living it; of not only understanding the Creative Will, but also of carrying it out. For, God works, not through miracles but through man whose resources and capacity are enormous.

Therefore, in Sikhism the ideal is not to know the truth but to live the truth. The realisation of truth is not an end in itself, but only a means to the highest end of creative living, the latter alone being the correct test and index of the former. In fact such an effort is not optional but obligatory, it being the sole measure of spirituality.

Applying the principle of the unity of perception, ideology and activities the basic contrast between Nathism and Vaisnavism on the one hand and Sikhism on the other becomes all the more evident and conspicuous.

In the face of the historical background and the contrast between.. the quietism of these mystics referred above and the activism of the Sikh Gurus, it would just be idle to suggest that the ideology or the religious perceptions of the Sikh Gurus were in any manner akin to the ideologies and perceptions of the quietist religions. The contrast is too glaring to be glossed over. It would be equally idle to suggest the soil-seed theory, or the one of environmental development or religious growth. How could it be that while devotional but quietist religious systems and mystics have arisen in all ages, climes and countries, not even at one place has a quietist system been followed by an activist ideology or a religion with socio-political concern or involvement. It is too much to believe that nowhere the quietists were able to prepare the soil to enable the activist seed to sprout, or that no one ever arose to sow the activist seed there. Nor is the suggestion of growth or development understandable. For, in India Saiva, Yogic, Bhagvata and other devotional systems have existed side by side for over two thousand years and yet never did an activist amalgam or growth take place. Facts and realities about the Sikh ideology and history are too obvious to be explained by such simplistic suggestions or conjectures.

The two classes or religions are entirely different in their approach and aims, their ideas and ideals and their modes and methods of worship and working. In the traditional mystic systems the goal is either to make room for the holy

by the ‘emptying of consciousness’, or to reach the state of ‘gnostic knowledge’, through the ‘internally isolating techniques’ of ‘concentrated meditation’. But, in the Guru’s system the Immanent (Naam) is the Ever-fresh Fount gushing forth into the universe. The human goal is to establish an intuitional or mystic link with this Never-ebbing Spring in order to be the humble but conscious vehicle of this Creative Flow of Love. The mystic’s role is dynamic. The aim is not to merge in the Self-absorbed Void. In the one group of systems, one rises towards the heavens to join the Transcendent. In Sikhism one tries to bring the Transcendent to the earth. For, the Gurus emphasise that the Transcendent is Immanent too, deeply interested in His creation. It is in this perspective that we have to view and understand the message of Guru Nanak. Accordingly, we find that in the earlier Indian tradition there was no trace of the fundamentals comprising the Sikh worldview. In all its basic doctrines, Sikhism is alien to the Indian Tradition, much more so to the Saiva, Nath, Yogic or Vaisnava traditions. In Sikhism at the time of Amrit or baptism, the Sikh gains five freedoms : (i) deliverance from the bonds and prejudices of all previous religious, customs and practices, (ii) Obliteration of and deliverance from the effects of the earlier deeds (iii) freedom from the influence of the previous caste or family lineage, (iv) freedom from the stigma attached to a previous calling or a hereditary profession, and (v) deliverance from all previous rituals, prejudices and inhibitions. There is, thus, a complete break with the earlier ideologies and religious goals and practices. Our conclusion is that far from being connected, Nathism and Vaisnavism on the one hand and Sikhism on the other hand are completely contrasted in their fundamentals, ideologies, goals methodologies and world views.

And, yet, it has been stated: “perhaps the most important difficulty with Sikhism for the compilers of the ‘world religious’ text books is the question whether Sikhism is, indeed, a religion.”²⁰ “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.”²¹ “It was the influence of Nath doctrine and practice upon 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.”²² “The Sant tradition was essentially a synthesis of three principal dissenting movements, a compound of elements drawn mainly from Vaisnava Bhakti and the Hathayoga of Nath Yogis, with a marginal contribution from Sufism.”²³ “With early Sikhism, the ancient tantric practices, submerged beneath the Bhakti tradition of the early medieval period, re-emerge in Sant synthesis in the form of Yogic ideas and practices of the Nath.”²⁴ “Referring to Guru Nanak McLeod writes, “Nath beliefs certainly exercised an influence and we encounter many examples of Nath terminology in his works.”²⁵ “Nath influence emerges in much of the basic terminology used by Kabir (and later by Guru Nanak).”²⁶ “What Guru Nanak offers us is the clearest and the most highly articulated expression of the nirguna sampradaya.”²⁷ “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 Yogic tradition, which, with Vaisnava Bhakti, was primarily responsible for the Sant synthesis.”²⁸ “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.”²⁹

Our examination reveals that such views about Sikhism, Nathism and Vaisnavism are not only without any basis but also betray an ignorance of the history and the essentials of the three systems.

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PART III

BIFTH OF THE KHALSA

Aurangzeb was a true believer in this Islamic theory. His reputation had suffered greatly in the Muslim world for having executed all his brothers and their sons and for imprisoning his father. To improve his image he became a ruthless puritan. He wished to show that his aim was to restore Islam to its original glory. He adopted the policy of persecution of non-Muslims as well as non-Sunni Muslims.

Aurangzeb decided to use all the resources of a vast empire in suppressing Hinduism and converting the infidels to Islam. During his viceroyalty of Gujarat in 1644 he “desecrated the recently built Hindu temple of Chintaman in Ahmadabad by killing a cow in it and then turned the building into a mosque. He had at that time also demolished many other Hindu temples in the province.”³

In the beginning of his reign Aurangzeb ordered “the local officers in every town and village of Orrisa from Cuttack to Medinipur” “to pull down all temples, including even clay huts, built during the last 10 or 12 years, and to allow no old temple to be repaired.”⁴ In 1661-62 a big temple was demolished at Mathura and a Jama Masjid was erected in its place in the heart of Hindu population.⁵ From April, 1665, Hindus were charged double the customs duty of that paid by Muslims on all articles brought for sale.⁶ In May, 1667, Muslims were exempted from payment of customs duty altogether, while Hindus had to pay at the old rate of five percent.⁷

In 1668 Hindu fairs and festivals were stopped.⁸ On April 9, 1669, a general order applicable to all parts of the Mughal Empire was issued “to demolish all the schools and temples of the infidels and to put down their religious teachings.” In January, 1670, the biggest temple of Keshav Rae at Mathura was destroyed and the city was named Islamabad.⁹ “The destruction of Hindu places of worship was one of the chief duties of the *Mubtasibs* or Censors of Morals who were appointed in all the sub-divisions and cities of the empire.”¹⁰

Hindus employed in public services including clerks and

accountants were dismissed in 1671.¹¹ The post of Qanungo could be retained by a Hindu on embracing Islam.¹² Others who became Muslims received stipends, rewards, government jobs, release from jails, right to ancestral property and other privileges. The new converts riding on elephants followed by bands and flags were paraded through the streets and bazars.¹³ Jazia was charged from all Hindus from April 2, 1679. “Jazia meant for the Hindus an addition of fully one-third to every subject’s direct contribution to the State.”¹⁴ The contemporary European traveller Manucci observed: “Many Hindus who were unable to pay, turned Muhammadan, to obtain relief from the insults of the collectors. ...Aurangzeb rejoices.”¹⁵ In June, 1680, the temples of Amber, the capital of Jaipur State, the most loyal Hindu State, were demolished.¹⁶ In March, 1695, all the Hindus except Rajputs were ordered not to ride on elephants, fine horses and in palanquins or to carry arms.¹⁷

Syed Muhammad Latif in his *History of Punjab* on pp. 176-77 writes: “He discouraged the teachings of the Hindus, burnt to the ground the great Pagoda near Delhi, and destroyed the temple of Bishnath at Benaras, and the great temple of Dera Kesu Rai at Mathura, said to have been built by Raja Narsingh Deo, at a cost of thirty-three lakhs of rupees. The gilded domes of this temple were so high that they could be seen from Agra. On the site of the ruined temple, he built a vast mosque at a great cost. The richly decorated idols of the temples were removed to Agra and placed beneath the steps leading to the mosque of Nawab Begum. The name Mathura was changed into Islamabad, and was so written in all correspondence and spoken by the people. Aurangzeb had resolved that the belief in one God and the Prophet should be, not the prevailing, but the only religion of the empire of Hindustan. He issued mandates to the viceroys and governors of provinces to destroy pagodas and idols throughout his dominions. About three hundred temples in various parts of Rajputana were destroyed and

their idols broken. The emperor appointed mullahs, with a party of horse attached to each, to check all ostentatious display of idol worship, and, sometime afterwards, he forbade fairs on Hindu festivals, and issued a circular to all governors and men in authority prohibiting the employment of Hindus in the offices of state immediately under them, and commanding them to confer all such offices on Mohammedans only. About the year 1690, the emperor issued an edict prohibiting Hindus from being carried in palanquins or riding on Arab horses. All servants of the state were ordered to embrace the Mohammedan religion, under pain of dismissal, those who refused were deprived of their posts. A large number of *jogis*, *sanyasis* and other religious men were driven out of the king's dominions. The emperor reduced the duty on merchandise belonging to Mohammedans to one half the amount paid by Hindus, and remitted a number of other obnoxious taxes. Following the tradition of his house, he, in 1661, married his son, Moazzam, to the daughter of Raja Rup Singh. In the 22nd year of his reign, he renewed the Jazia, or poll-tax, on Hindus, throughout his dominions. The Hindus of Delhi gathered in large numbers beneath the jharoka window, on the banks of the river, and implored his majesty to remit the obnoxious tax; but the emperor was inexorable. The Hindus adopted the expedient of closing the shops in the city, and all business came to a standstill. They thronged the bazars from the palace to the grand mosque, one Friday, with the object of seeking relief. The crowd increased every moment, and the king's equipage was interrupted at every step. He stopped for a while to hear them, but the multitude held their ground. At length under orders from the emperor, war elephants were directed against the mob, and, the retinue forcing its way through, numbers were trodden to death by horses and elephants. After this the Hindus submitted without further demur."

HINDU REVOLTS SUPPRESSED

1. The jats

Gokal, a Jat of Tilpat, revolted against the bigoted governor of Mathura, Abdu Nabi, and in an encounter shot him dead in May, 1669. Aurangzeb sent a strong force against him. After a fierce resistance Gokal was defeated and hacked to pieces. His womenfolk were given away to Muslims. Five thousand Jats were killed and 7,000 were taken prisoners.¹⁸

2. The Satnamis

Satnamis were living at Narnaul and in its neighbourhood. Khafi Khan, the contemporary historian of Aurangzeb, writes: "Though they dress like faqirs, most of them follow agriculture or trade on a small capital. Following the path of their own faith, they wish to live with a good name and never attempt to obtain money by any dishonest and unlawful means."¹⁹ One day in 1672 a Mughal soldier picked up a quarrel with a Satnami and broke his head with his baton. Other Satnamis beat the soldier in return. The local officer sent a party of footmen to punish the Satnamis who gathered in a body, seized their arms and drove them away. Thereafter about 5,000 Satnamis gathered in arms. Small parties of troops sent by local officers were repulsed. The rebels plundered Narnaul and demolished mosques. Aurangzeb sent a force of 10,000 strong with artillery. "After a most obstinate battle, two thousand of the Satnamis fell on the field, while many more were slain during the pursuit."²⁰ All the Sathamis were wiped out, and no trace of them was left.

3. The Sikhs

Aurangzeb dealt with the Sikhs in the same manner. In November, 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was called upon to embrace Islam, and on his refusal he was beheaded. His

companions were most brutally murdered.

4. *The Rajputs*

In December, 1678, Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur, the *thanadar* of Jarnrud at the Khaibar Pass, passed away. Aurangzeb immediately proceeded to annex his kingdom to the Mughal Empire, and himself went to Ajmer in January, 1679. Jaswant Singh's two widows gave birth to two sons on their way back at Lahore. One of them died soon afterwards. The other child, Ajit Singh, was detained at Delhi to be brought up in the imperial harem. "The throne of Jodhpur was offered to Ajit on condition of his turning a Muslim."²¹ On the Rani's refusal, Aurangzeb ordered them to be taken under a strong escort to the prison fortress of Nurgarh. Before the Mughal troops could arrive, their residence in Delhi was besieged by Raghunath, a noble of Jodhpur, with one hundred devoted soldiers. There were a few Mughal troopers guarding the mansion. In the melee, Durgadas, "the flower of Rathor chivalry,"²² "slipped out with Ajit and the Ranis dressed in male attire, and rode away direct for Marwar."²³ Raghunath and his men "dyed the streets of Delhi with blood,"²⁴ and then all met hero's death. The Mughal army went in pursuit of Durgadas. Small bands of Rathors turn by turn, at intervals, barred the path of Mughal forces, and thus allowed time to Durgadas to escape. These terrible conflicts every two or three hours, dismayed the Mughals who gave up the pursuit late in the same night. Ajit and Ranis reached Marwar territory safely. Then ensued a regular war between Aurangzeb and the Rathors. "But for Durgadas's twenty-five years of unflagging exertion and wise contrivance, Ajit Singh could not have secured his father's throne."²⁵ "Jodhpur and all the great towns in the plain fell and were pillaged; the temples were thrown down and mosques erected on their sites."²⁶

The annexation of Marwar was followed by the conquest of Mewar. Aurangzeb's artillery manned by Europeans easily defeated Maharana Raj Singh of Udaipur. Chitor was seized

and 63 temples in the town were razed to the ground. At udaipur 173 temples were demolished.²⁷

5. *The Marathas*

Aurangzeb then turned his attention towards the Marathas. He reached Aurangabad on March 22, 1682, never to return to the north, and died at the same place 25 years later. The great Shiyaji had passed away at the age of 53 on April 4, 1680. His eldest son, Shambhuji, succeeded him. Aurangzeb decided to destroy him. An Englishman who was living at Karwar wrote about the Emperor on July 30, 1682 : “He is so inveterate against the Rajah that he hath thrown off his *pagri* and sworn never to put it on again, till he hath either killed, taken, or routed him out of his country.”²⁸ Aurangzeb succeeded in his object. On February 1, 1689, he was captured and dragged by his long hair.²⁹ Twenty-five of his leading chiefs along with their wives and daughters were also seized. Shambhuji and his prime minister Kavikalash “were dressed as buffoons with long fool’s caps and bells placed on their heads, mounted on camels, and brought to Bahadurgarh with drums beating and trumpets pealing. Hundreds of thousands of spectators lined the roads, to gaze at Shambhuji as at a new kind of wild beast or demon. Thus degraded, the captives were slowly paraded through the entire camp and finally brought to the Emperor who was sitting in full darbar for the occasion. At the sight of the prisoner, Aurangzeb descended from his throne and kneeling down on the carpet bowed his head to the ground in double thankfulness to the Giver of this crowning victory.”³⁰

Khafi Khan, the contemporary historian of Aurangzeb’s reign says that at this Kavikalash shouted to Shambhuji:

“O Rajah! even Aurangzeb dare not sit on the throne in thy presence, but must kneel to do thee homage.”³¹ Shambhuji did not bow before the Emperor though pressed hard by the courtiers to do so. On the other hand he asked for the hand of one of Aurangzeb’s daughters. He was

immediately blinded and the tongue of Kavikalash was cut off. They were tortured for a fortnight. On March 11, 1689, their limbs were hacked to pieces, one by one, and dogs were fed on their flesh. Their heads were fixed on spears and exhibited in all the major towns and cities of the Deccan with the beat of drums and blowing of trumpets.³² Aurangzeb then seized the surviving widows of Shivaji, wives of Shambhuji and of his younger brother Rajaram and their sons and daughters including seven year old Shahu.³³

The Marathas harass the Emperor

Now there being no head of the Marathas, hundreds of Maratha chiefs at the head of their small bands began to harass the Mughals anywhere and everywhere. It became a people's war. Aurangzeb and his generals could not be present at all places. The Emperor had to face "an enemy all pervasive from Bombay to Madras across the Indian Peninsula, elusive as the wind, without any headman or stronghold whose capture would naturally result in the extinction of their power."³⁴ The Empire's leading chiefs and men suffered terribly. "Porters disappeared; transport beasts died of hunger and overwork; scarcity of grain was ever present in his camp. The endless war in the Deccan exhausted his treasury; the Government turned bankrupt; the soldiers starving from arrears of pay (usually three years overdue) mutinied."³⁵ The Marathas were supreme. They plundered the Mughal territory and camp mercilessly. "There was an exultant and menacing Maratha army always hanging three or four miles behind the emperor's camp wherever it marched or halted."³⁶ This happened during the regime of Rajaram, the younger son of Shivaji who died at the age of thirty on March 2, 1700.

After him the leadership of the Marathas was taken over by Rajaram's 25 year old widow, Tara Bai. This young woman worked wonders. She created a new and vigorous Maharashtra in a few years. "The Maratha queen flew from camp to camp and from fortre ss to fortress, sharing the

hardships of a trooper, exposed to the sun, sleeping on the ground. Tara Bai seemed to multiply herself to be everywhere and always encouraging her officers, and planning campaigns on a wider front. So clear was her vision, unerring her judgement, that she was equally welcome on the battlefield and in the council chamber by the war-worn soldiers and astute politicians of the older generation. Within a short time the Maratha counter-offensive, at first halting and ineffective, assumed alarming proportions and began to threaten the very heart of the Mughal Empire.”²³⁷

The enormous losses sustained by the Emperor are thus described by Sir Jadunath :

“The wastage of the Deccan war which raged intensely for nearly twenty-years, was one hundred thousand soldiers and followers and three times that number of horses, elephants, camels and oxen on the Mughal side every year.”²³⁸

About the appalling economic devastation of the Maratha country, the European traveller Manucci wrote:

“The fields are left devoid of trees and bare of crops, their places being taken by the bones of men and beasts. The country was so entirely desolated and depopulated that neither fire nor light could be found in the course of a three or four day’s journey.”²³⁹

Guru Gobind Das’s contemplation

The Guru knew that he had a definite mission and duty to perform. The time had come and the hour had struck. The circumstances were favourable and the opportunity was at hand. Delay might be dangerous. If the Emperor, the mightiest of the mighty, could be defied while commanding in person, there was no reason why he should not succeed against the emperor’s governors.

A moment’s reflection reminded him that Guru Nanak had described the rulers of his time as tigers and dogs. That situation had not changed even after 200 years. The policy

of non-violence, submission and surrender had produced no effect upon these ferocious tigers and mad dogs. Appeals, protests and representations were treated as treasons, punishable with death. Agitation was followed by disastrous consequences. Should this situation be allowed to continue till eternity?, the guru thought. Musketry and gunnery were the only remedies, he realized.

After the most determined meditation on this sad state of affairs, the Guru came to the conclusion that to Commit tyrannies was bad, but to bear tyranny patiently was worse. The country did not belong to the king. The king belonged to the country, and the country belonged to the people. If the king was bad, people must rise in revolt. Without political liberty, religious intellectual, social and economic freedom could not be achieved. Political freedom could be won by armies. The armies of the suppressed people were non-existent. The spirit of the brave Jats of Agra and Delhi had been crushed. The heroic Satnamis had been completely wiped out of existence. The Rajput resistance was broken. The noble Shivaji had died young. His eldest son Shambhuji had been hacked to pieces. His only son Shahu was in captivity. The Guru's own house was no exception. His great grandfather, Guru Arjan, was tortured to death. His grandfather Hargobind had suffered twelve years' imprisonment. His father Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed. His most faithful follower, Bhai Matidas, was sawn across from head to loins, while others were boiled or skinned alive.

Gobind Das did not feel dismayed. He did not lose heart. He knew that human mind when properly inspired was capable of rising to the loftiest heights, and when rightly guided and controlled could work wonders. He also realized that he would have to depend entirely on his own resources. The hill Rajputs whom he wanted to use in the national cause had failed. He set about planning and preparing himself for the struggle to win freedom. His army was to be based on social justice. There could be no discrimination

in the name of caste, creed and colour. His soldiers unpaid, ill-armed, poorly equipped, untrained were to be inspired with feelings of patriotism and nationalism.

In *Krishna Avtar* the Guru says:

Kou Kise ko raj na de hai

Jo lai hai nij bal sit lai hai.

[No people can have self-rule as a gift from another. It is to be seized through their own strength.]⁴⁰

Was Guru Gobind Singh an Enemy of Islam?

Guru Gobind Das was determined to exterminate the religious oppression of the Mughal Government. He concentrated against the cruel Government and not against Islam. There is not a word in his speeches and writings to prove this baseless charge. Nor does history offer any event or incident in proof of it. He was an embodiment of love and affection for all. His instruction to his Sikhs were to treat everybody with courtesy and consideration. It was for this reason that both Hindus and Muslims were attracted towards him. Muslim Sufi saints and Muslim commanders of note, and hundreds of Muslim soldiers fought under his banners. Pir Buddhu Shah of Sadhaura, together with his sons and seven hundred followers fought hard in the battle of Bhangani in 1688 in which the Muslim saint lost two of his sons and hundreds of his disciples. In the battle of Anandpur in 1702 Mir Beg and Mamun Khan commanded Guru's forces in fighting against the Mughal troops. At the same place in 1704 General Sayyid Khan of the Mughal army considered it improper and unjust to wage a war against the Guru. He deserted his post and joined the Guru. Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan saved him from capture by the Mughal army. Qazi Pir Muhammad did not confirm the Guru's identity, while Rae Kalha offered him a refuge and entertained him generously.

In *Akal Ustat* the Guru says:

1. "Some are Hindus while others are Muslims. Of the

latter some are Shias and others are Sunnis. Man's caste should be considered as one." (Manas ki jat sabhai ekai pahchanbo.)

2. "Karta, Karim, Rajak, Rahim is the same. No other distinction should be recognised at all."
3. "Temple and mosque are the same. Hindu worship and Muslim prayer are the same. All men are alike, but they are under delusion."
4. "Gods, demons, heavenly dancers, singers, Muslims, Hindus wear different dresses under the condition of their countries. But they possess eyes, ears, bodies, made of the same elements, composed of earth, air, fire and water."
5. "Allah, the unknowable, the Puranas and the Quran are the same. All are manifestations of One, and One is the creator of all."⁴¹

In the *jap* Guru Gobind Das has given 735 names to God. Of these 30 are of Islam. He declared Ram and Rahim were the same. Ishwar, Allah were the same. Barat and Roza were the same. Puja and Nimaz were the same. Pandit and Qazi were the same. Brahman and Mullah were the same.

Sujan Rae Bhandari, while describing the Sikhs wrote in 1696 :

"In their eyes their own people and others as well as friends and foes are all alike. They love their friends, but they do not ill-treat their enemies."⁴²

The Guru's mission

Guru Gobind Das decided to create national awakening in Punjab as it had been done in Maharashtra by Shivaji. The time chosen was opportunate. Aurangzeb was involved in the life and death struggle in the Deccan with Marathas. Punjab was in charge of Prince Muazzam who lived in Kabul. The Governors of Lahore, Jammu and Sirhind had failed to crush him. The Government at Delhi was in a state

of disorganization. The hill rajas were in revolt against the Mughals. A better time could not be expected to fulfil his life's mission, and the Guru was not the man to miss it. He had first tried to plant his ideas in the minds of the warrior class of Rajputs of the Shivalik Hills. He soon discovered that the caste-ridden and class-dominated feudal lords would not respond to his appeals and they would not fit in his ideology. They had grown flabby possibly because of comforts enjoyed by them. He therefore turned his attention to the down-trodden masses. He believed that he would be able to achieve his objective by stirring the latent faculties of the human will, which possessed the elasticity of rising to the tallest heights as well as of sinking to the lowest depths. The Guru made full use of the strong sentiment which had been expressing itself in the Sikh community in the form of sincere devotion and loving obedience for the person of the Guru. Sujan Rae in 1696 described the devotion of the Sikhs to their Gurus thus:

“They cherish such faith in their Guru as is not found in other communities. They utter his name at all times, and consider serving him as the most meritorious act. If a wayfarer arrives at midnight and takes the name of the Guru Nanak, he is treated as a friend and brother, no matter he may be an utter stranger, or even a thief, or a robber, or an evil-doer.”²⁴³

The Guru realised that God was the wielder of arms to punish tyrants and destroy evil-doers. He was also bestower of gifts and fountainhead of mercy. Further, the Guru had been deeply struck by the idea that God had been sending a saviour at critical times to save the virtuous and destroy the wicked. He knew that he had been sent to this world for the same purpose. In *Bachitra Natak* the Guru says:

1. *Ham eh Kaj jagat mo ae*
Dharam het Gur Dev pathae
jahan taban tum dharam bitharo
Dusht dokhian pakar pachharo.

[For this purpose did I come into this world,
 God sent me for the sake of dharam;
 Wherever you are, spread dharam,
 Root out the oppressors and the wicked.]

2. *Yahi kaj dhara ham janmam*
Samajh leho sadhu sab manmam
Dharam chalawan sant ubaran
*Dust saban ko mul uparan.*⁴⁴

[For this purpose was I born,
 Bear this in mind all ye saints;
 To propagate *dharam*, to protect saints,
 To annihilate all the tyrants.]

In order to seek divine approval of his mission, he entered into a blissful communion with Almighty and received the following reply:

Main apna sut tobe niwaja
panth prachur karbe kabo saja
jahan taban tai dharam ch alae
*Kabudh karan te lok hatae.*⁴⁵

[I have cherished you as my son,
 I have created you to preach righteousness;
 Wherever you are, promote righteousness,
 Restrain the people from evil deeds.]

The Guru then prays to God to give him strength of mind to fight valorously to a finish for victory in the cause of right and justice. He says:

Deh Siva bar mohi ehai
Subh karman te kabhun na tarun,
Na darun ar so jab jae larun,
Nishche kar apni jit karun,
Aru Sikh hau apne hi man kau
Eh lalach hu gun tau uchrun,
Jab av ki audh nidhan bane,
*At hi ran mai tab jujh marun.*⁴⁶

[O God ! give me the boon that I may not deter from righteous deeds;

Nor may I fear from an enemy, when I go to fight,

I must have determination for victory;

And I may guide my mind to aspire after uttering your attributes;

When the end of my life comes, then I may die fighting heroically.]

The Guru then invokes for the long life of all those whoever remember God and fight in the righteous cause. In *Krishna Avatar* he writes:

Dhan joyo tih kau jag main

Mukh te Rari chit main yudh bichare.

[Blessed are they in this world,

who have Hari on their tongue and war in their heart.]

The foundation of the Khalsa, March 30, 1699

The Guru declared that his mission would be proclaimed at Anandpur on the first of Baisakh, the New Year Day, March 30, 1699. He invited the entire audience to attend the grand function.⁴⁷ He was then on a visit to the shrine of Naina Devi.

The Guru remained busy in meditation and contemplation. On the morning of 30th March he sought God's blessings:

Thad bhayo main jor kar bachan kaha sar nyae

Panth chale tab jagat men jab tum ho sabae.

[I stood up with folded hands and head bent down and said,

Panth can flourish in the world only with your help.]

He entered a specially constructed canopy where a huge congregation was seated. Behind it there was a small tent which was closed on all sides and it could be entered from the canopy alone. The Guru asked them to utter the following call after him:

No one hath found its limits.

Thou art God of gods, King of kings,

Compassionate to the poor, and cherisher of the lowly.”

Addressing the fighting weapons the Guru said:

Jite sbastar nam

Namaskar tam

Jite astar bhen

Namaskar ten.52

Namaskaryan more tiran tufang,

Namo kbag, adong, abhen abhang,

Gadaen grishtan, namo saithiyan.

[Like them no other hero is born]

He made a stimulating appeal in the name of the country and nation. He placed great emphasis on the love of the mother country and loyalty to dharam. He dwelt on the necessity of subverting the Mughal Empire and building a new nation. He presented a picture of a new class of men and women ready to sacrifice everything in the service of the nation. He put forth the belief that the time was ripe for action.

After this exciting oration, the Guru flashed his sword and said that every great deed was preceded by equally great sacrifice. The Holy Sword would create a heroic nation after supreme sacrifice. He said that the Dharam thirsted for sacrificial blood. The Guru demanded a devotee in whose heart he would plunge his sword. This sent a thrill of horror in the audience. He repeated it in a sterner and more sonorous voice. All were terror-stricken and there was no response at the first and second call. At the third call, Daya Ram, a Khatri of village Dalla in District Lahore, rose in his seat and expressed willingness to lay down his life. He was led into the adjoining tent and asked to sit there quietly. He dipped his sword blade into a vessel full of goat's blood. The general belief is that the Guru had tied five goats, and he killed them one by one with a single stroke. This

assertion does not appear to be plausible. At the first killing the goats would have bleated loudly which could have been easily heard in the open ground where the Guru was conducting the meeting. He came back with the sword dripping with blood, and asked for another head. Dharam Das, a Jat of Jatwara village in District Saharanpur, offered his life. He was also taken to the same place. The blade was again immersed in blood. The sword was gleamed again and the Guru said: "Is there any other Sikh who will offer me his head? I am in great need of Sikhs' heads."⁵⁴ Sahib Chand, a barber, stood up. The Guru acted similarly. At the call for a fourth Sikh the audience was horrified. Some fled away, while others bent down their heads in despair. Himmat Chand Kahar or water carrier by caste offered himself for the sacrifice. The fifth to volunteer was Mohkam Chand Chhimba, or a calico-printer. ⁵⁵ The Guru stopped at five. He then ordered the curtain separating the tent from the canopy to be removed. All were wonder-struck to see the five men standing hale and hearty. The whole area rang with loud applause and thunderous clapping of hands.

All the five men were robed in similar new dresses and garlanded and then brought into the assembly. The Guru declared that Baba Nanak had found only one devoted Sikh in Guru Angad, while he had found five such Sikhs. Through the devotion of one true disciple, Sikhism had flourished so well. By the consecration of five Sikhs his mission was bound to succeed beyond measure. He further said that since the time of Guru Nanak the newly initiated Sikhs had taken *charanpabul* or water in which Gurus had dipped their toes. It developed spirit of humility and meekness. The times had changed. In place of humility and meekness boldness and pluck were required. He would therefore change the form of baptism and would administer to his warrior Sikhs, water stirred with a double-edged dagger in an iron vessel, and would change the name Sikh to Singh or lion. This title previously was exclusively confined to the noble Rajputs. His Singhs would look upon themselves as

inferior to no other. Every man was a sworn soldier from the time of his baptism. His Singhs would fight against the enemies of their faith and freedom like lions. They would be rulers in this life and would attain salvation and bliss hereafter.⁵⁶

The Guru's wife did not like that the five Sikhs who had offered their heads to the Guru, should be given plain water. She immediately brought a plate full of sugar cakes (*patashas*), and with the approval of the Guru, put them into water. The Guru observed: "We filled the Panth with heroism (*bir-ras*), you have mixed with it love (*prem-ras*)⁵⁷ While stirring water the Guru recited the sacred hymns of the holy Granth. The following five *banis* were recited by the Guru while preparing the *amrit* or nectar: Guru Nanak's *japji*, Guru Amar Das's *Anand*, and his own *jap*, *Chaupai* and ten *Swayyas*. The five Sikhs were asked to kneel down on their left knees and look into the eyes of the Guru. In this way the Guru's soul power penetrated into their souls. The Guru then gave everyone of them five palmfuls of sweet water called Amrit or nectar to drink, and five times was the holy water sprinkled over their heads and faces. They were designated *panj Pyare* or the five beloved ones. The Guru said that the five beloved ones were his sons.⁵⁸ Individually each was called a Singh and collectively they were given the name of Khalsa.

After administering baptism, the Guru stood before these five beloved ones and requested them to baptise him in the same manner. They pleaded their unfitness for such a performance. The Guru replied that he was not superior to his devoted disciples. His superiority lay in one thing. The Guru had attained salvation, *nirvan* or *sachkhand*, while his disciples were in the process of attaining it. The Guru said: "The Khalsa is the Guru and the Guru is the Khalsa. There is no difference between you and me." They baptised him, everyone of the five giving one palmful of nectar and sprinkling it on his head and face turn by turn. He also added Singh to his own name in place of Das and

henceforth came to be called Gobind Singh.

Somebody in the congregation observed: “*Wab Guru Gobind Singh, ape Guru te ape Chela*“. [Bravo Guru Gobind Singh ! himself divine as well as disciple.]

The Guru’s Khalsa consisted of four *Shudras* and only one *Kshatriya*. Guru Gobind Singh then addressed the Five Beloved Ones:

You are now of one creed, followers of one path. You are above all religions, all creeds, all castes, and all classes. You are the immortal soldiers of true dharma. You are the messengers of God. This country’s honour and liberty is entrusted to you by Wahiguru. Mix freely with the world, but remain of one soul, one ideal, and one aim. As Baba Nanak and his successors possessed one soul and one mind, so you possess one soul and one mind in the service of Wahiguru, dharam and country. You are the soldiers of God. Today you have taken new birth in the home of the Guru. You are members of the Khalsa brotherhood. Anandpur is your birthplace. Gobind Singh is your father. You are the citizens of Bharatvarsha. Its independence and security is entrusted to you. Work for it with one mind. Success is sure. From today your salutation will be : Wahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahiguru Ji Ki Fatah. Koer Singh in Gur Bilas Patshahi Das says:

Char barn ik barn pukara

Nam Khalsa panth sudhara

Meaning of Khalsa

There are different views about the meaning of Khalsa. Some say that in Persian the word means pure and sincere, and that the guru had purified his Sikhs after a certain ceremony by a test of steel and called them Singhs or lions. This is the general view which is accepted by almost all historians.

As a matter of fact the Guru wished to inspire his’ Singhs

with the conviction that while engaged in the service of the *Panth* (community) and the country, God was always present with them. For this purpose he made full use of the number five.

The number five has always been sacred in India from time immemorial. The best form of self-government provided by ancient sages was panchayat or a council of five. *Panchon men Parmeshwar* (God is present in the council of chosen five) was the famous saying in those days. The village administration in this country based on this principle survived unpolluted through all the upheavals of history. Guru Nanak also laid emphasis on number five. In *japji* he says:

*Panch parwan, panch pradhan,
Panche pawen dargah man,
Panche so hain dar rajan,
Panchan ka Gur ek dhayan*

Guru Gobind Singh made the best use of this spiritual sentiment. According to Giani Kartar Singh Kalaswalia in *Sri Guru Dashmesh Prakash*, page 106, Guruji sent from Paonta five Sikhs to Kashi to study Sanskrit. He built five forts at Anandpur. He selected five beloved ones at Anandpur. He read five *banis* while preparing *amrit*. He administered to each of them five palmfuls of *amrit* or holy water.

With a view to giving the Singhs an optimistic view of, life in the midst of trials and tribulations which lay ahead of them, the Guru gave them a unique form of salutation:

*Wah Guru ji ka Khalsa,
Wah Guru ji ki Fatah.*

[The Khalsa is thine, O Lord ! So does the Victory belong to you.]

Each half of this salutation again consists of five words. By this mode of salutation a strong link was established between the Khalsa and Victory, these two being the offspring of the Lord.

Guru Gobind Singh was in search of a word which could

have the sanctity of five and the presence of God. Persian was the language of the elite and the Guru was himself a great scholar of Persian language and literature. He adopted the word Khalsa for his Singhs because it fulfilled both the conditions in the most appropriate manner. Besides, this word had already been used by Guru Hargobind for his Sikhs. In Persian script Khalsa consists of five letters:

- (i) *Ke* or Kh stands for *Khud* or oneself.
- (ii) *Alif* or A represents Akal Purkh, Allah or God.
- (iii) *Lam* or L signifies Labbaik. The New Royal Persian--English Dictionary by S.C. Paul, 1925 edition, Allahabad, page 357, gives its meaning as follows: "What do you want with me? Here I am. What would you have?"
- (iv) *Swad* or S alludes to Sahib or Lord or Master.
- (v) It ends with earlier A or H. *Alif* or A points to *Azadi* or freedom. If written with *He* or H as it is generally the case, it refers to Huma, a legendary bird. Every head this bird over-shades, in time wears a crown. The word Khalsa, therefore, has the sacredness of number five as well as the presence of God with his Singhs both engaged in a pleasant conversation. God Himself asks the Singhs:

"What do you want from me? Here am I. What would you have?" The Singhs reply:

Lord! give us liberty and sovereignty. "

The formula of five into five

For the guidance of his Singhs, Guru Gobind Singh prescribed a formula consisting of five principles each governed by five rules. The five principles were: Five beliefs, five symbols, five vows, five deliverances and five rules of conduct.

(i) Five beliefs :

The Khalsa were enjoined to have fivefold belief in God (Akalpurkh), Guru Granth, Greeting- *Wab Guru ji ka Khalsa*,

Wah Guru ji ki Fatab and Guru Nanak's Japji.

(ii) *Five symbols:*

In those days Hindus of respectable families wore five ornaments: gold earrings, a necklace, gold or silver bangles, finger ring and a waist belt of gold or silver or a *tagri*. The wearer felt proud of displaying his superior social position. At the same time he ran the risk of losing these articles as well as his life into the bargain.

Guru Gobind Singh provided to his followers, five jewels which were within reach of everybody down to the poorest peasant and the lowest labourer. Instead of creating fear in the mind of the wearer, his five jewels made his Singh bold, brave and awe-inspiring. These jewels were *kesh* or long hair, *kangha* or comb, kirpan or dagger, *kara* or steel bracelet and *kaucha* or a pair of knicker-bockers. These symbols gave the Khalsa a semblance of unity, close brotherhood and equality. They developed group consciousness.

Several arguments are advanced in favour of unshorn hair, beards and moustaches:

1. That it was a general practice with Hindu sages and ascetics to keep long hair tied in a knot on top and flowing beard, and that Guru Gobind Singh wanted his disciples, in spite of their being householders, to be *karam yogis* or practical saints like Rama, Krishna and Bharata or the Five Pandavas.
2. That the warlike tribesmen of the North-West Frontier kept long hair though trimmed, and that the Guru wished his followers to have a similarly impressive and alarming appearance.
3. That the Guru adopted the practice of Goddess Durga of preserving long locks unshorn.
4. That the previous Gurus also kept long hair and Gobind Singh did not introduce any innovation.
5. The most reasonable explanation is that Guru Gobind Singh desired to provide his Khalsa a natural military uniform, the least expensive and most impressive permanent costume.

Besides he deemed it necessary that their heads should be properly guarded from sword cuts and *latbi* blows by means of long hair and turbans.

Comb indicated cleanliness. Steel bracelet developed an iron will and destroyed the evil effects of misfortune. It was a permanent substitute of *rakbri*, a thread tied by sisters on the wrists of brothers, reminding them of their duty to help and protect them. Similarly the *kara* served as a reminder to the Sikhs that they had promised to be true to the Guru and the Panth and that promise must be kept at all cost.

Dagger depicted power and prestige. The pair of knickers-bockers aimed at agility. It was more convenient for fighting than the long *dboti* of Hindus and loose trousers of Muslims. Thus the five symbols of Guru Gobind Singh gave strength to the body, mind and soul and developed an integrated personality of the wearer.

(iii) Five Vows

The Khalsa were required not to do five things: (a) to shave or cut hair, (b) to smoke⁶⁰, (c) to eat *halal* meat of the animal killed in the Muslim style, (d) to wear a cap [To Sikh sar topi dhare, sat janam kushti hoe mare] and, (e) to worship tombs, graves and relics of cremation and cherish superstitions.⁶¹

(iv) Five deliverances

Guru Gobind Singh declared the following five deliverances for his disciples:

1. *Dharam Nash* or freedom from previous religious practices and customs.⁶²
2. *Karam Nash* or the obliteration of the past bad deeds.
3. *Janam Nash* or giving up the family influences and caste effects. The Guru explained that all the four Hindu castes had been blended into the Khalsa like the

betel leaf. When mixed with *supari* (betel nut), *Katha* (catechu) and *chuna* (lime), the leaf reddened lips, strengthened gums, gave flavour to mouth and added heat to the body. Individually none of these things could produce this effect. Similarly the four Hindu castes when united, would change them into a flower possessing beauty, bloom, fragrance and freshness. All the castes were blended on a democratic basis in which all were equal, and nobody was higher or lower.

4. *Sharam Nash* or the disappearance of hereditary professional distinctions, as all the callings like those of priests, soldiers, traders, weavers, tailors, barbers, cobblers and sweepers were given equal respect and status.

5. *Bharam Nash* or discarding the rituals prescribed by previous practices.

(v) Five rules of conduct

Five rules were laid down for the general observance of the Sikhs:

1. Before beginning every work or enterprise, prayer should be offered.
2. The Sikhs should help one another and serve the Panth.
3. They should practice riding and using arms.
4. A Sikh coveting another's property would go to hell.
5. Regarding sexual matters the Guru said that his father Guru Tegh Bahadur had given him these instruction which should serve as a guide to the Sikhs:

“O son, as long as there is life in the body, make this thy sacred duty ever to love thine own life more and more. Approach not another woman's couch either by mistake or even in a dream. Know, that the love of another's wife is a sharp dagger. Believe me, death entereth the body by making love to another's wife. They who think it great cleverness to enjoy another's wife, shall in the end, die the death of dogs.”⁶³

The Guru declared:

*“Par nari ki sej,
bhul sapne hun na jaiyo.”*

[Go not ye, even in dream, to the bed of a woman other than your own wife]

Abolition of the institution of Masands

Immediately after the creation of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh took another momentous decision in regard to the institution of Masands. The third Guru, Amar Das, 1552-1574, had organised his Sikhs territorially into twenty-two districts. They were called manjis because the priest in charge of the district sat on a cot, while all others were seated on the floor. These missionaries were called Sangatias. During the pontificate of Guru Ram Das, 1574-1581, they were called Ramdas after the name of the Guru. The fifth Guru, Arjan, 1581-1606, put a Sikh of status in charge of each district. He called him by the dignified term of Masand. It was the Panjabi form of the Persian word Musannad or an elevated man of grace and dignity. The Masands collected one-tenth or *daswandh* of the income of each Sikh living in the area of their jurisdiction, and presented it to the Guru on the occasions of Baisakhi and Diwali, twice a year.

The Masand system worked well in the beginning at least up to the time of the sixth Guru, Hargobind. The seventh Guru, Har Rae, died at the age of thirty-one. Out of this short life he lived at Nahan for twelve years. The eighth Guru Har Krishan died at the age of eight. The ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur lived outside Punjab for many years, and when he came back, he was involved in a conflict with the Government and was shortly afterwards executed. The central control having been loose and weak the masands became independent to all intents and purposes. They began to gather riches and power for themselves, and became corrupt.

Ram Rae, the eldest son of Guru Har Rae, had been excluded from succession for misinterpreting the holy Granth. He established his own institution of Guruship at Dehra Dun. Many people became his followers. To collect their offerings he also appointed masands. He failed to control them. Guru Gobind Singh in his early days was living at Paonta, not very far from Dehra Dun. He sought Guru Gobind Singh's help. He said: "My masands are getting too powerful and headstrong. When I am gone, do protect my family and property from being ruined at their hands."⁶⁴

A little later Ram Rae was in a trance. The masands said he had died. Ram Rae's wife protested that it often happened before and he was alive. The masands cremated him and seized his property. At her request Guru Gobind Singh went to Dehra Dun and punished them. This was the first experience by the Guru of their arrogance and effrontery.

The Guru's own masands had become corrupt, selfish, profligate and cruel. Frequent complaints were pouring in against their misbehaviour. They treated the Sikhs with scorn, and persecuted them. They had courtesans in their harems. They demanded the hands of the daughters of the Sikhs for their servants and sycophants. They extorted from them good food, good beds and full service. They let loose their horses into the green and ripe fields of the Sikhs.⁶⁵

They were also adopting a defiant attitude towards the Guru. They retained a larger part of the offerings for themselves. They opposed the Guru's Ranjit Nagara, the huge kettledrum beaten every morning and evening at Anandpur. They exerted pressure upon Gobind Singh to lend his elephant and the tent to the Raja of Bilaspur. They often boasted that the Guru's power and prestige was mainly due to their work of preaching and procuring money.⁶⁶

In *Bachitra Natak* the Guru condemns the masands thus:

Jo Babe ke dam na dai hain

Tin te gah Babar ke lai hain

*Dai dai tin ko bari sajai Pun laben greh loot banai.*⁶⁷

[Those who do not pass on the offerings received for Baba, They would be seized by the successors of Babar; Severe punishment would be inflicted upon them, Then their houses would be ransacked,]

On this occasion Guru Gobind Singh abolished this institution. Most of the masands were present there. The notorious ones were severely punished, while others had to pay fines.

The *Akhbarat-e-Durbar-e-Mualla* or a newsletter of the Mughal court dated May 13, 1710 stated: "Guru Gobind Singh had summarily dismissed the masands long ago."⁶⁸ This measure not only freed the Sikhs from humiliation but also restored a close personal contact between the Guru and his disciples.

He issued strict instructions to the Sikhs not to pay anything to the masands, but make their offerings to the Guru directly while visiting him. Those Sikhs who gave money to masands were placed under a curse:

*Jab hawai hai bemukh bina dhan
Tab charhi hain Sikhian kah mangan
Je je Sikh tin ain dhan dai hain
Loot Malechh tin u hau lai hain.*

[When these disloyal persons become paupers, They go to the Sikhs to beg;

Those Sikhs who give them money,
Shall be plundered by the Muslims.]

In *Chaupais* 12 to 15 the Guru says he will not forgive them, and God also will not own them.

Admonition to princes

Besides the Sikhs, a large number of hill Rajputs and the Rajput princes of the neighbourhood had gathered there

to see what the Guru was doing. After creating the Khalsa, the Guru addressed them:

“How has your religious, political and social status deteriorated ! You have abandoned the worship of the true God and addressed your devotions to gods, goddesses, rivers, trees, etc. Through ignorance you know not how to govern your territories; through indolence and vice you disregard the interests of your subjects. You place over them officials who not only hate you, but are besides your mortal enemies. You despise and loath one another through your narrow prejudices, and you act contrary to the wishes of the great Almighty Father. Your morals have become so perverted that through fear and with a desire to please your “Musalman rulers, you give them your daughters to gratify their lust. Self-respect hath found no place in your thoughts, and you have forgotten the history of your sires. I am intensely concerned for your fallen state. Are you not ashamed to call yourselves Rajputs when the Musalmans seize your wives and daughters before your very eyes? Your temples have been demolished and mosques built on their sites; and many of your faith have been forcibly converted to Islam. If you still possess a trace of bravery and of the ancient spirit of your race, then listen to my advice, embrace the Khalsa religion, and gird up your loins to elevate the fallen condition of your country.”⁷⁰

Parable of donkey

After the creation of the Khalsa, a large number of Sikhs stayed at Anandpur to get baptism and to enjoy the company of the youthful Guru who was then 32. A Sikh presented a tiger’s skin to Guru Gobind Singh. In the evening stroll the Guru saw a donkey grazing in a field. He left two Sikhs to keep a watch on the donkey’s movements. In the night the tiger’s skin was fastened on the donkey. Early next morning people raised an alarm. The whole population was terrified Nobody dared to stir out of his house. The Guru collected his Sikhs, approached the donkey and removed

the tiger's skin. The Guru then said: You should be Khalsa from within and without and should not behave like the disguised donkey. Your persecutors are outwardly like lions, but inwardly they are cowards. Face them boldly, and they will be beaten.

Significance of the creation of the Khalsa

1. The creation of the Khalsa was an epoch-making event in the religious and political history of the country. It marked the beginning of the rise of a new people, destined to play the role of hero against all oppression and tyranny. The severities of the high caste people over their brethren, the Shudras, were set at naught as soon as one joined the ranks of the Khalsa, where all were equal and ready to render one another every help and useful service. Their only difficulty lay in destroying the organised oppression of tyrannical despotism of the Mughal Government. It was a gigantic task for the small community of the Khalsa. Under the direction of the Guru, the Khalsa took up the profession of arms and the results were most surprising. The people, lowliest of the low, who had lived for centuries under complete servility, now turned into doughty warriors, the praises of whose physique and valour were sung by the whole world including their bitterest foes. The Guru's assertion made on this occasion was fully justified:

*“Chiryān kolon baṛ marawan,
Tan main Gobind nam kahawan.”*

[Call me by the name of Gobind only if I succeed in making sparrows kill hawks.]

Its implication was that his Khalsa who were poor and unarmed and who were as docile and innocent as sparrows, would destroy the hawks meaning the Mughal Empire and the foreigners whose constant stream was running from the north-west across the

Punjab to Delhi and other places.

2. The Guru declared himself equal with his five beloved ones. He considered them even superior to himself when he took baptism at their hands. It was pure and genuine democracy. It represented spirit of the Glorious Revolution in Britain which had taken place ten years earlier in 1689. It had demolished the theory of the divine rights of kingship.

3. Further, the foundation of the Khalsa implied that the people had the divine right to overthrow a tyrannical government, and establish in its place a government of their own choice. In this doctrine the Guru anticipated the Declaration of Rights by the thirteen American colonies in 1776.

4. The Guru gave the Khalsa the social ideal of equality and close brotherhood. There was to be no distinction of birth, caste, class or colour. All were equal in social status, and had the same rights and privileges. He thus enunciated ninety years earlier the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity which formed the bed-rock of the French Revolution.

SOURCES AND NOTES

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42. *Khulasat-ut-Twarikh* 70.
43. Ibid.
44. *Bachitra Natak*, Section vi. Chaupais 42, 43.
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46. *Chandi Charitra*, Part I, 231.
47. Sainapat, *Sri Gur Sobha*, Hamam Singh, Lahore, 1925, pp. 18-19.
48. *Bachitra Natak*, Nanak Chand Naz, Jullundur, 1952, No. 140, p. 126.
49. *Gur Rilas*, quoted by Banerjee in *Evolution of the Khalsa*, ii, 95.
50. Macauliffe, v, 83.
51. Ibid, 286, 287, 289.
52. *Bachitra Natak*, Raswal Chhand.
53. *Bachitra Natak*, Bhujang Paryat Chhand.
54. Macauliffe, v, 92.

55. Ganda Singh, *Makbīz-e-Tvarikh-e-Sikhan*, i, 8.
56. Macauliffe, v, 93.
57. Kalaswalia, 203.
58. W.L. M'Gregor draws a ludicrous conclusion: "The term Singh, applied by Gooroo Govind to his followers, may have had reference to the great number of lions infesting the Punjab even in his time." *History of the Sikhs*, i, 23.
59. The word Wah Guru is used in *Puratan Janam Sakhi* on p. 23. It says Guru Nanak used it. McLeod, op. cit., 41.
60. The Guru said: "Wine is bad, bhang destroyeth one generation, but tobacco destroyeth all generations." (Macauliffe, v, 153). Santokh Singh says that the tobacco leaf resembles the ear of a cow, and so the Guru prohibited its use. *Sura* } *Prakash*, 5571, f.n.
61. Bhai Nandlal, *Rabit Namah*, published by Bhai Partap Singh Sunder Singh, Amritsar, p. 2 "Gor marhi mat bhul na mane". [Worship not even by mistake a tomb or a relic of cremation.]
62. Phokat dharam na kauri kaman. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh*, 1963, p. 3.
63. Macauliffe, v, 110.
64. Kartar Singh, *Life of Guru Gobind Singh*, pp. 70-71.
65. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh*, 1963, pp. 24-25.
66. Macauliffe, iv, 316-17; V,S, 11, 12, 23, 84, 86.
67. *Bachitra Natak*, Section xiii, Chaupai 10.
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PART IV
GURU GRANTH SAHIB

GURU GOBIND SINGH DESIGNATES GURU GRANTH SAHIB TO BE THE GURU

GANDA SINGH

The two historical facts that Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, died at Nanded in the Deccan, now in Maharashtra, on October 6-7, 1708, and was cremated there, have been substantiated not only by contemporary and semi-contemporary evidence but also by other authorities of undeniable historical importance. It has also been authenticated beyond doubt that Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint anyone of his followers to succeed him as Guru and that he had commanded his followers to look upon the Word of the great Masters, as embodied in their holy book, the *Granth Sahib*, as their Guru, thenceforward known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

GURU'S PERSONALITY

Like all his predecessors, from Guru Nanak to the Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh was a historical person who lived in this world. He was born at Patna in the eastern province of Bihar, he travelled throughout the length of the Uttar Pradesh on his way to Anandpur and spent the greater part of his life in the Punjab. He was neither a renunciatory recluse, nor an ultra-spiritualistic saint given to slumbering meditation and thus beyond the reach of his fellow beings. He was no doubt a godly being. But his godliness was not other-worldliness. He believed and declared that he had come to the world with a mission to protect, encourage and help the good and to chastise and uproot the evil-doers.

This could be done only by leading an active life in the world, not in the hiding retreats of mountains and jungles, far away from the people, but by living amongst them, teaching and guiding them both by precept and example, leading them at every step of their worldly lives, protecting them from aggression and oppression, ready to lay down his life in their cause, if need be. This was Guru Gobind Singh, both a teacher and a disciple-the real Khalsa-a saint and a soldier, a man of the world and yet detached.

As the son of a martyred father, he was the subject of the attention of both the oppressed people and of the oppressive rulers. While his people looked up to him as their saviour and socio-political guide, the power-mad rulers looked upon him as a dangerous enemy who was inspiring their meek and submissive subjects with a spirit of freedom and resistance. The latter, therefore, were ever watchful of his programmes and vigilant of his activities.

As a scholar of many languages and a writer of soul stirring poetry, practising the use of arms and training his men in it, he always acted in the open and kept himself in close and constant touch with those around him. As a commander of his armies fighting either against the Hill Rajas of the Sivaliks or Mughalleves of Sirhind and Lahore, he always occupied a prominent place within the sight of his men. Those were the days when it was *darshan* of the leader that inspired and sustained them in the field of action. He created out of the indistinguishable common people, the distinct Order of the Khalsa, with an uncommon form and symbols that helped distinguish them easily in a crowd of millions.

The Guru knew no despondency and did not give way to frustration under the most adverse circumstances. He lost not his heart at the death of his four young sons and his aged mother. Two of his sons he had himself sent into the battle-field at Chamkaur. He heard the news of cold-blooded murder of his younger sons at Sirhind with complete resignation to the Will of God. His letter addressed to

Emperor Aurangzeb from Dina, popularly known as the *Zafar Namah* or *Epistle of Victory*, evidently in reply to one from the Emperor, in its style and content, bespeaks volumes for the unruffled and evercalm state of his mind.

With the cessation of war, Guru Gobind Singh again engaged himself in literary pursuits and completed and edited the Sikh's holy Book at Talwandi Sabo, now known as Damdama Sahib, in the Bhatinda district of Punjab.

GURU'S MAGNANIMITY

Forgetful of the long-standing animosity and continued persecution by the Mughal emperors, the Guru favourably responded to the invitation of Aurangzeb for a meeting and set out for the Deccan where the Emperor then lay encamped. But the Emperor died on February 20, 1707, while Guru was on his way to the south. He received the news near Baghaur in Rajasthan. He immediately marched back towards the Punjab and was in the neighbourhood of Delhi when the emissaries of the heir-apparent Prince Muhammed Muazzam appealed to him for assistance. He was then face to face with a great trial of his life. And he was able to meet it boldly and in the right way. He was not to be deflected from the right decision by memories of past bitter relations with the prince's ancestors. For him the bitter past had died with the past. He rose above the weaknesses of revengeful mortals and, like a true Guru and a chivalrous soldier that he was, he helped him with a detachment of men in the battle of Jajau in June 1707. He met the new emperor, Shah Alam Bahadur Shah (the old Prince Muhammed Muazzam) at Agra in a public *darbar* on July 23, 1707, when the royal host publicly acknowledged the Guru's assistance in the war of succession and in token thereof, presented to him, a rich dress of honour, including a *dbukh-dbukhi* worth sixty thousand rupees. The Guru was then accompanied by a number of Sikhs. He kept his people in the Punjab and elsewhere fully informed through formal letters not only of his important activities but also

of his future intentions and programme. He kept nothing secret from the Khalsa whom he had openly, and on many occasions, declared to be his very *self-Khalsa mero rup hai khas, Khalse men hau karuan nivas*. Nor did he ever, throughout his normal life, travel or move about incognito. In the company of Emperor Bahadur Shah moving to the Deccan, he was accompanied by a number of Sikhs and availed himself of the opportunity of visiting the various Sikh *sangats* on the way. The *Tarikh-i-Bahadur Shahi* tells us that, when accompanying the royal camp, “He was in the habit of constantly addressing assemblies of worldly persons, religious fanatics and all sorts of people.” (Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, vii, p. 566)

HIS LAST DAYS

At Nanded, where he arrived in the last week of August 1708, he performed the normal duties of life and regularly attended and addressed the assemblies of the Sikhs and other people both in the morning and afternoon when the *dhadis* headed by Nath Mall and his companions recited ballads on Sikh themes. He was in the best of spirits throughout his stay there. Although warned on his way to the Deccan by the Dadupanthi saint Jait Ram of the sorceries of the Bairagi ascetic Madho Das, the Guru visited his hermitage on the bank of the River Godavari on September 3, 1708, the day of Sun-eclipse and successfully reclaimed him to a normal life in the world. He then baptized him into a regular Khalsa and relumed him with Promethean fire to play in the Punjab the historic role of a valiant hero and a great martyr. Even when he had been stabbed near the heart and his imperfectly healed wound had burst open as the result of his bending a stiff bow, he maintained his usual cheerfulness and told his sorrowful Sikhs not to give way to mourning on his death.

In his last farewell message, he told the Khalsa:

“I have entrusted you to the Immortal God..... I have

infused my mental and bodily spirit into the *Granth Sahib* and the Khalsa..... Obey the *Granth Sahib*. It is the visible body of the Guru.” (Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. V, p. 244.)

HISTORIC STEP

It is a very significant thing indeed from historical point of view that he did not nominate anyone of his followers to succeed him as Guru of the Sikhs. Those who have studied the story of his life know that at the institution of the baptismal ceremony and, through it, of the creation of the Khalsa, on the Baisakhi day of 1756 *Vikrami*, 30th March, 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 Singhs (the Khalsa). This virtually meant the surrender of his high office of guruship to the Will of the Khalsa and its merger into the body politic of the New Order. And this is what he reaffirmed and declared from his deathbed. In the words of Sainapat, who was not only a contemporary of the Guru but was also one of his trusted courtiers at Anandpur and who wrote his *Sri Gur Sobhain* 1711, within three years of the Guru's death:

“A day before his death, the Singhs asked him as to 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 our Supreme *Master-Satguru hamara*' (XVIII, 40-44, 805-809).

This 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 the *Rehit-nama* that the Guru had told him that his one form is the formless Supreme Spirit and the

other *Granth Ji – the Gur-Sabda*, the Word of the great Gurus incorporated in the holy *Granth Sahib* – “*Dusar rup Granth ji jan..... mera rup Granth ji jan, is men bhed nabin kuch man* (have no doubt about it).” The visible form is the Sikhs, the Khalsa, absorbed in the *gurubani* (the Word of the Guru, the *Guru Granth Sahib*), night and day.

GURU'S COMMANDMENT

Another close associate of the Guru and the author of a *Rehit-nama* is Bhai Prahlad Singh who has also recorded the Guru's commandment in this respect saying:

“With the order of the Eternal Lord has been established the (Sikh) Panth:

All the Sikhs are hereby commanded to obey the Granth as the Guru.” (*Rehit-nama Bhai Prahlad Singh*).

Similarly Bhai Chaupa Singh, another associate of the Guru, has mentioned this commandment in his *Rehit-nama*.

PERSONAL GURUSHIP ABOLISHED

Thus Guru Gobind Singh 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*, believing in the Unity and Uniqueness of the One Formless, Self-existing, All -pervading and Eternal God.

With this, the historical life of Guru Gobind Singh came to an end and he departed from this world on *Katik” Sudi 5, 1765 Bikrami*, October 6-7, 1708 A.D.

There is abundant reliable, original, contemporary and semi-contemporary evidence available for comparative study of different versions of controversial events and for sifting fact from fiction. It is the light of such material that we propose to examine here the last event of the earthly life of Guru Gobind Singh, i.e., his death at Nanded and the appointment of his successor.

It will greatly help us to understand the various points of this study if we know the different types of scholars who have written about the last days of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded.

EYEWITNESSES

First of all there are those who were then present at Nanded or had been in its neighbourhood and had unmistakable knowledge of his death. To this type also belong those who had known the Guru personally, had met his companions and had received first-hand information about the end of his life.

IMPARTIAL SCHOLARS

The second type comprises the unattached scholars who have written on this topic purely from historical point of view. Only such of them have taken notice of his last command and farewell message as had studied the growth and development of the Sikh movement from the time of Guru Nanak and were interested in the religious life of the Sikh people after the death of their last Guru. They are mostly non-Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Christians.

ACTUAL FACTS

To come to the story of the death of Guru Gobind Singh, it is agreed on all hands that, while at Nanded, he was one evening stabbed by a Pathan and that his wound was stitched and bandaged by a surgeon sent by the Emperor Bahadur Shah. It is also accepted without doubt that his imperfectly healed wound burst open when the Guru bent a stiff bow presented to him by a visitor.

The news of the death of Guru Gobind Singh finds a prominent mention in the Royal Court News, *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, of October-November, 1708 A.D. and the *Bahadur Shah Nama* in a number of places. Emperor Bahadur Shah had crossed the river Godavari on October

7, 1708, to quell the rebellion of his younger brother Kam Bakhsh before the news about the death of the Guru was reported to him. For the next three weeks he was extremely busy preparing for the coming struggle. On October 28, the Emperor ordered the grant of a dress of honour to the son of Jamshed Khan Mghan who had died at the hands of the Guru. Apparently he was the same person who had under the assumed name of Gul Khan stabbed the Guru at Nanded and had fallen under his sword before he could escape. Or, he might have been the companion of Gul Khan killed by the Sikhs while he was trying to run away after the death of Gul Khan.

On Ramazan 9, 2nd Bahadurshahi (November 11, 1708), the Emperor's orders were solicited about the movable property of the deceased Guru, which according to the Mughal practice, ought to have been confiscated. The Emperor, however, commanded that "These goods will not add to the affluence of the royal treasury. It is the property of saintly people. It should not be interfered with" – *bukm shud as-in amwal khazanah-i-Badhshaban ma 'mur na-mi-shawad, mal-i-daroeshan ast, mazaham nami shawand-* (Cf. *Bahadur Shah Nama*, Irvine *Later Mughals*, i. 90)

BALLAD VERSIONS

Dhadi Nath Mall was present in the camp of the Guru at Nanded and used to recite ballads in the afternoon assemblies of the Sikhs there. One such ballad known as the *Amar Namah*, composed under the name of the Guru himself in the first person, has come down to us through the son of Bhai Fatta, the seventh descendant of Nath Mall. According to its colophon, it was completed in the month of *Katik* 1765 *Bikrami* after the death of the tenth Guru. As the 30th of *Katik* of that year corresponded to 31st October, 1708, the *Amar Namah* was evidently completed within twenty-four days of the Guru's death. Describing it in the first person in the words of the Guru, the *Amar Nama* says in lines 61-62:

“I then resolved to set out for the lasting abode in heaven, which is the place of all peace and divine blissfulness. My Singhs (the Khalsa) shall remain firm, listening to *vars* from *dhadi* singers.”

In keeping with the tradition of the ancient balladists, Nath Mall did not enter into the details of the painful event. Except in the case of deaths occurring in the thick of battle, the reciters or writers of *vars* generally skipped over the mention of deaths or made a casual reference to them in a prose sentence. In support of this observation we have the example of Bhai Gurdas. He was one of the closest relative of Guru Arjun on the mother's side, and was also one of the most revered and knowledgeable Sikhs of his, time. In his *varam* he has in a systematic manner, given brief accounts not only of the Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak to Guru Hargobind but also of the various *sangats* and important Sikhs in the Punjab and outside. But he does not make any clear and direct statement on the martyrdom of Guru Arjun which gave a sharp turn to the development and transformation of the Sikh movement. He has quietly passed over the event with only a casual reference to his death in a line or two.

In his *Ibrat Namah or the Swanah*, 1705-19 AD., Mirza Muhammad Harisi had devoted some thirteen pages to the contemporary account of the Sikhs, with particular reference to Banda Singh. He tells us that Guru Gobind Singh had travelled in the train of Emperor Bahadur Shah to the Deccan and was killed there in 1120 *al-Hijri*, 1708 AD. by an Afghan, an old enemy of his, and his body was cremated.

FIRST RELIABLE BIOGRAPHY

The *Sri Gur Sobhaby* poet Sainapat, mentioned as Saina Singh by Bawa Sumer Singh in his *Pothi Gur-Bilas ki*, was completed in 1768 *Bikrami*, 1711 AD., i.e., within three years of the Guru's death. He was an old Sikh of his and had lived with him at Anandpur. His is the first book which

could be said to have been a reliable biography of the Guru. His narrative was evidently based on the first hand information received from the Sikhs who had returned from Nanded and had been eyewitnesses to what they had related to Sainapat. As far as we can see, the purity of his account, though brief in many places, is not muddied with the mixture of imaginary myths introduced later into the life of the Guru, beginning with the *Gur-bilas Patshahi Das* by Koer Singh, written in 1751, forty three years after the death of the Guru. Mentioning the death of the Guru (XVIII, 34-37) without any poetical embellishments, the *Sri Gur Sobha* tells us that a day before the event, the Guru had, in reply to a question of the Sikhs, said that he had bestowed his physical form upon the Khalsa-bakhsh *dio Khalis ko jama* (XVIII-41) and that the Limitless and the Eternal Word was the *Satguru-Satguru hamara apar apara Shabad bichara ajar-jaran* (XVIII-43). 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.

SIKH'S ACCEPTED CREED

This has since become the accepted creed of the Sikhs as inculcated by Bhai Nandlal in his *Rebit Nama* or the Rules of Conduct. Bhai Nandlal, as history knows, was a devoted Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh and had stayed with him for some time at Anandpur. According to the *Amar Namah*, line 42, Bhai Nandlal was present in the Emperor's camp at Nanded as one of his ministers during the Guru's stay there. He was a distinguished scholar of Persian and panjabi and, out of his ten works known to us, eight-five in Persian and three in Panjabi—are commentaries on Sikh

life and teachings. One of them, the *Rebit-nama*, which is written in the form of a dialogue between the Guru and the Bhai, lays down the rules for Sikh conduct. Therein, as already mentioned in one of the previous paragraphs, the Guru had told Bhai Nandlal that his two forms were the *Granth-mera rupa Granth ji jan-embodiyng the gurbani* and the Sikhs (the Khalsa) deeply absorbed in it. This not only clarifies but also supports the Guru's last message and commandment to the Khalsa mentioned in the *Sri Gur Sobha*.

The *Gur-bilas Chhavin Patshahi* leaves no doubt about the recognition by the Sikhs of the Guruship of *Guru Granth Sahib* after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. The *Gur-bilas* was begun by its author, poet Sohan, in May 1717 and was completed on July 22, 1718 (*Sawan 22, Sudi 5, 1775 Bikrami*), within ten years of the Guru's death. Its fourth chapter is devoted to the compilation of the holy book by Guru Arjun and the first twelve verses of the fifth chapter to its, formal installation in the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. Therein the author has invariably used the then accepted prefix *Guru* to the *Granth* and has called it the *Guru Granth*. The following verses of chapter IV are very significant indeed.

Hear ye all, this precept of mine as true and certain.

Recognize the *Granth* to be the same as the *Guru*, think not of any difference (between the two).

In the *Kali-yuga*, the *Guru Granth* has assumed the form of the Sri Guru.

Recognize the *Guru Granth* to be the very self of the Ten Gurus.
(412)

He who wishes to see the Guru, let him see the *Guru Granth*.
And, he who wishes to speak to the Guru, let him read the
Granth with a devoted mind. (413)

(Chapter IV old ed. p. 75; new ed. p. 90)

FURTHER TESTAMENTS

We have available to us in a collection of manuscripts the accounts of Guru Gobind Singh's meeting with Emperor Bahadur Shah in 1707 (*Bahadur Shah ke Mulaqat ka Prasang*), of his last days and death at Nanded in the Deccan in 1708 (*Guru Sahib Daswen Patshah ji ke Jori Jot Samawane ka Prasang*) and of the first battle of the Sikhs at Amritsar with the Mughal forces of Lahore in 1709 (*Var Amritsar ki*) during the governorship of Aslam Khan. Copies of the first two manuscripts are also available in the *Amrit Gutka* preserved in the Punjab State Archives, Patiala. According to the *Guru Sahib Daswen Patshah ji ke Jori Jot Samawane ka Prasang*, which is based on the information received from the companions of the Guru himself – *Haṣṣur ke khas Sikh an di rasna thin* – the Guru, before his death, told the Sikhs that he was not appointing anyone to succeed him as Guru, that he was entrusting them to *Sri Sahib* and the *Sabda*, the great Word, as given in the *Granth Sahib* which should be accepted by them all.

The *Parchian Sewa Das*, according to the date mentioned in the manuscript preserved in the Panjab University, Lahore, was written in 1798 *Bikrami*, 1741 A.D., while the manuscript in the Central State Library Patiala, bears 1896 *Bikrami*, 1839 A.D. as the date of its transcription. Sewa Das was an Udasi Sadhu. Writing in the style of a mystic, he tells us that the Guru had his funeral pyre prepared under his own supervision. He mounted it fully dressed and armed, sat on it cross-legged and that his light blended with the Divine Light-*Joti meh jot samane*. Heaps of flowers and scent were then showered on the pyre. After pouring plenty of ghee thereon, the pyre was set alight-*babur baisantar lagava diya*. The Sikhs standing there started crying loudly. Several of them tried to jump into the flaming pyre, but they were not allowed to do so. When the pyre was all reduced to ashes, they found no trace of the dead body or of the Guru's arms. "All then so *thought* that the Guru Baba had gone (to heaven) bodily."

BIRTH OF MYTHOLOGY

It is here for the first time, thirty-three years after the death and cremation of the Guru, that a suggestion has been made by a mystical minded Sadhu of the Guru having ascended to heaven bodily. This is only a reflection of the thinking of an ultra-devotional mind of an ascetic fed on the mythology of ancient Hindu *Puranas* full of supernatural fables added to the lives of their avatars-and also of the Gurus including Guru Nanak and his sons.

COHERENT ACCOUNT

Ten years later, in 1808 Bikrami, 1751 A.D., Koer Singh wrote his *Gur-bilas Patshahi Das*, making a liberal use of the *Sri Gur Sobha*. He has, however, covered a broader canvas and given an extensive and a coherent picture of the Tenth Guru's life. In his twenty-first chapter devoted to the death of the Guru, *Pyan Gur ker*, based on the commentaries of Bhai Mani Singh, as mentioned in the colophon, Koer Singh tells us that, in reply to a question of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh had said that he would (always) be with the Sikhs and that he had raised his worthy sons (the Khalsa) to wreak vengeance (XXI, 60-61).

This is clearly a reflection of the mind of Koer Singh under the influence of the brutal treatment that had been meted out to Bhai Mani Singh, his preceptor, during the latter's captivity and martyrdom at Lahore in 1734 when he was hacked to pieces limb by limb under the orders of Nawab Zakariya Khan, the Governor of Lahore. Koer Singh has also made some very disparaging observations on the lowering standard of morality of the so called religious teachers of his time moving about from house to house and begging for alms. "Without meditation, these immoral people", says he, "call themselves *sant*, while in their minds they think of other people's women. As such, in the dark age of *Kali*, the real saints have disappeared like sun in the clouds." "Therefore, my virtuous Sikhs", says Guru, "should

acknowledge the *Guru Granth* as supreme and worthy of worship (and not any pretender *sant* of the type mentioned above) (XXI, 89-93). Koer Singh then goes on to say, in the words of Guru Gobind Singh, in the next verses that Guru Nanak had himself told Baba Buddha of Ramdas :

“Recognize Ten of our incarnations when your family will be supreme”. (94-95)

He then goes on to say:

“When the Ten incarnations disappear (from this world with the death of the Tenth one), then the ancestral line — *Kuit* — will not continue.”

It is no longer the time for Guruship : I will not appoint anyone (now).

“Consider the entire Khalsa to have been entrusted to the protection (lap) of the Wielder of the Sword (*Asi Ketu*)-the Divine Protector.”

“I have given to you to hold the sheet of the embodiment of Word (*shabad ka mp*). He who accepts it shall be an incomparable-really true Singh.”

Recognize *Sri Granth ji* as ever-ready (readily available, ever-present *darshan* (sight, appearance or embodiment) of the Guru.

“Bring it here to this place.” (96-98)

HOW GRANTH BECAME GURU

The Guru had then grown very weak, as has been mentioned in verse XXX-56. The Holy Book was, therefore, brought to him. Coming to know of it, he said: “Let us go to the *Adi Sat-Guru* (the great *Adi Guru Granth Sahib*)”. Evidently, he could then see that his end was fast approaching. Then he got up along with all of his Sikhs; took five *paise* and a coconut with him; offered them himself (to the Holy Book), bowed down, circumambulated with all reverence and said:

“He who wishes to talk to me should read the Guru

(*Granth Sahib*) and receive the peace of mind.

‘There is no other Guru equal to it. Without any hesitation, I utter this truth.

‘There is no other Guru like it anywhere. Therefore, it should be accepted as the True Guru.

‘With its study (*darshan*) sins disappear. And by realizing its Word in practice, salvation is obtained.’ (XXI, 90-102)

Saying this, he calmly prepared himself for the end and desired a funeral pyre to be raised with the sandalwood worth five thousand rupees previously purchased from a Labana Sikn. He told his wife Sahib Devi not to immolate herself on his pyre and sent her to Delhi. He then consoled the sorrowful Sikhs explaining to them the inevitableness of the end of human life saying: “He who has full faith in the *Gum Granth* and does not place his reliance on anything else, shall have his wishes fulfilled by the Guru.

With full faith in it, all suspicions will disappear.” He then bowed to *Sri Granth*, prayed in all reverence, made offerings to *rababi* musicians and was absorbed in the Word of the *Granth Sahib*”. (XXI, 124-37).

The Guru died a little before midnight and was cremated in a place enclosed by a tent-wall, a Sikh setting fire to his dead body. The Sikhs then went out of the enclosure and stood there. Flames went up and the body of the Guru became all ashes. “Then came all the gods (from Heaven) blowing conches and showering flowers and, amidst shouts of victory, took the Master away with them, with all the heavens (*lokas*) singing his praises.” (*Ibid.*, 140,142-3).

On the fourth morning they searched the ashes, washing them with diluted milk, and found only a dagger therein. The Sikhs were all drowned in sorrow. At that time appeared on the scene an Udasi Sadhu and said that it was not becoming of the Sikhs to be sorrowful, for he had met the Guru in full dress on horse-back and the Guru had told him (the Sadhu) to convey his message to the Sikhs not to go

into mourning (ibid, XXI, 144-5),

BEST-INFORMED AUTHOR

Better accomplished in the art of writing, Koer Singh has not only supplied more details to his story but has also given clarity to it. He tells us in explicit language 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 became one of them at the baptismal ceremony and he publicly declared this merger on many an occasion afterwards, and especially a little before his death at Nanded. Entrusting the Khalsa to the care of the Divine Protector, as declared by the great Master, Koer Singh narrates at some length, the formal installation of the *Gum Granth Sahib* as the Guru. He had been in close touch with Bhai Mani Singh who was a contemporary and close associate of Guru Gobind Singh and was the first person to be appointed as the reader of the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar by Mata Sundri after the Guru's death. As such, he was the best informed person on the subject in addition to being the most qualified to explain the significance of the *Gum Granth Sahib* to Koer Singh. He also tells us that a dagger had been found in the heap of the ashes of the Guru's pyre.

ANOTHER RELIABLE VERSION

Another work of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, which we may refer to here, is the *Bansawali Nama* of Kesar Singh Chhibar completed in 1826 *Bikrami*, 1769-70 A.D. 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 *bahi* or account book of the house of the Guru. The tenth *charan*, or chapter of the book deals with the life of Guru Gobind Singh. Towards the end of it, in stanzas 678-83, he mentions the death of the Guru and his last commandment saying in reply to the

questions of the Sikhs: “The *Granth* is the Guru; you hold the garment (seek the protection) of the Timeless God- *bachan kita Granth hai Gum, lar pakro Akal* (679), Two hours (*ghari*) later the Guru went to heaven; his light blended with the Light. The same night he was cremated after he had been bathed in the rose water.” (653) Kesar Singh makes no mention of any heavenly reception or anything else of the kind.

MOST TRUTHFUL VERSION

The account of the death of Guru Gobind Singh as given in *sakhi 27 of Sakhiban Patshahi Das* chapter of the *Mehma Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla, pp. 891-93, may on the whole be said to be nearest the truth and may be accepted as objective and historical. Written by a descendant of Guru Amar Das and based, apparently, on reliable evidence, it was completed in January 1801. The first part of the chapter regarding the excitement to the Pathan who attacked and wounded the Guru, seems to have come from earlier writers. But the second part is based entirely on independent evidence. In the absence of any poetical embellishment and. unnatural, mysterious or supernatural element introduced into it, the account may be accepted as historically correct.

According to the *Mehma Prakash* :

“When the Guru took the bow in his hand and wished to pull it, the Sikhs submitted that the wound had not yet completely healed. The Guru said that there was no cause for fear. He then pulled the bow, and the stitches gave way. At this time the Guru said that the time for his death had come. He called the Sikhs to his presence and he was pleased to see them. The Sikhs then asked him where they would have the *darshan* (of the Guru). The great Guru, merciful to the lowly, said: ‘Our Ten forms have come to end. Now recognize the *Gum Granth Sabib* in my place. He who wishes

to talk to me should read the *Adi Granth Sabib*. This will be like talking to me. I have entrusted you to the lap of the Almighty.’ Having said this, he desired them to prepare the *biban* (the wooden board to carry the dead body to the cremation ground). After this was done, he lay down and covered himself with a sheet and liberated himself from human existence (or merged himself in the Divinity). Neither did he come anywhere nor did he go anywhere. Seeing this spectacle, all people fully believed that the great Guru was a part of the Divine Light. The Guru’s body was then cremated and the *Sri Guru Granth Sabib* was . recognized in place of the Guru.”

This is a simple and straightforward account of the death of Guru Gobind Singh with no mystery or embellishment enshrouding it. And it agrees in all its essentials with the contemporary and the earliest known accounts.

MOST RELIABLE AUTHORITY

Munshi Sant Singh, a *vakil* of the Bedis, wrote an account of the Bedi family of the Una under the title of the *Bayan-i-Khandan-i-Karamat Nishan-i-Bedian* from the time of Guru Nanak to that of Baba Sujan Singh. It was completed in May 1865. The first sixty-five pages of the work are devoted to the account of the Ten Gurus which ends with the death of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded in 1765 *Bikrami*, 1708 A.D. According to it:

“When on *Katik Sudi* 5, 1765 *Bikrami*, Guru Gobind Singh was about to die at Nanded in the Deccan, all the Singhs and disciples asked him as to who would be the future Guru. The Guru then said: ‘Guru Khalsa, Khalsa Guru. He who shall observe the Sikh *rebit* or the rule of conduct and morality and meditation, him know ye to be my very Self.’ Then thinking that there should be a definite centre of faith for all the Sikhs, the Guru with five paise and a coconut in his hand

(as offering) bowed before the *Guru Granth Sahib* and said : ‘Ye all community should recognise 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.

The Sikh who wishes to meet me should find me therein. “

In this the author of the *Bayan* has reiterated the last commandment of Guru Gobind Singh in the words of his contemporary and well known disciple Bahi Nandlal who was present at Nanded at the time of the Guru’s death. There could be no better and more reliable authority than him on the subject.

The author of the *Bayan* is all devotion and praise for Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una, whom he has called ‘Guru Sahib’ throughout his book. He also tells us that, according to Guru Gobind Singh’s promise, he was reborn in the house of Baba Kaladhari Bedi as his grandson-Sahib Singh (pp. 57-58, 66). But in spite of it, Munshi Sant Singh does not claim formal Guruship for him in place of the Tenth Guru who, he says, had formally declared the *Guru Granth Sahib* to be the Guru after him. Born in 1756. A.D., within forty-eight years of the Tenth Guru’s death and being the most respected Sikh of his time, commanding overwhelming influence with the Sikh Sardars, Rajas and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, he had a better chance than all the later pretenders. Baba Sahib Singh, however, preferred to be an humble disciple, a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh—a Khalsa—than to pretend to be an equal of his. In 1780 he presented himself at Dera Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur and received *Khande ki Pabul*, the *amrit* of the Khalsa, there. According to the *Bayan*, Baba Sahib Singh was the first of the Bedis to receive the Khalsa baptism which he himself later on administered from time to time to a large number of Sikhs

throughout the country.

HISTORICAL WORKS

Having referred to official records, contemporary works and hagiological literature, we now come to historical works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries based on the information available to, or collected by, professional historians. They are either in Persian or in English. The works written by Indian scholars, both Hindu and Muslim, are in Persian while those of the Europeans are in English. As almost all the Indian writers belonged to the Punjab or its neighbourhood, they had either lived amongst the Sikhs as neighbours or had close associations with them in day--to-day life. As such, most of them had first-hand knowledge of the prevalent beliefs, practices and ceremonies of the Sikhs and could, therefore, speak with a certain amount of authority. Some of them might have differed with the Sikhs in matters theological or might as well have had political prejudices against them, but about the broad facts of their history there could be no misgivings. Moreover, as writers, they are expected to be impartial and objective. And to be as near truth as possible, they must have relevant sources. As the subject under our immediate study here belongs to the prevalent beliefs of the Sikhs through the centuries and is purely historical, their mention in the historical works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carries special weight with students of history and cannot be ignored by serious scholars.

IMPORTANT MUSLIM ACCOUNTS

We have already referred to the contemporary accounts of Mirza Muhammad *Harisi's-Ibrat Namah* (1705-19 AD.). To almost the same period belongs Sayyed Muhammad Qasim Husaini Lahauri's *Ibrat Namah* (1135 *al-Hijri*, 1722 AD.) and *Ibrat Maqal* (1144 A.H., 1731 AD.) written within fourteen and twenty-three years, respectively, of the death

of Guru Gobind Singh. Giving the usual account of the Guru having died of the wound inflicted on him with *ajamdhar*- a dagger-by a Pathan at Nanded, Muhammad Qasim tells us that the Guru's body was cremated by his disciples with aloe and sandal wood according to the necessary Sikh rites. (p. 36).

Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari has to his credit, two very important historical works, the *Tarikh-i-Muzaffari* (1225 AH., 1810 AD.) and the *Tarikh-i-Babr-ul-Manwaj*, carrying the history of the Mughals to the beginning of the reign of Akbar Shah II (1806-37 AD.). These works deal extensively with the struggles of the Sikhs against the Mughals and Durranis and 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 spiritualism came to end and the book, the *Granth*, was established in place of Guru" (*Tarikh-i-Muzaffari*, p. 152; *Babrul-Manwaj*, p. 208).

At the same time in 1810 A.D. (1225 AH.) was completed Ahmed bin Muhammad Ali's *Mirat-ul-Ahwal-i-jahan Numa*. According to it, "the sons of Guru Gobind had been killed in the battle of Alamgir. *After him there is no Khalifah* (successor, Guru)."

SUPPORTERS OF CONVENTIONAL VERSION

Rai Chatarman, the author of the *Chabar Gulshan Akbbar-un-Nawadar*, also known as the *Chatar Gulshan or Khulasat-un-Nawadir*, compiled his work in 1759 soon after the death of Mata Sundri about whom, and about Ajit Singh, her adopted son, and Mata Sahib Devi, he seems to be well informed. According to him, the Pathan's dagger put an end to the Guru's life. "As declared by Guru Nanak", says he, "there are Ten persons (to be recognized). These Ten *Khalifabs* (Gurus) are called *Das Mahal*. Anyone else sitting

on the gaddi after them is not acceptable to them (the Sikhs). Some recognize him” (Ajit Singh, the adopted son of Mata Sundri). He was later disowned by Mata Sundri (pp. 35-36).

In the *Maima-ul-Akbbbar* (1214-20 A.H., 1799 A.D.), its author Har-Sukh Rai says about Guru Gobind Singh that “He is the *Tenth Mahal* and is the last *Zabur* (appearance Or successor) of Guru Nanak.” (p. 481).

EUROPEAN VERSIONS

This was the time when Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been on the throne of Lahore for some eleven years. He had occupied the traditional capital of the Punjab in 1799 A.D. and had fully established himself as the undisputed Maharaja of the Land of the Five Rivers. He had not only been accepted as such by a number of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh chieftains but had also been recognised by the greatest foreign power in India, the British East India Company, which had entered into a political treaty with him. This attracted the attention of a number of British and Indian scholars who wrote historical works devoted exclusively to the Sikhs. A few pamphlets, it is true, had also been written on the Sikhs in the eighteenth century by men like Antoine L.H. Polier (1780), William Franklin (1798-1803), etc., but they were too sketchy to contain any detailed account of the Sikh Gurus. George Forster alone has referred to the Gurus in his Letter No. XI of 1783 in his *A journey from Bengal to England* and says:

Govind Singh was assassinated during this expedition (of Emperor Bahadur Shah to the Deccan) by a Pathan soldier and he died of his wounds in 1708 at the town of Nanded without leaving any male issue; and a tradition delivered to the Sicques, limiting their priests to the number of ten, induced them to appoint no successors to Govind Singh. (vol. I, pub. 1798, 263).

Talking about the change in the inscription on the Sikh coins, Major James Brown has casually referred to Guru

Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh as the first and the last Gurus of the Sikhs, respectively, and has indirectly given us the confirmed belief of the Sikhs of about 1787-88. He says in his *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks*, published in 1788:

“...but after they had been current about fifteen years, the grand Diet of the sick chiefs (called *Goormutta*) determined to call in all those rupees, and to strike them in the names of *Gooroo Nanuck* and *Gooroo Gobind Singh*, the first and last of their *Gooroos* or religious leaders (pp. vi, viii).”

RELIABLE INDIAN WRITERS

In referring to the historians of the nineteenth century, we would prefer to mention at first the Indian writers who should presumably be better informed about the Sikh Gurus than Europeans. It may, however, be mentioned that some of the Indian writers wrote their books at the instance of Europeans who were at this time feeling interested in the history and religion of the Sikhs with whom they expected to come in close political contact in the near future. For this purpose they desired to obtain as correct and reliable information as possible.

Khushwaqt Rai's *Tarikh-i-Sikhan*, also called the *Kitab-i-Tawarikh-i-Panjab*, was written in 1811. Therein he says that “at Afzal (Abchal) Nagar (Nanded) the Guru purchased a piece of land and moved in all happiness from this transitory world to the world Eternal. The disciples of the Guru collected from all sides and cremated his dead body with aloe and sandalwood with all the necessary rites..... This event that is his death, took place on *Katik Sudi 5, 1765 Bikrami*. The generation (of Gurus) of Guru Nanak up to Guru Gobind Singh came to an end.” (pp. 36b-37a).

In 1233 *al-Hijri*, 1817-18 A.D. was completed Ahmad Shah Batalias' *Tawarikh-i-Hind*, *Bayan-i-Ahwal-i-Mulk-i-Hind wa Maluk-i-an az Zaman-i-qadim ta 1233 Hijri*, a part

of which, the *Zikr-i-Guman wa ibtida-i-Singhan wa Mazhab-i-esban*, forms an appendix to *Daftar I* and *II* of the *Umdat-u- Tawarikh* by Munshi Sohan Lal Suri. In it Ahmad Shah tells us that Guru Gobind Singh, who had accompanied Emperor Bahadur Shah to the Deccan, died at Nanded in 1765 *Bikrami*, 1708 A.D. and that the place was known as Abchal Nagar. He says that some Sikhs also lived there and that the Nizam of Hyderabad had fixed a daily allowance for them. In addition to it, Maharaj Ranjit Singh also made handsome donations for the upkeep of the sanctuary and the maintenance of its custodians (p. 11).

OUTSTANDING WORK

The *Umdat-u-Tawarikh* of Lala Sohan Lal Suri is a very important work on the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors up to 1849. Although its first volume dealing with the Guru and the *Misal* periods was published in 1885, it was originally begun in the form of notes somewhere in the middle of the eighteenth century during the time of Sohan Lal Suri's grandfather and father, Lala Hakumat Rai and Lala Ganpat Rai. It 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 *Gum* is *Granthji*. There is no difference between the *Granth* and the Guru. From the *darshan* of *Granthji* one shall have the happy *darshan* of the Guru Sahib." (Vol. I, pp. 64-65).

So intense was the faith of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Guru Gobind Singh and so ardent was his desire to raise a befitting memorial on his last resting place at Nanded that he occasionally sent large sums of money and a number of his men for the purpose all the way from the Punjab. The name of one Sardar Chanda Singh is mentioned in the *Umdat-u-Tawarikh* (Vol. III, part Hi, p. 355) as having been deputed by him on the 1st of *Magh*, 1893 *Bikrami*, to proceed to Abchal Nagar with twenty-five thousand rupees, with promise to remit more money, for the renovation and

construction of buildings of the Sachkhand Gurdwara there. (Also see *Ibid.* Ill, Hi, 77, 187, 267, 455.)

Ratan Chand Bal, the author of the *Khalis Namah* (1846 A.D., p. 13b, 14a) and Ganesh Das Bادهhra of the *Char Bagh-i-Panjab* (1855 A.D., p. 118) also confirm the information about the death of the Guru.

MUSLIM CONFIRMATION

Ghulam Muhy-ud-Din alias Bute Shah in his *Tarikh-i-Panjab* (1848, p. 206) and Mufti-Ali-ud-Din in his *Ibrat Namah* of 1854 (vol. I, p. 178) have both recorded the death of the guru 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-ut-Tawarikh* in not omitting to include 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*." (p. 62)

The last Persian work to be referred to on the subject is Kanhaiya Lal Hindi's *Zafar Namah-i-Ranjit Singh* published in Lahore in 1876. In the introductory pages he has given a sketch of the Gurus at the end of which he says that "Guru Gobind Singh died at Abchala Nagar (Nanded in the Deccan) in 1765 and that no one (of his disciples) succeeded him to the gaddi (throne of Guruship). With him ended the gaddi of leadership (*masnad-i-sarwari* and with him came to end the custom of the (succession of) Gurus (*shewa-i-rahbari*). (p. 52).

OBJECTIVE EUROPEANS

European writers on history are generally more objective and precise, and those who have written on the Sikhs in the first half of the nineteenth century, were seasoned scholars like Sir John Malcolm, the Hon'ble W.G. Osborne, Dr. W.L. M'Gregor and captain Joseph D. Cunnigham. The last of them incurred the displeasure of his superiors and

lost his political appointment for his frank and honest observation in his *History of the Sikhs*. All of them had been in close contact with the Sikhs in the Punjab and may be safely relied upon for their information on the historicity of Guru Gobind Singh's death, of his being the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs and of his declaration and commandment regarding *Guru Granth Sahib* being the Guru after him. We would, therefore, quote here only the relevant passages from their works without going into any particulars about them, following only the chronological order of their publication.

Malcolm Lt., Col. *Sketch of the Sikhs*, London, 1812.

Osborne, W.G., *The Court and Camp of Runjeet Singh*, London, 1840.
 "The tenth and the last of their spiritual leaders was called Gooroo Govind, whose plans of ambition were different from those of his predecessor Nanak " (p. xiv).

"We accordingly set the old Faqueer Uzeezoodeen to work with him, and much to our satisfaction heard, in the course of the evening, that on his mentioning our wishes to the Maharaja, he had consulted the *Granth*, or sacred volume of the Sikhs, and that, as the oracle was propitious we might be prepared to set off for Lahore in four days' time." (p. 121).

"Runjeet Singh rarely undertakes any expedition of importance without consulting this holy book.....(p. 122)".

"Guru Govind was the last acknowledged religious ruler of the Sikhs. A prophecy had limited their spiritual guides to the number of ten (p. 76).

This sect, as has been before stated, has never admitted a spiritual leader since the death of Guru Govind (p. 89)."

M'Gregor, W.L. *The History of the Sikhs*, London, 1846, Vol. I.

“The wound was sewed up, and to all appearance, healing, but Govind was determined to die. He called for a strong bow, which he bent with all his force, and in doing so the stitches of his wound gave way, his bowels again protruded, and he died almost immediately (p. 100).

“This event occurred in the year of the *Hijera* 1132, *Samvat* 1765, and A.D. 1708, at the city of Nadshur (Nander) in the reign of Buhadoor Shah (p. 100).

“Aware that since the death of his brave sons there was none among his adherents capable of following up his views and conquests, he fixed upon a Byragee fukeer, named Bunda who became his successor, *though not as Gooroo. That title died with Gobind Singh, the tenth and last.* (p. 104).”

Cunningham, J.D. *History of the Sikhs*, 1849.

“The expiring Gooroo was childless, and the assembled disciples asked in sorrow who should inspire them with truth and lead them to victory when he was no more. Govind bade them be of good cheer; the appointed Ten had indeed fulfilled their mission, but he was about to deliver the Khalsa to God, the never dying. “He who wishes to behold the Gooroo, let him search the *Granth* of Nanak. The Gooroo will dwell with the Khalsa: be firm and faithful; wherever five Sikhs are gathered together, there will I also be present (p. 88).

“Govind was killed in 1708 at Nuderh on the banks of the Godavery” (pp. 88-89),

Trump, Ernest. *The Adi Granth*, 1877.

“The Guru felt that his dissolution was near at hand, and ordered his Sikhs to keep ready wood (for cremation) and shroud. Having done so they all joined their hands and asked: ‘O true Guru, whom will you seat, for the sake of our welfare, on the throne of the Guruship?’ He answer: “As the nine Kings before me

were at the time of their death, seating another Guru on their throne, so shall I now not do; I have entrusted the whole society (of the disciples) to the bosom of the timeless, divine Male. After me you shall everywhere mind the book of the *Granth-Sahib* 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 A.D. 1708 (pp. xcvi).”

WELL-KNOWN BOOK

The last important writer of the nineteenth century on the history of the Punjab in English is Syed Muhammed Latif of the Punjab Judicial Service. His well known book *History of the Pan jab* was published in 1891 and is still one of the best books on the subject. Some time before the death of Guru Gobind Singh when Sikhs asked him to who would be Guru after him, the dying apostolic hero, according to Syed Muhammad Latif, told them:

“I entrust my Khalsa to the bosom of the ever-lasting Divine Being. Whoever wishes to behold the Guru, let him offer *karah parshadworth* Re. 1-4 or less, and bow before the *Granth* and open it, and he shall be given an interview with the Guru. The *Granth* shall support you under all your troubles and adversities in this world, and be a sure 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 gave them sundry warnings, telling them that there were impostors in the world who would try to dissuade them from the right path, but that his disciples should be on their guard against them and give no ear to what they say. 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 devotions (p.269).

MACAULIFFE'S STANDARD WORK

Of the writers of the twentieth century, we would refer only to M.A. Macauliffe, whose book *The Sikh Religion*, in six volumes published in 1909, was begun in the eighties of the nineteenth century and is considered to be a standard work on the lives of the Gurus and of the *Bhaktas* whose hymns are incorporated in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. In the compilation of this work, Macauliffe was assisted by a number of well-known Sikh scholars of his time like Bhai Hazara Singh, Bhai Sardul Singh, Bhai Dit Singh and Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha who was closely associated with it up to the last stage of its publication at Oxford in England. The views expressed in *The Sikh Religion*, therefore, represent the views and beliefs not only of the orthodox section of the Sikh community but also of their reformist intelligentsia in the beginning of the twentieth century. Writing about the last commandments and the death of Guru Gobind Singh, he says:

“When the Sikhs came again to take their last farewell of the Guru, they inquired who was to succeed him. He replied, ‘I have entrusted you to the Immortal God. Ever remain under His protection, and trust to none besides. Wherever there are five Sikhs assembled who abide by the Guru’s teachings, know that I am in the midst of them. He who serveth them shall obtain the reward thereof the fulfillment of all his heart’s desires. Read the History of your Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak. Henceforth the Guru shall be the Khalsa and the Khalsa the Guru. I have infused my mental and bodily spirit into the *Granth Sahib* and the Khalsa. “After this the Guru bathed and changed his dress. He then read the *Japji* and repeated an *ardas* or supplication. While doing so, he gave instructions that

no clothes should be bestowed as alms in his name. He then put on a muslin waistband, slung his bow on his shoulder and took his musket in his hand. He opened the *Granth Sahib* and placing five paise and a coconut before it solemnly bowed to it as his successor. Then uttering ' *Wahguru ji ka Khalsa, Wahguru ji ki fateh*', he circumambulated the sacred volume and said, "O beloved Khalsa, let him who desireth to behold me, behold the *Guru Granth*. Obey the *Granth Sahib*. It is the visible body of the Guru. And let him who desireth to meet me, diligently search its hymns.'

USEFUL SOURCE OF INFORMATION

There is another class of evidence which is particularly relevant to our study here. It is known as the *Gur-parnalian* or Genealogies of the Gurus. As they deal mainly with the parentage, births, deaths, descendants and successors of the Gurus, they are a very useful source of information for determining the order of succession of Guruship. Six of these *Gurparnalis* by Bhai Kesar Singh, Poet Saundha, Bhai Gulab Singh, Kavi Ram Singh, and an anonymous poet and by Kavi Gulab Singh respectively, are available, and all of them without exception, accept the death of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded in 1708 as an indisputable historical fact.

'GRANTH IS GURU'

Under the heading 'Guru Granth Sahib' in his well-known book the *Gurmat Martand*, Vol. I, p. 411, Bhai Kahan Singh refers to the holy book as *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and tells us on page 415 that the use of the word 'Guru' with *Granth Sahib* began in *Samvat 1766 Bk.*, (A.D. 1708) when Guru Gobind Singh invested the *Granth*, the basic scripture of the Sikh faith, with *Guruship* at Abchal Nagar (Nanded in the Deccan).

Bhai Kahan Singh has also answered the question of those who at times asked about the volume which was

invested with Guruship. He writes on page 415 of the book mentioned above:

“We believe that it was that volume which the Tenth Guru had compiled at Damdama Sahib after including therein the compositions of the Ninth Guru and which was lost during the great Holocaust (*Wadda Ghalu-ghara*) and of which Baba Dip Singh had previously prepared several copies. But even if no volume was available at the time of the death of the Tenth Guru, could there be any difficulty in the investiture? Was Guru Tegh Bahadur present at Delhi at the time of the death of Guru Har Krishan (Who invested Guru Tegh Bahadur with Guruship)? The Guruship could be entrusted by mental contemplation or through Word (of the mouth).”

These statements and writings of Bhai Kahan Singh leave no doubt about his belief that:

- (i) Guru Gobind Singh did not appoint any person to succeed him as Guru, and
- (ii) The Tenth Guru had invested the *Guru Granth Sahib* with Guruship, and commanded the Sikhs to accept it as their future Guru.

Recently a contemporary Bhatt Vahi has been traced by Gyani Garja Singh which contains an entry regarding the succession of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* as Future Guru of the Sikhs ending personnel line of succession. This has been quoted by Guninder Kaur in her recent book 'The *Guru Granth Sahib, Its Physics and Meta-Physics*'

(Footnotes)

¹ Sterling Publishers, 1981, pp. 20-21. The relevant entry has been reproduced by Prof. Harbans Singh at page 257 of this volume

THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB : GURU ETERNAL FOR THE SIKHS

HARBANS SINGH

The Guru Granth Sahib-some of the variations on the title being Adi Granth, Sri Adi Granth or Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib- is the religious Scripture of the Sikhs as well as Guru eternal for them. The basic word in the expressions listed is *granth* meaning a book, *sahib* and *sri* being honorifics, *guru* indicating its status as successor in the Guruship after Guru Gobind Singh and *adi*, literally original, first or primary, distinguishing it from the other sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Dasam Granth*, which contains the poetic compositions of the Tenth (Dasam) Guru. .

The Guru Granth Sahib is an anthology of the sacred compositions of the Gurus and of some of the medieval Indian saints. The latter came from a variety of class and creedal background-Hindu as well as Muslim, high-caste as well as low-caste. One criterion for choosing their verse for the Guru Granth Sahib apparently was its tone of harmony with the teaching of the Gurus. The anthology was prepared by Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru, in 1603-4. To it were added by Guru Gobind Singh, the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru.

Even before the time of Guru Arjun, *pothis* or books in Gurmukhi characters, existed containing the holy utterances of the Gurus. A line in Bhai Gurdas, Var I. 32, suggests that Guru Nanak during his travels carried under his arm, a book evidently comprising his own compositions. According to the *Puratanjanamsakhi*, he handed over such a manuscript to Guru Angad as he passed on the spiritual

office to him. Two of the collections of hymns or pothis prior to the Guru Granth are still extant. They are in the possession of the descendants of Guru Amar Das. One of the families in the line lives in Patiala and the *potbi* it has inherited, is on view for the devotees in their home on the morning of the full-moon day every month. A collateral family which is in possession of the second *potbi* lives in the village of Darapur, in Hoshiarpur district of the Punjab.

The *bani*, or word revealed, was held in great veneration by the Sikhs even before the Holy Volume was compiled. It was equated with the Guru himself. "The *bani* is the Guru and the Guru *bani*", sang Guru Ram Das in Raga Nat Narain. The *bani* echoed the Divine Truth, it was the voice of God - "the Lord's own word", as said Guru Nanak in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Amar Das says:

vabu, vahu bani nirankar hai

tis jevad avar na koe

Hail, Hail, the word of the Guru, which is the
Lord Formless Himself,

There is none other, nothing else to be reckoned equal to it.

The compilation of the Holy Book, a momentous event in Sikh history, is generally described in the briefest terms. The Sacred Volume was prepared by Guru Arjun (A.D. 1563--1606) and the first copy was calligraphed by Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636) at his dictation - this is all we learn from most of the sources. What amount of planning, minute attention to detail and diligent and meticulous work it involved, is slurred over. An old text which gives some detailed information is the *Gurbilas Chbevin Patshahi*. Written in A.D. 1718, this, in fact, is the oldest source. Although it does not go into the technical and literary minutiae, it narrates the entire process from the beginning of the transcription of the Holy Volume to its installation -in the newly-built Harimandir at Amritsar.

Why Guru Arjun undertook the task is variously

explained. One commonly accepted assumption is that the codification of the Guru's compositions into an authorized volume was begun by him with a view to preserving them from garbling by schismatic groups and others. According to the *Mahima Prakash* (A.D. 1776), he set to work with the announcement: "As the panth (Community) has been revealed unto the world, so must there be the Granth (Book), too." By accumulating the canon, Guru Arjun wished to affix the seal on the sacred word. It was also to be the perennial fountain of inspiration and the means of self-perpetuation for the community.

Guru Arjun called Bhai Gurdas to his presence and expressed to him the wish that the compositions of the Gurus as well as those of some of the saints and sufis be collected. Messages were sent to the disciples to gather and transmit to him the hymns of his predecessors.

Baba Mohan, son of Guru Amar Das, Nanak III, had manuscript collections of the Gurus' hymns inherited from his father. Bhai Gurdas travelled to Goindwal to bring these *pothis*, but the owner refused to see him; Bhai Buddha, one of the oldest Sikhs from Guru Nanak's days, was similarly turned away from his door. Then Guru Arjun went himself. He sat in the street below Mohan's attic serenading him on his *tambura*. Mohan was disarmed to hear the hymn. He came downstairs with the *pothis* and presented these to the Guru. As says the *Gurbilas*, the *pothis* were placed on a palanquin bedecked with precious stones. The Sikhs carried it on their shoulders and Guru Arjun walked behind barefoot. He refused to ride his horse, saying that the *pothis* were the very spirit, the very light of the four Gurus-his predecessors.

The cavalcade broke journey at Khadur Sahib to make obeisance at shrines sacred to Guru Angad. Two *kos* from Amritsar, it was received by Hargobind, Guru Arjun's young son, accompanied by a large number of Sikhs. He bowed at his father's feet and showered petals in front of the *pothis*. Guru Arjun, Hargobind, Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Buddha
now

bore the palanquin on their shoulders and marched towards Amritsar, led by musicians with flutes and drums. Reaching Amritsar, Guru Arjun first went to the Harimandir to offer *karahprasad* in gratefulness.

To quote the *Gurbilas* again, an attractive spot in the thick of a forest on the outskirts of Amritsar, was marked out by Guru Arjun. So dense was the foliage that not even a moonbeam could pry into it. The site was peaceful and picturesque. A tent was hoisted in this idyllic setting. Here Guru Arjun and Bhai Gurdas started work on the sacred volume. The making of the Granth was no easy task. It involved sustained labour and a rigorous intellectual discipline. Selections had to be made from a vast amount of material. Besides the compositions of the four preceding Gurus and of Guru Arjun who himself was a poet with a rare spiritual insight, there were songs and hymns by saints, both Hindu and Muslim. What was genuine had to be sifted from what was counterfeit. Then the selected material had to be assigned to appropriate musical measures and transcribed in a minutely laid out order.

Guru Arjun carried out the work with extraordinary exactness. He arranged the hymns in thirty different *ragas*, or musical patterns. A precise method was followed in setting down the compositions. First came *sabdas* by the Gurus in the order of their succession. Then came *chhands*, *vars*, and other poetic forms in a set order. The compositions of the Gurus in each *raga* were followed by those of the Bhaktas in the same format. Gurmukhi was the script used for the transcription. According to Bhai Gurdas' testimony, the text had been transcribed by Bhadon Vadi Ekam 1661 BK. At the head of the index he recorded: "*Sammat 1661 miti bhadon vadi ekam pothi likh pahuche*, i.e. on Bhadon Vadi Ekam 1661 he had reached this spot where the index was to begin after completing the writing of the book." The index, giving the opening words of each *sabda* or hymn and pagination, is

itself a marvel of scholarly fastidiousness. A genius, unique in spiritual intuition and not unconcerned with methodological design, had created a scripture with an exalted mystical tone and a high degree of organization. It was large in size-nearly 7,000 hymns, comprising compositions of the first five Sikh Gurus and fifteen bhaktas and sufis from different parts of India, including Shaikh Farid, Kabir and Ravidas. The Sacred Volume consisted of 974 leaves, or 1948 pages, 12" x 8", with several blank ones at the end of a *raga* when there were not *sabd*s enough to fill the section assigned to it. The site of these marvellous labours is now marked by a shrine called Ramsar.

The completion of the Granth Sahib was, says the *Gurbilas*, celebrated with much jubilation. In thanksgiving, *karahprasad* was prepared in huge quantities. Sikhs came in large numbers to see the Holy Book. They were rejoiced in their hearts by a sight of it and bowed before it in veneration. Among the visitors was Bhai Banno who had led a group of Sikhs from Mangat, in western Punjab. Guru Arjun who knew him as a devoted Sikh, instructed him to go to Lahore and have the book bound. Banno sought the Guru's permission to be allowed to take the Granth Sahib first to Mangat for the Sikhs there to see it. The Guru allowed this, but enjoined him not to tarry at Mangat, or at any other place, more than a night.

As Banno left Amritsar with his sacred charge, it occurred to him to have a second copy transcribed. The first copy, he argued, would remain with the Guru. There must be an additional one for the *sangat*. The Guru's direction was that he should not stay longer than one night at a place, but he had said nothing about the time to be spent on the journey. So he proceeded with his plans and sent a Sikh to purchase paper. He proposed to his companions that they should travel by easy marches of five miles a day. The time thus saved was utilized in transcribing the holy text. Sikhs wrote with love and devotion and nobody shirked his duty whether it was day or night. By the time they reached

Lahore, the second copy was ready. But Banno had added to it some apocryphal texts. He had both volumes bound and returned to Amritsar as fast as he could.

At Amritsar, he was received with due ceremony, though Guru Arjun was not a little surprised to see two volumes instead of one. Bhai Banno spoke truthfully: "Lord, there is nothing that is hidden from you. This second copy I have had made for the sake of the *sangat*." But the Guru accepted only the volume written in Bhai Gurdas's hand. He enjoined the Sikhs to own the Granth equal with the Guru and make no distinction between the two. "He who would wish to see the Guru, let him see the Granth. He who would seek the Guru's word, let him read the Granth with love and attention.

Guru Arjun asked the Sikhs where the Granth Sahib be installed. Bhai Buddha spoke, "You are omniscient, Master. But there is no place more suitable than the Harimandir." "The Guru was happy to hear these words "like one who has sighted the new moon." He then recited the praise of the Harimandir: "There is nothing like it in all the world. Harimandir. Harimandir is like the ship-the means for the people to cross over the worldly ocean triumphantly. A new joy pervades here every day. A sight of it annuls all sins."

It was decided to spend the night at Ramsar and return to Amritsar the next morning. The Granth Sahib rested on a seat under the canopy, whereas the Guru and the Sikhs slept on the ground.

A disciple had to be chosen to take charge of the Granth Sahib. As says the *Gurbilas*, Guru Arjun lay awake through the night reflecting on the question. His choice finally fell on Bhai Buddha whose devotion was universally applauded. As they awoke, the Guru and his Sikhs made ablutions in Ramsar. The former thereupon practised his wonted meditation. At dawn, the entire *sangat* marched towards Harimandir. Bhai Buddha carried the Holy Book on his head and Guru Arjun walked behind swinging the flywhisk over it. Musicians sang *sabdas*. Thus they reached the Harimandir.

The Granth Sahib was ceremonially installed in the centre of the inner sanctuary on Bhadon Sudi 1, 1661 BK/August 16, 1604. Bhai Buddha opened it with reverence to obtain from it the divine command, as Guru Arjun stood in attendance behind. The following hymn was read as God's own pronouncement for the occasion:

He Himself hath succoured his saints in their work,

He Himself hath come to see their task fulfilled.

Blessed is the earth, blessed the tank,

Blessed is the tank with amrit filled.

Amrit over floweth the tank:

He hath had the task completed.

Eternal is the Perfect Being,

His praises Vedas and Puranas sing.

The Creator hath bestowed on me the nine treasures, and all the chrisms,

No lack do I suffer now.

Enjoying His largesse, bliss have I attained. Ever-expanding is the Lord's bounty.

Guru Arjun directed that during daytime the Holy Book should remain in the Harimandir and by night, after the *Sobila* was read, it should be taken to the room he had built for himself in Guru-ka-Mahal. As evening advanced by two watches, Bhai Buddha recited *Sobila* and made the concluding *ardas* or supplication. The Granth Sahib was closed and wrapped in silks. Bhai Buddha held it on his head and marched towards the chamber indicated by Guru Arjun. The Guru led the *sangat* singing hymns. The Granth Sahib was placed on the appointed seat, and the Guru slept on the ground by its side. Daily in the small hours of the morning as the stars twinkle in the pool below, the Holy Book is taken out in state to the Harimandir and brought by night to rest-now, in a room at the Akal Takht. The practice continues to this day. But the volume is not the same. That original copy was taken to Kartarpur when Guru Arjun's successor, Guru Hargobind, left Amritsar in 1634.

There it passed into the possession of his grandson, Dhir Mall. It has since remained in that family.

In the Sikh system, the word *Gurm* is used only for the ten prophet-preceptors — Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, and for none other. Now this office of Guru is fulfilled by the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sacred Book, which was so apotheosized by the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, before he passed away in 1708. No living person, however holy or revered, can have the title or status of Guru. For Sikhs, Guru is the holy teacher, the prophet under direct commission from God—the Ten who have been and the Guru Granth Sahib which is their continuing visible manifestation.

Guru Gobind Singh manifested the Khalsa in 1699. In 1708, he supplied another permanent-and final-feature in the evolution of the Sikh faith when he installed the Holy Scripture as Guru. This is how the *Bhatt Vahi Talanda parganah find* describes the event:

Guru Gobind Singh mahall dasman beta Guru Tegh Bahdur ka pota Guru Hargobindji ka parpota Guru Arjunji ka bans Guru Ram Das ji ki Surajbansi Gosal gotra Sodhi Khatri basi Anandpur parganah Kahlur muqam Nander tat Godavari des dakkhan sammat satran sai painsath Kartik mas ki chauth shukla pakke budhvar ke dibun Bhai Daya Singh se bachan hoya Sri Granth Sahib lai ao bachan pai Daya Singh Sri Granth Sahib lai ay Gumji ne panch paise narial age bheta rakha matha teka sarbatt sangat se kaha mera hukam hai meri jagah Sri Granthji ko janana jo Sikh janega lis ki ghal thaen paegi Guru tis ki baburi karega sat kar manana.

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Tegh Bahdur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjun, of the family of Guru Ram Das, Surajbansi Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, parganah Kahlur, now at Nanded, on the

Godavari bank in the Deccan, asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Wednesday, *Shukla chauth* of the month of Katik, 1765 BK (October 6, 1708) to fetch the Sri Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the *sangat*, “It is my commandment: Own Sri Granth ji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth.”

According to Giani Garja Singh to whom we owe the discovery of this entry, the author was Narbud Singh Bhatt, who was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded at that time.

Bhatt Vahis are a new source of information discovered by Giani Garja Singh (1904-77), a dogged searcher for materials on Sikh history. The Bhattas were hereditary panegyrists, genealogists or family bards. (A group of them were introduced to Guru Arjun by Bhatt Bhikkha who himself had become a disciple in the time of Guru Amar Das. According to Bhai Gurdas, Var XI. 21, and Bhai Mani Singh *Sikkhan di Bhagatmala*, he had earlier visited Guru Arjun with the *sangat* of Sultanpur Lodhi). Those of them who came into the Sikh fold composed hymns in honour of the Gurus which were entered in the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjun.

These Bhattas also recorded events of the lives of the Gurus and of the members of their families in their scrolls called *vahis*. Some of these *vahis* are preserved to this day in the descendant families, especially at the village of Karsindhu, in Jind district of Haryana. The script in which they are written is called *bhataksbri*- a kind of family code like *lande* and *mahajani*. The only known scholar to have worked with these materials was Giani Garja Singh.

Apart from this new testimony culled by Giani Garja Singh from the Bhatt Vahis, another contemporary document which authenticates the fact of Guru Granth Sahib having been invested with the final authority, is a letter issued by reference of Guru Gobind Singh's wife, Mata Sundarji. To quote from the original, which is now in the possession of

Bhai Chet Singh, of the village of Bhai Rupa, in present day Bhatinda district, to whose ancestors it was addressed:

Ikk Oankar Wahguru ji ki fateh. Sri Akal purkhji ka Khalsa yak rang jina dithia Wahguru ji chit avai. Bhai Sahib Dan Singh ji, Bhai Duni Singh ji, Bhai Jagat Singh ji, Bhai Gurbakhsb Singh ji, Ugar Singh ji, Bhai Ram Singh ji, sarbatt Khalsa Wahguru Akal – purkh ji ka pase likhtam gulam Khalsa ji ka Kahn Singh, Nival Singh, Mul Singh ji, Sujan Singh, Gaja Singh, Mahan Singh sarbatt Khalsa, Wahguru Akal purkh ka Wahguru ji ki fateh vachani khusba karna ki Wahguru Akal purkh ji har dam chit avai sukh hoe Khalse ji ka bol bala hoi ardas tusadi maifat Bhai Dulcha Singh ke hath pahuti parhkai Khalsa ji babut khuswaqat hoiya tusade bab Khalsaji dayal ho kai hath jore hai jo rakhya hove. Jo jan harika sevako hari tiske kami“, Guru Guru japna Wahguru ang sang hai fujal karkai rakhia hovegi Khalsaji Bhai Kahn Singhji kau Mata Sahibji ne gumastgiri Amritsar ji ki mukarar kiti hai Khalsaji ne gurmata karke Harimanjir ate bagh di murammat imarat ka kam shuru kita hai, Sri Mata Sahibji ne likha hai ke Wahguru Akalpurkh ji ki nagari hai langar jarur karna Khalsa Sri Wahguru ji ka suchet bibek budh chahie jo sivai Akalpurkh duje no janai nahi. Dasam patshabian tak jamai paidhe yarvin Banda Chaubanda Ajita vagaire te aitkad lai avana hatiya hai. Hor hatiya Guru japan nal dur hosan, par ih hatiya gunah bakhsbiaiga nahi jo manmukh ke jame upar aitkad karenge. Mukh (mohi) pheriai mukh (mohi) jutha hoi.’ Khalsa ji tusan sivai Akal duje no mannana nahi. Sabad dasvin patshahi tak khojna. “Sabad khoji ihu gharu lahai Nanak taka dasu. “Guru ka nivas sabad vich hai. “Guru mabi ap samoi sabad vartaiya.” jian andar jiu sabad hai jit sahu milava hoi. “Wahguru ji ki fateh. Bhai Mehar Singh tablia Bhai Bule ke pattar ke khasmane vich rahina Guru nal gandh paisi.

Ikk Oankar Wahiguru ji ki Fateh

The Khalsa, of the Timeless Himself, immersed in the One, and whose sight brings Wahiguru to mind. Addressed to Bhai Sahib Dan Singh ji, Bhai Duni Singh ji, Bhai Jagat Singh ji, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh ji, Ugar Singh ji, Bhai Ram Singh ji, the entire Khalsa of Wahiguru, the Timeless One. From the slaves of the Khalsa ji, Kahn Singh ji, Nival Singh ji, Mul Singh ji, Sujan Singh, Gaja Singh, Maha Singh Wahiguru ji ki Fateh to the entire Khalsa. May you be rejoiced in constant remembrance of the Timeless Wahiguru. May prosperity prevail; may supremacy belong to the Khalsa. Having received your missive through Bhai Dulcha Singh, Khalsa ji is highly pleased. Khalsa ji happily prays with folded hands for your security. "He who to Lord surrenders himself, his affairs the Lord will set to rights." Repeat always the name of Guru. Wahiguru is by your side. He will extend to you His grace and protection. Khalsa ji, Mata Sahib ji has appointed Bhai Kahn Singh ji to the superintendence of Amritsar ji. The Khalsa ji, through a *gurmata*, has taken in hand the construction and repair of the Harimandir and the garden. Sri Mata Sahibji has written that *langar* must be run in that place which is the abode of God Himself..... Wahiguru's Khalsa must always be alert, possessed of discriminating wisdom. The Khalsa must believe in none other than the Timeless One. There have been only Ten Masters in human form; to believe in the eleventh and twelfth, Banda [Banda Singh Bahadur], Ajita [Ajit Singh, adopted son of Mata Sundari ji], etc. is a mortal sin. Every other sin can be got cancelled by repeating the Guru's name, but this sin of believing in human form will not be remitted. "The faces turned away from the Guru are faces perverted." Khalsa ji, you must believe in none other except the Timeless One. Go only to the Ten Gurus in search of the Word. "Nanak is the slave of him who by seeking the Lord's name obtains his goal." The Guru resides in *sabda*. "The Lord hath merged His own Self in the Guru through whom He hath revealed His Word." "The Word is the life of all life, for,

through it, one experiences God.” Victory to the Lord. Bhai Mehar Singh, the messenger, son of Bhai Bula; keep the letter secure in your custody. You will gain the Guru’s favour.

From this letter it is clear how the Sikhs after Guru Gobind Singh believed that the Guruship had passed to the *sabda*, i.e. the Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. None in the human form after the Ten Gurus was to be acknowledged by the Sikhs as Guru. Those who, like some of Banda Singh’s or Ajit Singh’s followers, called their leaders Gurus were committing a mortal sin. All their sins, says the letter, could be forgiven by repeating the Guru’s name, but not the sin of believing in a living Guru after the Ten Masters of the Sikh faith. Several other old Sikh documents also attest the fact of succession having been passed on by Guru Gobind Singh to the Guru Granth Sahib. For instance, the *Rabitnama* by Bhai Nand Lal, one of Guru Gobind Singh’s disciples, remembered to this day for his Persian poetry in honour of the Gurus. In his *Rabitnama*, or code of conduct, Bhai Nand Lal, who was at Nanded in the camp of Emperor Bahadur Shah as one of his ministers at the time of Guru Gobind Singh’s passing away, thus records his last words in his punjabi verse:

He who would wish to see the Guru,
 Let him come and see the Granth.
 He who would wish to speak with him,
 Let him read and reflect upon what says the Granth.
 He who would wish to hear his word,
 He should with all his heart read the granth, or listen to the Granth
 being read.

Another of Guru Gobind Singh’s disciples and associates, Bhai Prahlad Singh, records in his *Rabitnama* the Guru’s commandment:

By the word of the Timeless One,
 Has the Khalsa been manifested.

This is my commandment for all of my Sikhs,
 Thou shalt acknowledge Granth as the Guru.
 In *Gurbilas Patsbabi* 10 (author Koer Singh; the year of writing 1751),
 Guru Gobind Singh is quoted as saying:
 This is no more the age for a personal Guru to be anointed.
 I shall not place the mark on anyone's forehead
 All *sangat* is owned as Khalsa now, under the shelter of the Almighty
 Himself,
 They are now to the Word attached.
 He who believes is the Sikh par excellence.
 On the Guru Granth should he put his reliance,
 To none else should he direct his adoration.
 All his wishes the Guru will bring to fulfilment, This he should believe,
 Casting away all dubiety.

Another authority that may relevantly be quoted is Devaraja Sharma's
Nanakacandrodayamabakavyam, an old Sanskrit manuscript which has
 recently been published by Sanskrit University, Varanasi. It records
 Guru Gobind Singh's proclamation that the Scripture would be the
 Guru after him. "While the Master lay on his deathbed, Nand Lal (?)
 came forward and asked the following question: 'Who shall be our
 teacher now? Whom shall we salute and see and what shall be the
 object of our discourses?' The Master replied, 'The Granth, which
 itself is the doctrine of the Gurus, shall be your teacher. This is what
 you should see; this is what you should honour; this is what should be
 the object of your discourses.'" The original, in Sanskrit, reads as
 follows:

*Nandalalas tadaprechat ko asmakam adbuna gurub kam namena ca pasyema
 kasmai varta vadema ca uce gurusty yusmakam grantba eva gurumatab tam
 nameta ca pasyeta tasmai varta vedata ca.*

(*Nanakacandrodayamabakavyam*, XXI, 227-229)

This point has been laboured somewhat lengthily for the

reason that cavil is sometimes raised. Certain cults among Sikhs still owning personal Gurus ask for authentic evidence to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh had named the Guru Granth Sahib his successor. No archival testimony can be presented, unless the Bhatt Vahi entry be included in that category. But evidence bequeathed through tradition- written as well as oral-supports this fact. This is what has come down through Sikh memory. Had there been the 11th Guru, the name could not have been effaced from the pages of history. Guru Gobind Singh brought to an end the line of personal Gurus and declared the Holy Word Guru after him.

Alongwith the Guru Granth Sahib, the Khalsa was now the person visible of the Guru. The word *Khalsa* is derived from the Arabic *Khalis*, meaning pure or pious. Guru Gobind Singh used the term in its symbolic and technical sense. In official terminology, Khalsa in Mughal days meant lands or territory directly under the king. Crown-land was known as Khalsa land. As says a contemporary poet, Bhai Gurdas 11, Guru Gobind Singh converted the *sangat* into Khalsa. Sikhs were the Guru's Khalsa, i.e. directly his own, without any intermediary or local *sangat* leaders. On that point, we have the evidence of *Sri Gur Sobha* by Sainapat, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, and Guru Gobind Singh's own *bukamnamas*. To quote from the former:

A day preceding the event [i.e. passing of Guru Gobind Singh],

The Sikhs gathered together

And began to ask:

“What body will the lord now take?”

The Guru at that moment spoke:

“In the Khalsa wilt thou see me;

“With the Khalsa is my sole concern:

“My physical form have I bestowed upon the Khalsa.”

Guru Gobind Singh, in his *bukamnama* issued on Phagun 4, 1765 BK/ February 1, 1700, to the *sangat* of Pattan

Farid, modern Pakpattan, refers to the *sangat* as “his own Khalsa.” *Hukammamas* are letters written by the Gurus to *sangats* in different parts of the country. Some of them have been traced in recent years and two collections were published in 1967 — one by Dr. Ganda Singh (Punjabi University, Patiala) and the second by Shamsheer Singh Ashok (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar). Most of the *bukammamas* are common to both anthologies. These *bukammamas* are another valuable source of information on the lives of the Gurus and on the Sikh communities forming in far-flung places.

That the Guru Granth is Guru Eternal for it has been the understanding and conviction of the Sikh community since the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh. In their hard, exilic days soon afterwards when they were outlawed and had to seek the safety of the hills and jungles, the Sikhs’ most precious possession which they cherished and defended at the cost of their lives, was the Guru Granth. The Holy Book was their sole religious reference, and they acknowledged none other. In the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who established sovereignty in the name of the Khalsa, personal piety and court ceremonial centered upon the Guru Granth Sahib. As contemporary records testify, Ranjit Singh began his day by making obeisance to the Guru Granth Sahib. On festive occasions, he made pilgrimage to Amritsar to bow before the Guru Granth Sahib in the Harimandir. For the Sikhs in general, Guru Granth Sahib was the only focus of religious attachment. None other existed otherwise, in either human form or symbolically. In all Sikh literature after Guru Gobind Singh, the Holy Book is uniformly referred to as Guru Granth.

The personal Guruship was ended by Guru Gobind Singh himself. Succession passed to the Guru Granth Sahib in perpetuity. This was a most significant development in the history of the community. The finality of the Holy Book was a fact rich in religious and social implications. The Guru Granth became Guru and received divine honours. It was

acknowledged the medium of the revelation descended through the Gurus. It was for the Sikhs the perpetual authority, spiritual as well as historical. They lived their religion in response to it. Through it, they were able to observe their faith more fully, more vividly. It was central to all that subsequently happened in Sikh life. It was the, source of their verbal tradition and it shaped their intellectual and cultural environment. It moulded the Sikh concept of life. From it the community's ideals, institutions and rituals derived their meaning. Its role in guaranteeing the community's integration and permanence and in determining the course of its history has been crucial.

The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued for ever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib to be his successor. It was only through the Word that the Guruship could be made everlasting. This object Guru Gobind Singh intuitively secured when he pronounced Guru Granth Sahib to be Guru after him. The Guru Granth Sahib was henceforth-for all time to come - the Guru for the Sikhs.

Since the day Guru Gobind Singh vested succession in it, the Guru Granth has commanded the same honour and reverence as would be due to the Guru himself. It is the focal point of Sikhs' devotion. The object of veneration in Sikh *gurdwaras* is the Guru Granth Sahib. *Gurdwara* is in fact that place of worship wherein the Guru Granth is seated. No images or idols are permitted inside a *gurdwara*. The Holy Volume is opened ceremonially in the early hours of the morning after *ardas* or supplication. It must be enthroned, draped in silk or other pieces of clean cloth, on a high seat on a pedestal, under a canopy. The congregation takes place in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, with the officiant, who could be anyone from among those

present, sitting in attendance, with a *chavar* or whisk in his hand which he keeps swinging over it in veneration. The singing of hymns by a group of musicians will go on. All the time devotees have been coming and bowing low to the ground before the Holy Book to pay homage and taking their seats on the ground in front. The officiant or any other learned person who will take his place behind the Guru Granth Sahib, will read out a hymn and expound it for the audience. At the end of the service, the audience will stand up in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, with hands folded in front in reverence and one of them leading the *ardas* or prayer. At the end of the evening service the Holy Book will be closed, again after a short prayer, and put to rest for the night. The Guru Granth Sahib is similarly kept in some Sikh homes, where a separate room is set apart for it. It is opened in the morning and put to rest in the evening in the same style and manner. Before starting the day's work, men and women will go into the room where the Guru Granth has been ceremonially installed, say a prayer in front of it and open the book at random and read the first hymn which meets the eye to obtain what is called *vak* or the day's lesson or order (*bukm*). Breviaries contain stipulated *banis* from the Guru Granth which constitute the daily offices and prayers of a Sikh.

A very beautiful custom is that of *akband path* or uninterrupted recital of the Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end. Such a recital must be completed within 48 hours. The entire Guru Granth, 1430 large pages, is read through in a continuous ceremony. This reading must go on day and night, without a moment's intermission. The relay of reciters who take turns at saying Scripture must ensure that no break occurs. As they change places at given intervals, one picks the line from his predecessor's lips and continues. When and how the custom of reciting the canon in its entirety, in one continuous service began, is not known. Conjecture traces it to the turbulent days of the 18th century when persecution scattered the Sikhs to far-off

places. In those exilic, uncertain times, the practice of accomplishing a reading of the Holy Book by continuous recital is believed to have originated.

Important days on the Sikh calendar are marked by *akhand paths* in *gurdwaras*. Celebrations and ceremonies in Sikh families centre upon *akhand paths*. The homes are filled with holiness for those two days and nights as the Guru Granth, installed with due ceremony in a room, especially decorated for the occasion, is being, recited. Apart from lending the air sapctity, such readings make available to listeners the entire text. The listeners come as they wish and depart at their will. Thus they keep picking up snatches of the *bani* from different portions at different times.

Without such ceremonial recitals, the Guru Granth, a very large volume, would remain generally inaccessible to the laity except for *banis* which are recited by Sikhs as part of their daily devotion. In bereavement, families derive comfort from these *paths*. Obsequies in fact conclude with a completed reading of the Guru Granth Sahib and prayers are offered in its presence at the end for the departed soul. There are variations on *akhand path* as well. A common one is the *saptabik path* wherein the recital of the text is taken in parts and completed within one week. A *sabj* or slow-reading *path* may continue for a longer time, even for months. At such *paths* the Holy Book is recited or intoned, nor merely read. This brings out tellingly the poetic quality of the *bani* and its power to move or grip the listener. But it must be listened to in silence, sitting on the floor in front of it in a reverent posture.

The *bani* of the Guru Granth Sahib is all in the spiritual key. It is poetry of pure devotion, lyrical rather than philosophical, moral rather than cerebral. It prescribes no social code, yet the Guru Granth is the basis of Sikh practice as well as of Sikh devotion. It is the living source of authority, the ultimate guide for the spiritual and moral path Pointed by the Gurus. Whatever is in harmony with its tenor will be acceptable; whatever not, rejectible. Guidance is

sought from it on doctrine, on the tenets of the faith.

The Sikh Panth as a whole will resort to the Guru Granth as will the individuals in moments of perplexity or crisis. Instance comes to mind of the early days of the Gurdwara movement aiming to reform the ritual in Sikh places of worship. On October 12, 1920, a meeting of Sikh backward castes, sponsored by the faculty and students of the Khalsa College at Amritsar, was held in the Jallianwala Bagh. The following morning some of them were taken to the Golden Temple, but the granthis in control refused to accept *karahprasad* or sacrament they had brought as an offering and to say the *ardas* on their behalf. There was an outburst of protest against this discrimination towards the so-called low-caste Sikhs, totally contrary to the Sikh teaching. A compromise was at last reached and it was decided that the Guru's direction be sought. The Guru Granth Sahib was, as is the custom, opened at random and the first verse on the page to be read was:

He receives the lowly into grace,
And puts them in the path of righteous service.

The Guru's verdict was clearly in favour of those whom the *granthis* had refused to accept as full members of the community. This was a triumph for reformist Sikhs. The *karahprasad* brought was accepted and distributed among the *sangat*.

Singly or in groups, in their homes or in congregations in their places of worship, Sikhs conclude their morning and evening prayer, or prayer said at any other time as part of personal piety or of a ceremony, with a supplication called *ardas*. *Ardas* is followed by the recitation of these verses:

*Agya bhaei Akal ki tabhi chalayo panth,
Sabb sikkhan kau hukm hai Guru manio Granth.
Guru Granth ji maniyo pragat Guran ki dehi
Jo Prabhu ko milibo chahai kboj shabad main lehi.*

By the command of the Timeless Creator, was the Panth promulgated!

All Sikhs are hereby charged to own the Granth as their Guru.
Know the Guru Granth to be the person visible of the Gurus. They
who would seek to meet the Lord, In the Word as manifested in the
Book shall they discover Him. This is the status, the significance of
the Holy Book in the Sikh way of life.

PART V

CASTE SYSTEM AND SIKHS

CASTE SYSTEM AND THE SIKHS

JAGJIT SINGH

There is generally a lack of understanding of the achievements of the Sikh movement in the field of caste. That is so because neither the rigid strength of the caste system as a unified organic structure, nor the deliberate attempt of the Sikh Gurus to create a new society and to steer it away from the shackles of the constitutive elements of the caste and from the grip of the system as a whole, is fully appreciated.

The subject will be discussed under the

following sections:

- (1) The caste and the Caste system;
- (2) Three facets of the Caste system;
- (3) The caste system and the Sikhs in the period of ideological ascendancy;
- (4) The caste system and the Sikhs in the later period;
- (5) Conclusion.

SECTION I

THE CASTE AND THE CASTE SYSTEM

A good deal of confusion is avoided if a clear distinction is kept in view between the relative significance of caste, as such and when castes come to constitute a system as it happened in India alone.¹ A system, by its very definition is a complex whole, made up of different parts, which coordinates and harmonizes the working of its constituents to serve a set purpose. Without unity of purpose and coordination of functions, the constituents either remain a

haphazard assortment of factors and forces, or, at best, these combine casually to form a fraction of the potentially possible resultant force. This is amply illustrated by many examples of caste-like elements present in societies outside India. We cull a few of the facts given by Hutton² and Ghurya³ to prove our point.

1. *WHEN UNSYSTEMATIZED*

In ancient Assyria and Egypt, trades were forbidden to intermarry.

Goguet writes that “in the Assyrian Empire, the people were distributed into a certain number of tribes, and the professions were hereditary We know not the time nor the author of this institution, which from the highest antiquity prevailed almost over all Asia and even in several other countries.”²⁴

Risley argues that whenever the conquest of one people by another has taken place, it has been followed by inbreeding, and by an initial stage of hypergamy. Where the two peoples concerned “are of the same race, or at any rate of the same colour”, the initial stage of hypergamy passes away and a state of complete amalgamation follows. On the other hand, where marked distinctions of race and colour intervene “the tendency is towards the formation of a class of half-breeds, the result of irregular unions between men of the higher race and women of the lower, who marry only among themselves and are to all intents and purposes a caste.”²⁵ Thus, in the southern states of the U.S.A. “Negroes intermarry with Negroes, and the various mixed races, mulattoes, quadroons and octoroon, each have a sharply restricted *ius Connubii* of their own and are absolutely cut off from legal unions with white races.”²⁶ Hutton draws the conclusion that although the “Negro in the southern states has been in many respects kept segregated as a distinct community, prohibited or at least prevented from using the same public amenities as white men”, and while “it is certain enough that there is a strong prejudice on the part of the whites against mixed marriages, but the question of taboo

and pollution by touch hardly arises. A Negro servant to a white man is no strange anomaly, but a Brahman with a Chandal cook is unthinkable, and hardly less so a Rajput with a Dhobi for a valet... Conditions such as those under which Negroes and whites live together in the United States do not form a true parallel to caste in India.”⁷

Herodotus tells us that the Egyptians were divided into seven classes. The profession of priests and fighting men were hereditary. No artisan was allowed to have another trade and employment and the Egyptians came to hold the agriculturists as well as the able craftsmen in light esteem.⁸ Pig was regarded as an impure animal, “mere contact with which made it necessary to bathe. The swineherds, although native born Egyptians, could not enter any temple, and they married among themselves, as no one would be willing either to give a daughter to one of them in marriage, or to receive a swineherd’s daughter as a wife. The priests were also hereditary, and we learn, among other things, that they bathed themselves in cold water four times every twenty- four hours..... drank universally from brass vessels which they scoured daily, and regarded beans as unclean (*on katbaron*) food The parallel with caste is further emphasized by a statement that no Egyptian man or woman will kiss a Greek on the mouth, or use the knife, spit or cauldron of a Greek, or taste the flesh of a clean (*katharos*) ox if cut by a Greek knife..... It all sounds as though a caste system not unlike that of India may have existed in ancient Egypt.” Further, “The Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination unto the Egyptian.”¹⁰ But, Revillout, who has gone into this question carefully, “comes to a definite finding that whatever the nature of these so-called Egyptian ‘castes’, there is nothing to show that there was any caste system which really resembled that of India, nor anything in the customary laws of Egypt which interfered with social intercourse between these groups or prevented their inter-marriage (no doubt with the possible exception of the case of the pig-keepers) instances of which

are known to have taken place.”¹¹ “Indeed, in so far as there seem to have been groups analogous to caste in Egypt, they seem to have been rather of the nature of administrative organisations like those of the later Roman Empire, than of quasi-organic development like castes in India “¹²

The Burmese analogue is possibly as near to the essence of caste as any parallel elsewhere. Here, seven distinct classes of outcastes were recognized. These outcaste classes in Burma cannot enter a monastery nor become a Buddhist monk. One of these classes, the “pagoda slave is such for life and his children and descendants are pagoda slaves *in perpetuum* : they cannot be liberated even by a king. If a person who is not a pagoda slave marries or be married to a pagoda slave even unwillingly, such a person and all her or his children, even by a former marriage, also become automatically pagoda slaves in perpetuity. Pagoda slaves cannot be employed in any other capacity than that of 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.”¹³ However, although the seven classes constituted an outcaste population distinct from the people, their social relations with the remaining population were possible.¹⁴ “They did not constitute caste, so that there were, so to speak, only in caste and outcaste in Burma, and no ‘Caste system’.”¹⁵ The analogy of the caste system is also clear in this respect that the untouchability in Burma is obviously based on taboo.¹⁶ There seems, therefore, “to be common ground here for an origin of caste, which, while developing in India into an organic structure of society, has in Burma become stabilized in an undeveloped form, or even degenerated, so as to affect only a limited part of society, and 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.”

Nearest to the Indo-Aryans are the Aryans who migrated to Iran. There, the work of the priest was regarded as of the highest merit and that of the artisan as of the lowest. Change of profession from one class to another was allowed only to those who demonstrated exceptional merit. The priest could marry girls from the lower classes, but did not permit his daughter to marry a man from the lower class.¹⁷

In fact, the early population of Iran was divided into four *pishtrās*, analogous to the four *varnas* of India,¹⁸ and the priests were likened to the head of man, the warriors to his hands, the husbandmen to his stomach, and the artisans to his feet,¹⁹ which simile reminds one of the *Purusha* Sukta Hymn. But, the “existence of castes is nowhere attested in the history of Persia.”²⁰

China, whose civilization is considered older than ours, also had traces of caste-like social exclusiveness. The barbers and their sons were regarded among the pariah classes. They were not allowed to compete for the civil service. Singing girls, play actors, policemen and boatmen were considered low and had to marry within their own class. No slave could marry a free woman.²¹ But, seen in the overall context, the “Chinese society has been characterized by a remarkable minimum of hard and fast class division.”²² “By the time of the fourth and third B.C., the idea that social status should be determined mainly by individual merit had become deep rooted.”²³

In Japan, during her military age, society was divided into five distinct groups. The fifth group was formed of the *Eta* and the *Hinin*, who were the outcastes of the society. “Every occupation that brought a man into contact with unclean things, such as the corpses of human beings, the carcasses of animals, and offal of all descriptions were degraded.”²⁴ “So strong is the prejudice against them (*Eta*) that the very word *Eta*, if it must be uttered, is only whispered. They were considered subhuman; remembered with the *termination-biki* used for quadrupeds; 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 only go abroad between sunset and sunrise In the small fishing village of Mihorosaki. the children on either side never crossed an imaginary line which marked the frontier of untouchability half way up the street.”²²⁵ “Their (Etah’s) position is not without analogies to that of the exterior castes of Hinduism, but probably both here and in Burma what there is of caste is closer to the Ceylon than to the Indian pattern.”²²⁶

“The laws of the Anglo-Saxons laid it down that none was to seek in marriage a mate outside one’s class, so that if a person of lower status married a woman of a higher class he was to perish. In the eyes of the tribal law the only legal marriage that could take place was between free-born people of equal status. The free women who married her own slave lost her freedom, and had her property confiscated, and the slave was killed on the wheel. . . . Originally members of different status groups could not contract a marriage. . . 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 intermarriage, may, therefore, be considered to be a common characteristic of the mental background and social picture of the Indo-European cultures.”²²⁷

It was a common characteristic of the mental background and social picture of not only of the Indo-European cultures. In fact, social differentiation has been, and is, a characteristic common to all societies, including the most primitive ones. This social differentiation has developed into different degrees of social discrimination or exclusiveness, and taken various forms in different societies. Hutton and Ghurya have given instances also of caste-like elements present in many primitive, tribal and less developed societies outside India. The excerpts given above we have selected only from advanced societies, because the chances of system formation were greater there. In the instances cited above, we meet almost all the

elements that go into the formation of castes. There are strong colour and racial antipathies; taboos regarding human beings, animals and callings; notions of purity and impurity; restrictions on marriages; hereditary status differentiation and functionalism; social disabilities and segregation: and even extreme social formations of outcastes comparable in some respects, at least, to the miserable condition of the Indian outcastes. But no where these caste-like elements of social exclusiveness present in societies outside India developed into an elaborate system of castes.²⁸ The general tendency for caste-like social exclusiveness in other societies was either to melt away into more fluid class distinctions, or this exclusiveness, in its rigidity, remained in the nature of aberrations limited to a segment of the society concerned. Social exclusiveness elsewhere lacked that motive force, unity of purpose, organization, coordination, thrust and propulsive force that welded the Indian castes into an elaborate and all embracing caste system.

2. *AS A SYSTEM*

A system is qualitatively different from a casual or unintentional get-together or assortment of factors or forces. It is what distinguishes a philosophy, a religion or a 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 considered principles of procedure. Above all, it presumes a direction, a plan, a purpose, an objective, towards the fulfillment of which the functioning of the different parts of the system is coordinated and harmonized. As soon as a person loses his urge and will to live and survive, the working balance between his nervous, circulatory, respiratory and digestive apparatuses, etc., which maintains the body as a functional whole, is disturbed, and he is on the way to his final end. Moreover, a system has its own cumulative power, thrust, momentum and grip. Whereas, in other societies, the number of distinct

hierarchical layers or stratum could be counted on one's fingers, the number of well-defined Indian sub-castes is well over 3,000. And, all these sub-castes were meticulously arranged in a hierarchical social pyramid in which the social grade of each group and individual was fixed permanently by birth. Each layer in this social pyramid was superior in caste status (i.e. virtually in social status) to all the layers below it, and lower in caste status to all the others above it, irrespective of their political and economical position. Even the Brahmins at the top of the pyramid and the unapproachables at its bottom were graded among their own ranks. The privileges, disabilities, obligations and duties, i.e. practically all aspects of social behaviour, of each sub-caste were regulated by fixed rules and codes. These sub-castes were, by and large, endogamous groups, and they worked sedulously to isolate themselves from each other in other social matters too. Mutual exclusiveness was caused predominantly not by social but by ritualistic factors.²⁹ Ritual barriers are absolutely essential for caste³⁰, and the caste order is orientated religiously and ritually to a degree not even partially attained elsewhere.³¹ Such factors as personal endowments, wealth, political power, colour and racial prejudices, and even taboos (which could, and did, vary, and which determined the hierarchical setups in other societies) were not the final determinants of the Indian Caste hierarchy, though these did contribute to its development. Nothing could change the Indian caste hierarchical pattern. Although individuals, groups and sub-castes were in the grip of a continuously downgrading process, there was practically no upward social mobility. Whatever little there was, was only marginal and was exceptionally allowed in the interests of preserving the overall hierarchical structure, and never to its detriment. In short, the Indian caste hierarchy was not a fluid hierarchy of the types based on social prejudices or social grades, which are common enough, but which elsewhere lack integration into an elaborate social philosophy or a

rigid social system. The caste system was a hierarchical system with a vengeance. The way its hierarchical strata were arranged in minutest details in a hierarchical whole; the elaborate caste rules, codes and norms which regulated the application of the hierarchical principle at various sub-caste levels; and the thoroughness with which sanctions were applied by the caste Contunittees or panchayats to enforce these caste rules and norms; all showed a unique social phenomenon in human history. In other words, the caste system had all those elements of arrangement, organization, methods and principles of procedure which distinguish an organic growth from a casual one.

The second main feature of a system, we pointed out, is that it has a purpose, an objective and a plan in view, and the functioning of its different parts is coordinated and harmonized towards the fulfilment of that purpose and plan. It is, infact, this purpose which sets the direction which sets the direction in which the system is to move, and helps to coordinate the functioning of its constituents towards that direction. The overriding consideration of the caste system was the preservation of the caste status, primarily, of the priestly castes and to a lesser degree of that of the lower ones in fulfilment of the hierarchical scheme noted above. Towards that end, economic status was lowered than in caste status, and political power was made subsequent to the Brahmin priesthood.³² The preservation of the caste order became the overriding compulsion of the caste society to such an extent that all liberal and egalitarian social values and movements were either scorched or suppressed. Even purely religious movements, which had in them socially egalitarian seeds or trends, were either engulfed in the caste ideology or distorted to blunt their liberal import.³³ The functioning of the main elements that characterize Indian castes was directed towards the fulfilment of the supreme purpose, noted above, of the caste system. In fact, the distinctive traits and significance these factors assumed in the Indian context, in contrast to the significance of the

role of the same factors in other societies, was due to their getting interlocked in and with the caste system.

“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.³⁴ Hereditary functionalism does not constitute caste.³⁵ “Colour and racial exclusiveness have been common enough, but they have nowhere else led to such an institution as caste, and it would be rash to suppose that they could have done so in India of themselves.”³⁶ In the modern world, the racial and colour prejudice is most prominent by contrast among the Negroes and whites of the southern states of U.S.A. “It is no doubt true that separate railway carriages, separate restaurants, even separate townships, are provided for Negroes, but no pollution takes place as a result of employing Negro servants, and there is no hard and fast line which is really analogous to a caste distinction between, say, quadroons and octoroons; nor have the social factors which might have tended to produce similar results in India ever succeeded in making Muslims, Anglo-Indians or Eurasians into a caste in the Hindu sense; and where Muslims do form a real caste it is always one which has been converted to Islam from pre-Islamic inhabitants while retaining its original caste organization.³⁷ In India, hereditary functionalism assumed special significance because it was used to support a permanent hierarchical caste order. It is not hereditary functionalism that created caste, rather it was the caste system, of which it became a part, that gave hereditary functionalism its own significance in the Indian caste context. Similarly, the racial and colour prejudice between the Negroes and the whites in the U.S.A. is a hard present day reality of life, but the admixture of racial and ethnic stocks in India had taken place on such a scale that no caste can boast of its blood being pure.³⁸ The actual existence of racial and colour prejudice in the U.S.A. has not led to the formation of castes there but the myth of the preservation of the nonexistent purity of Aryan blood grades set in and

augmented the process which led to the formation of numerous sub-castes. This difference is due to the fact that, in the U.S.A. the racial and colour prejudice did not develop into an all embracing Dharma or system of socio-religious exclusiveness; in India it did.

Restrictions on connubium and commensalism are the most outstanding features of caste hierarchy. These restrictions are, in fact, a part and parcel of a general principle of purity and impurity "on which the entire system depends."³⁹ It is not to our purpose to go into the various hypotheses which trace the genesis and working of this notion of purity and impurity to the beliefs in taboos, *mana*, soul-stuff and magic etc.⁴⁰ What is pertinent for us is that the beliefs in taboos, *mana*, soul-stuff and magic were current in many societies but nowhere these led to the formation of castes, much less a caste system. "No doubt ideas of magic, *mana*, taboo and soul-substance were not wanting among the Indo-European themselves. Parsi priests have to undergo elaborate ceremonies of purification, and while in state of purity must eat no food cooked and drink water drawn by anyone but a man or woman of the priestly class."⁴¹ "With Parsis, eating and drinking are religious rites."⁴²

"The *mana* principle appears in the Buddhist religion as *iddht* and in Islamic beliefs as *kudrat*."⁴³ "It is not suggested that the caste system has developed from ideas of soul-stuff, *mana*, magic and taboo above; only that without these ideas it could not have developed. If these ideas alone were enough, one might expect to see a caste system in every island from the Nicobars to Easter, instead of only in India."⁴⁴ Not only that. We have seen, more than mere ideas or notions, a fairly well developed social phenomenon of untouchability in the cases of the pagoda slaves of Burma and of *Eta* in Japan. "The untouchability in Burma is obviously based on taboo."⁴⁵ What was peculiar to India was that these notions of taboos, *mana*, etc., were systematized by Hindu priests and lawgivers into an elaborate system of Social philosophy, Dharma, rules and norms which, in turn,

became the all pervasive ideological basis of the caste system. In fact, these rules and norms were a part of a wider hierarchical cosmic principle which grades gods, animals, food, drinks, vegetables and many more things of common use into higher and lower categories in terms of their preconceived graded of intrinsic purity and impurity. Similarly, restrictions on intermarriages are a common feature of many societies. But, in class societies the prohibition on intermarriages was not one of taboo so much as one of mere social prejudice, while there was no commensal taboo as in India.⁴⁶ In addition to the commensal taboos, what further complicated the connubial restrictions in India was that these were linked with religious sanction and Dharma. In other words, the connubial restrictions became a part of that complex what is called the Indian caste system. And it is this integration into this caste system which made the Indian connubial restrictions more exclusive and rigid than the restrictions on intermarriage elsewhere. “Among classes who marry among themselves, marriage outside caste is prevented by sentiment and not by hard and fast rules. Marriage outside the class in Europe might be rare and invalid, but in India, if it is contracted outside the caste, it is a sacrilege.”⁴⁷

It is not only restrictions on intermarriages that were sanctified by religion and Dharma. Also, it is not only religious sanction and Dharma that made the Indian caste system the Gordianknot it is. Of this, we will see later. What we want to point out here is that the Indian caste system was no ordinary system. Its constituents were interdependent and interlocked both horizontally and vertically in the social fabric. Within the sub-caste, each constituent of the system (e.g. hereditary functionalism, restrictions regarding commensalism and connubium, pollution, ritualistic taboos, religious sanction and Dharma, etc.) tied its own..caste-knot around the individual, and the several caste-knots so made by the different constituents multiplied caste exclusiveness and rigidity, because all these served the same overall

purpose of the caste system. Individuals bound in such manner joined together to form the sub-caste, which may be called the horizontal network of the caste system. The sub-castes, so made, were further interlocked in a vertical network of similarly constituted sub-castes, arranged in a hierarchical structure of higher and lower sub-castes. It was, again, not a simple hierarchical system based on one or two factors. Here the hierarchical principle was reinforced by a variety of supposed grades of intrinsic purity or impurity inherent in individuals and groups of human beings; in trades, occupations and professions; in articles of food, drink, and of common use; in ritualistic and ethical standards; and in Dharmik and religious duties and obligations. As an illustration, we will give only one example; as to how untouchability was graded, as if untouchability as such was not low enough. "A Nayar may approach a Nambudri Brahman, but must not touch him; a Tiyan (toddy-drawer) must remain 36 paces off; a Malayan (Le. Panen, exorcist basket-maker) must remain 'three or four' paces farther; a Pulayan (cultivator and untouchable) must keep 96 paces from a Brahmin. A Tiyan must not come within 12 paces of a Nayar; a Malayan (panen) must keep 3 or 4 paces farther off, and a Pulayan must still keep his 96 from a Nayar as well as a Brahmin." A Panen may approach but not touch a Tiyan, but a Pulayan must not even approach a Panen.⁴⁸ The intricate entanglement of the warp and woof of the Indian caste system hardly needs further comment. It amply illustrates how wrong it is to evaluate the role of the various factors that contribute to caste formation by viewing them in isolation without taking into consideration the enhanced significance their role assumes when placed in the context of the Indian caste system. The third prominent feature of a system, we mentioned, is that the system as a whole acquires much greater grip, momentum and thrust, a greater total resultant force than the leverage exercised individually by its uncoordinated

constituents. The primitive beliefs in taboos, *mana*, soul--stuff, magic purity and impurity never came near (not even where these gained some dimension as in the case of the pagoda slaves of Burma and Eta of Japan) to becoming that propulsive, enveloping and binding force that these became when these were coordinated and systematized into a code and Dharma by the Hindu priests and lawgivers. The same is true regarding hereditary functionalism and restrictions on commensalism and intermarriages. As regards its sweep and grip the caste system became a self-expanding downgrading process which gradually enveloped large section of the Aryan people themselves, including the kshatriyas. It did not spare the Aryan women folk, not even those of the Brahmins.⁴⁹ It covered the entire Hindu society, excepting the Sadhus and medicants, etc., who had broken off all worldly connections. There could be no Hindu without being a member of one caste or the other.⁵⁰ A conquered barbarian territory was 'ritually pure' only when the king established the four castes.⁵¹ There were ritualistic barriers against tribes not affiliated with the Hindu association. They were magically defiled and no Hindu temple was open to them.⁵² There were codified sanctions against the breach of caste norms and rules, and the caste-committee or panchayat of each caste was itself the jealous guardian for enforcing these sanctions. These caste rules were so elaborate and systematized in such detail that there was no escape from these for any group or individual. Wilson has graphically described how these rules regulated in minutest details the life of an individual from birth to death.⁵³

SECTION II

THREE FACETS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

We are not attempting to detail here all the different features of caste as such. What we want to point out are the three main factors (i.e. caste ideology, Brahmins and the Caste society) responsible for constituting and consolidating the castes into the Indian Caste System.

1. THE CASTE IDEOLOGY

The fundamental assumption of the caste ideology is that ‘Men were not-as for classical Confucianism-in principle equal, but for ever unequal’.⁵⁴ They were so by birth, and ‘were as unlike as man and animal.’⁵⁵ It has to be clearly grasped that this inequality between man and man was in principle, and not merely the result of a gap between man’s aspirations and practice that is the common failing of all human organizations, religious or social. Permanent human inequality by birth is the summum bonum of the officially declared brahmanical ideology. This forms the very basis of its social order. Instead of being akin to a universal father, God himself was made the author of unequal Varnas. Prajapati created him (the Sudra) as the slave of other castes.⁵⁶ Moreover, He was the God of the Aryans only, from whom the Sudras were excluded. ‘Everyone cannot obtain this (for the gods do not associate every man), but only an Arya, a Brahmin, or a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya, for these alone can sacrifice. Nor should one talk with everybody (for gods do not talk with everybody) but only with an Arya.’⁵⁷ Order and rank of the castes is eternal (according to the doctrine) as the course of the stars and the difference between animal species and the human race.’⁵⁸ Therefore, the key to the caste system is the pre-eminence given by it to the caste--status; and the key to the pre-eminence gained by the caste--status is the sanction it received from the orthodox scriptures, ritualism, old tradition and custom. The last three also had a religious sanction and sanctity.

(i) Pre-eminence of Caste Status

The caste status comprised social status, but it was something more than what is generally meant by social status. Ordinarily, social status depends upon the personal endowments of an individual or a group, as also on wealth and power. These could be additional adjuncts to the caste--status, but the caste-status retained its primacy even without

these. Manu declares that whether learned or not, and even when practising undesirable occupations, a Brahmin is a great divinity.⁵⁹ Besides, social status is generally variable. With the loss of political and economic power, status consciousness tends to vanish. Whole classes have been replaced by other classes; races have been known to lose their identity; occupations have risen and fallen in the scale of social estimation; and group bias and prejudices have disappeared altogether, or have been replaced by others of different kinds. But, here the caste status was based on birth and placed above political and economic status. The wealthiest Bania was lower in caste-status than the poorest Kshatriya. The Chaturpatti Hindu King was lower in caste-status than his own priest (Purohit) who was economically dependent upon the prince. Gautama lays down that when a king and a Brahmin pass along the same road, the road belongs to the Brahmin and not to the king.⁶⁰ Shivaji, the embodiment of the solitary successful Hindu revolt against the Muslim political domination, had to go about a begging to the Brahmins for the legitimation of his sovereignty by them. As late as the beginning of the present century, “the Shanans of southern India, inspite of the wealth they have acquired, have no right to build two-storied houses, to wear gold ornaments, or to support an umbrella.”⁶¹

(ii) The Authority of Scriptures

From very remote times, it became the cardinal belief of the orthodox religion that the Vedas were ‘Aspurshaya’⁶² (that it was not the work of man), or that these were self-revealed texts. Had this belief been confined purely to the realm of religion, it would have been quite different. But, it was used as the central pillar on which the superstructure of the Caste system was raised and maintained. The Vedic hymns are, by and large, concerned with sacrifices and ritualism, which served to consolidate the position of the sacerdotal class. These hymns also directly extol the priestly class which, as a caste, became inextricably bound up with

caste system. Above all, the authority of the Vedas, and of other scriptures (by linking them with the Vedas), was invoked to sanctify and declare inviolable the caste system and its retrograde rules.

The oft-cited Purusha Sukta hymn, which is sung by the Rig Vedic and Yajurvedic priests at the time of their principal ceremonies (as if to emphasize its importance), was regarded as a divine ordinance sanctioning the origin of the four castes.⁶³ The Vedas were declared by Manu to be the direct revelation of God (Sruti),⁶⁴ and was to be viewed as the sole source of all knowledge, secular as well divine.⁶⁵ Throughout the earlier part, and even in the body of the Institutes, the Dharma Sastra of Manu is spoken of as the inspired exponent of the Vedas, almost of equal (p. 18 et. a1) authority with them; but in the last chapter of this book is a passage (p. 359, 109) wherein the Vedangas, Mimansa, Nyaya, Dharma Sastras, and Puranas are called the extended branches of the Vedas.⁶⁶ All outside it (the Vedas), or not derived from it in the Dharma Sastra by the perfect wisdom of Manu, was human, vain, and false. Unbelief in the Vedas was deadly sin; and whoever, in reliance upon heretical books, questioned the authority of the revealed Vedas and of the Dharma Sastras was to be treated as an atheist, and driven from the society of the virtuous.⁶⁷ Rejection of the authority of the Vedas, transgression of the precepts of the Sastras, and an universal lawlessness, lead to a man's own destruction. The Brahmin who regards himself as a Pandit, who reviles the Vedas, and is devoted to useless logic, the science of reasoning, who states arguments among virtuous men, defeats them by his syllogisms, who is constant assailant and abuser of Brahmins, an universal doubter and a fool, is to be regarded as a child; people regard that man as a dog. Just as a dog assails to bark and to kill, so such men set to wrangle and to overthrow the sacred books.⁶⁸ "Abandoning fruitless reasonings, resort to the Vedas and the Smrities."⁶⁹ One of the few essentially binding duties of Hindu 'faith' is not-at least not directly-to dispute their

authority (i.e. of the sacred books).⁷⁰

Manu did not rest content with establishing the divine authority of the Vedas, his own work, and that of other scriptures. His object thereby was to sanctify the caste system and the position of the Brahmins. So he decreed that “the teaching of a Brahmin is authoritative for ‘man’, because the Vedas are the foundation for that.”⁷¹

That the authority of the scriptures was used to sanctify the caste-system and other retrograde social laws, hardly needs any elaboration. This point has been the main burden of Manava and other Dharma Sastras. Their inimical approach towards the Sudras, Vaishyas and women is crystal clear. Manu claimed that Brahma enacted the code of laws, and taught it to him (Manu), Manu taught it to Bhrigu, and the latter would repeat it to the sages.⁷² He further declared that the soul of one who neglected his caste-duties might pass into a demon,⁷³ The Gita preaches that, ‘according to the classification of the action and qualities the four castes are created by me. Know me, non-actor and changeless, as even the author of this.’⁷⁴ It further sanctifies hereditary functionalism thus: “Congenital duty, O son of Kunti, though defective, ought not to be abandoned.”⁷⁵ According to one passage in the Mahabharata, ‘As cisterns for cattle, as streamlets in a field, the Smriti (law-code), is the eternal law of duty, and is never found to fail.’⁷⁶ The Dharma-Sutras enjoined that a king has to rely on the Vedas and Dharma Sastras for carrying out his duties.⁷⁷

Whether the Purusha hymn is a later addition or an interpolation, and whether its interpretation is correct or not, and whether the sanctity derived for the Dharma Sastras and other post-Vedic scriptures from the Vedas is real or fake, is beside the point. One cannot get away from the hard reality that the scriptural sanctity attached to the Dharma Sastras and the like texts, and to the inviolability of the laws laid down by them, became a cardinal part of the religious belief of Brahmanism, old and new. The Brahmins came to monopolize the interpretation of these scriptures.⁷⁸ The

Brahmanical interpretation of these scriptures became the main prop for sanctifying and maintaining the caste-system and social reaction. Above all, the Brahmanical interpretation of the scriptures in this respect was neither challenged for thousands of years, nor a single voice raised against it from within orthodoxy. Anybody who dared to differ from the Brahmanical view was declared a heretic, and this so-called heresy was the main plank for combating Buddhism and other liberal trends controverting or doubting the validity of the caste-system or Brahmanism. ‘To acknowledge the authority of the Vedas, as demanded of the Hindu, means *fides implicita* in a more fundamental sense than that of Catholic Church, and precisely because no saviour is mentioned whose revelation could have substituted new law for old.’⁷⁹ And, ‘Brahmanical and caste power resulted from the inviolability of all sacred law which was believed to ward off evil enchantment.’⁸⁰

(iii) Hindu Dharma

In the ever-changing scene of the importance of deities, creeds, racial antipathies and other considerations, there was in Hinduism one factor which was persistent. It was the concept of Hindu Dharma. This concept was synonymous, or very closely interwoven, with the social order of Brahmanism. viz., the caste system (Varna Ashrama Dharma). Like the banks of a stream, it determined the limits within which the current of Indian social life must flow and the direction system, all varieties and sorts of dogmas, ideas, faiths, creeds, customs and practices were tolerated and allowed to be a part of the Hindu Dharma. But any threat to the framework of the social order was frowned upon, condemned, or combatted against, depending upon the seriousness of the threat posed. The concept of Hindu Dharma was the main plank for fighting heresies like Buddhism and Jainism, but what Brahmanism was concerned with was not the divergence from the Vedic religion and practice, because Neo-Brahmanism

itself was the result of such a variation in belief and practice. It had virtually broken away from the old Vedic religion. 'Vedas contain nothing about the divine and human affairs fundamental to Hinduism.'⁸¹ The Vedas rather defy the dharma of Hinduism.⁸² In fact, it is such a get-together of fluid religious ideas, beliefs, cults, etc., that 'at the present time it is next to impossible to say exactly what Hinduism is, where it begins, and where it ends. Diversity is its very essence.'⁸³

As such, what was really at stake was not the religious doctrines and beliefs, but the orthodox social order, i.e. the caste system or the Varna Ashrama Dharma as it was called. 'In contrast to the orthodox sects, the heresy of the theophratrics 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.'⁸⁴

The above view is further supported by the fact that the hostility of Brahmanism towards different heretic sects has varied almost in direct proportion to the effective threat they posed, not so much to the orthodox creed as such, but to the caste system. From the purely theological point of view, Jainism was no less heretic than Buddhism, but the Jains suffered far less persecution than the Buddhists. It was so because, 'if the necessity arose, Jainism was not unwilling to admit a god of popular Hinduism to this galaxy. Besides, it was also not opposed to the theory of caste. It was thus very much less hostile and more accommodating to Hinduism than other heterodox systems. The result of this spirit of accommodation was that Jainism has survived in India till today, whereas Buddhism, its twin sister, had to look for habitation elsewhere.'⁸⁵ Also, when Buddhism itself had ceased to be a serious challenge to the established social order, Lord Buddha was included in the list of Vishnu's Avtaras, although Buddhism had by no means compromised, even at that period, its essential tenets.

It is significant that Saivism, which had been established throughout India in the third century BC.⁸⁶ (and was the predominant religion in the 7th and the 8th centuries,⁸⁷ or shared even honours in popularity with Vaisnavism⁸⁸), but which did not stress the observance of caste,⁸⁹ and showed comparative independence from Brahmins and Brahmanism, got steadily pushed into the background by Vaisnavism, which was liberal in accepting the caste system and the Brahmins as its ministers.

The above hypothesis also helps us to explain why Brahmanism, which had all along been very particular about sex morality and even upheld celibacy as an ideal, could put up with the Sakatas, with their obscene practices, but rejected the highly ethical Buddhists. It also explains why the doors of Vedic religion, which were closed to Sudras and women so long as they remained in the social field, were opened to them if they became sophists or mendicants, i.e. when they cut themselves away from the general society and their status ceased to be of any consequence to the social order.

It is not our aim to reduce the interpretation of various socio-religious developments in India in terms of a simple formula. We only seek to emphasize that the consideration of preserving the orthodox social order (the caste system) was supreme in determining the direction and developments of even the religious systems. This view is further supported by the pattern of assimilation of alien elements into Hinduism. The motivation on the part of those assimilated, whether tribes, classes, sects, or nobles, was the legitimation of their social and economic situation.⁹⁰ The precondition for their assimilation was the adoption by them of the Neo--Brahmanical social customs and usages. Two aspects of this process of assimilation are noteworthy. First, both the motivation and the conditions for accepting outsiders had not much to do with religion as such; these were primarily social in their nature. Secondly, the more one accepted the antisocial restrictions regarding occupations, contact, table-

community and widow-remarriage, and adopted customs such as endogamy and child-marriage, higher the status one got in the orthodox social order.⁹¹ In other words, conformity with the caste-system was the central criterion for admission to the Hindu Dharma. The assimilated races, tribes or nobles, found their place only as members of some caste or as new castes.

(iv) Custom, Ritualism and Ceremonialism

Custom, ceremonialism, and ritualism do not lag behind in claiming sanction of the sacred scriptures.⁹¹⁻⁹²⁻⁹³⁻⁹⁴⁻⁹⁵⁻⁹⁶⁻⁹⁷⁻⁹⁸⁻⁹⁹⁻¹⁰⁰ Custom, says The Code of Manu, is transcendent law.¹⁰¹ Hence, the assertion of Manu that a number of Kshatriya races sank among men to the lowest of the four castes on account of their omission to perform holy rites and to see the Brahmins.¹⁰² Similarly, children, although the off springs of a couple in the same caste, were likely to forfeit their caste--status if the obligatory ceremonies were neglected. A special term Vratyas was used to distinguish them from others.¹⁰³

The path of action (Karma-marga), one of the three recognised paths of attaining salvation, which was emphasized by the Vedas and the Brahmanas, was the path of doing prescribed duties of rituals. It was the most widespread of the three paths. ritualism was not confined to the religious sphere; it governed all aspects of the life of an individual and circumscribed his outlook and action. The great importance attached to religious and ceremonial observances enabled the priestly class to entrench itself in the social system to an extent wholly unknown elsewhere. Upanayna ceremony was made absolutely obligatory for the first three castes. Unless performed by the prescribed age, the individual lost his caste. Thus, in addition to the right by birth, initiation, which was called rebirth or second birth, was the door by which one entered the Aryan family. The key to this door was placed in no other hand than that of the Brahmin, because he alone had the right to initiate. All roads lead to Rome. Ritualism, ceremonialism, and

custom also converged towards entrenching the caste order and social reaction. Mutual exclusiveness was predominantly caused not by social, but by ritualistic factor,¹⁰⁴ and “the essential concepts of commensality, and endogamy are ritual rather than economic in nature.”¹⁰⁵ Ritual barriers were absolutely essential for caste,¹⁰⁶ “The caste order is orientated religiously and ritually to a degree not even partially attained elsewhere.”¹⁰⁷ That territory only was ritually pure where had been established the four castes.¹⁰⁸ As already noted, the dharma, which hinges on the ritualistic duties of one’s caste, ‘is the central criterion of Hinduism.’¹⁰⁹

(v) Pollution

The notions about pollution, of which the taboo on food is just one aspect, played the biggest role in extending the caste system and in projecting it in its day to day operation. It has been mentioned that colour-prejudice and racial hatred, perhaps, were responsible for lowering the status of the Sudras. But it was not just that. They were considered to be impure by their very birth as Sudras. Their mere presence defiled the air. The inherent impurity in them could not be shaken off by any means. The story of Matanga, a Sudra, given in the Epic, well illustrates the approach of the caste ideology towards the Sudras. Matanga does penance for centuries to regain his lost dignity. Indra on his throne is moved and promises him exceptional favours; but the one of rise to a higher caste, which the penitent solicited, was impossible. ‘Thousands and millions of successive births are necessary to obtain the ascent from a lower to higher caste’, replies Indra.¹¹⁰ It was, thus, the notion of inherent pollution or impurity which was mainly responsible for stiffening and making permanent the social exclusiveness against the Sudras. The concept of pollution did not remain confined to the Sudras. As it originated in the fancy of Brahmins and was not subject to any principle, it was diversified and extended in many ways and directions. Human beings, animals,

vegetables, articles of food and of daily use, occupations, etc., were graded in an arbitrarily fixed scale of comparative purity and impurity. What is still worse, this gradation was made an instrument for fixing the social position of individuals and groups in the caste society. The idea of pollution associated with the after-effects of child-birth and the flow of blood at the time of the monthly period of women had much to do with the undermining of their social status. The peasants, who comprised the majority among the Vaisyas, were downgraded simply because ploughing involved the killing of worms. In the classical literature 'the Vaisya is, first a peasant.'¹¹¹ Arian describes the husbandman as respected and as having his rights preserved even during a war.¹¹² But 'in post-classical times and at present the conception of the Vaisya as a "peasant" has completely vanished.'¹¹³ He has been, with a few exceptions, pushed to the borderline of the Sudras. 'For a man to lay his hand to the plough or to cultivate vegetables is throughout the high castes, considered to entail derogation.'¹¹⁴ Similarly, honoured Vedic professions, such as those of the tanner, weaver, smith and chariot-maker came to be confined in later days to the Sudras.¹¹⁵ Castes came to be downgraded because they took to vocations which involved processes or handling of articles considered to be religiously impure. 'The lowest caste strata was considered to be absolutely defiling and contaminating. First, this stratum comprised a number of trades which are almost always despised because they involve physically dirty work; street cleaning and others. Furthermore, this stratum comprised services which Hinduism had come to consider ritually impure: tanning, leather work.'¹¹⁶ Then there were other castes which, though trifle higher in the social scale, are for all that not treated with any respect. The barbers and washermen are looked upon as menials because of the unclean things they have to handle. The potters are also a very low class. The five castes of artisans and the manufacturers and vendors of oil are very much looked down upon. The Mochis or tanners

are so much despised that other Sudras would hardly condescend to give them a drop of water to drink. This feeling of repulsion is caused by the defilement which is presumed to ensure from their constantly handling the skin of dead animals.¹¹⁷ “And in all cases the nature of taboo is such, of course, that the contagion of the pollution occupation contaminates all members of the caste whatever their individual occupation may be, and to an infinite number of generation.”¹¹⁸

Not only was impurity or defilement believed to be imparted by direct contact, but it was supposed to be contracted indirectly through objects, and in an extreme case even through sight. This is what led to the castes of untouchables, unapproachables and unseenables. There are villages of Brahmins to which all other castes were strictly refused admittance.¹¹⁹ Impure castes shunned infectious contact with non-members as rigidly as the high castes.¹²⁰ As already seen, unapproachability also came to be meticulously graded.

There is a proverb that caste is only a question of food.¹²¹ The Santhals, a very low caste in Bengal, have been known to die of hunger in times of famine rather than touch food prepared even by Brahmins.¹²² A general criterion of the social position of the caste of a person was as to which of the higher castes would accept water or food from him.¹²³ In fact, the notion of pollution in its application assumed innumerable variations and confronted individuals often in their daily life. The grading of professions, crafts and occupations, of which downgrading of some of them is a corollary, ‘was so much an integral part of the caste system that Nesfield goes to the extent of regarding occupation as the centre around which the caste has grown up. The pressing of oil-seeds is stigmatized as a degrading occupation in the Code of Manu because it is supposed to destroy life. This seems to have led to the division of the Teli caste into two. The ones who press oil are treated as untouchables, and the Telis who only sell oil will outcaste

a member who should venture to press it.¹²⁴ It is not Our purpose to go into many details. But it needs to be stressed that the idea of pollution was given a distinct religious significance. It spread a wide network which directly downgraded existing castes, created new ones, and consolidated social differentiation in the caste society by raising religiously (or magically) tinged insurmountable barriers between different castes.

(vi) The Theory of Avtaras and the 'Karma' theory

The Avtara theory, or the theory of incarnations or the descent of God, led to important social implications. Social reaction was tagged on to the fair name of the Avtaras and their authority was invoked to confer divine sanction for the caste-order and social reaction. Lord Rama was said to have cut off the head of a Sudra for the sole crime of indulging in religious rites not allowed to his caste.¹²⁵ Lord Krishna was supposed to have asserted that he was the creator of Chaturvarnya.¹²⁶ The association of the authority of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, the popular Avtaras of Vishnu, with the caste order and the reactionary social usage, gave great support to these institutions. The Shastras and the other Brahmanical religious literature had, no doubt, already claimed Vedic sanction for these. But Vedism had ceased to be a living force in the post-Buddhist period, except as an authority for owning formal allegiance. But, Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, who as Avtaras were thought to have come in the garb of human beings to uphold Dharma, had become living realities for the vast multitudes who worshipped them. Sanction of the caste order by these Avtaras, therefore, gave fresh sanction to this inequitable social system.

The Karma theory, as applied by Brahmanism, not only explained the caste origin of individuals and provided for 'the co-existence of different ethical codes for different status groups', but it also benumbed the moral sensitiveness of those who came under its spell. It made blind to the evident immorality of the caste ethics. For, once the premises of this

theory were accepted, 'Karma doctrine transformed the world into a strictly rational, ethically-determined cosmos.¹²⁷ The caste situation of the individual was not accidental. He was born into a caste as merited by his conduct in a prior life. 'An orthodox Hindu confronted with the deplorable situation of a member of an impure caste would only think that he has many a great sin to redeem from his prior existence.¹²⁸ This also led to the corollary that a member of an impure caste through primarily of bettering his future social opportunities in the next birth by leading an exemplary life according to the prescribed duties of the caste in which he was born. In this life there was no escape from the caste. There was no way to move up in the caste order. 'The inescapable on rolling karma causality is in harmony with the eternity of the world, of life, and, above all, the caste order.¹²⁹ It was, therefore, senseless to think of overthrowing the system. An individual oppressed by the caste order was not left with any hope whatsoever. 'He too can "win the world", even the heavenly world; he can become a Kshatriya, a Brahman, he can gain Heaven and become a god-only not in this life, but in the life of the future after rebirth into the same world pattern.¹³⁰ 'Absolute pre-requisite, however, were strict fulfilment of caste obligations in this present life, the shunning of ritually sacrilegious yearning for renouncing caste.'¹³¹ The Bhagavata Purana (Book XI, Chap. X) demanded that the followers of Bhagavata, 'forsaking all desires should act in consonance with their castes.'

In such a scheme of Karma-bound society, men were 'for ever unequal'. 'Thus there was no "natural" order of men and things in contrast to positive social order. There was no *sort* of "natural law"..... All the problems which the concept of "natural law" called into being in the Occident were completely lacking. There simply was no "natural". equality of man before any authority, least of all before a super-worldly god it excluded for ever the rise of social criticism, of rationalistic speculation, and abstractions of the

natural law type, and hindered the development of any sort of idea of “human right”.¹³²

It is not suggested that the Karma theory was formulated necessarily to justify the caste order and caste-ethics. But, there is no doubt that it admirably served the ends of the caste order. Like the scriptures, religious literature and the epics, it was moulded to the extent necessary for the Brahmanical purposes. The facts enumerated above leave no doubt that the Indian caste ideology was altogether different from the loose bundle or combination of social prejudices and discriminations, such as we meet in the colour and racial bar among the Negroes and the whites in the U.S.A., or in the restricted *jus connubii* among class societies in general and among the mixed races of mulattoes, quadroons and octoroons in particular, or in the notion of impurity attached to pig and swineherds in Egypt, or in the elements of untouchability that we find concerning the pagoda slaves of Burma and Eta of Japan. The Indian caste ideology was not a simple ideology. It was an ideological system, wherein social prejudices concerning hierarchy, colour, race, taboos, purity, impurity and pollution etc., were integrated into one whole to serve the overall purpose of the caste system. Towards this end, Hindu scriptural sanction, Dharma, tradition, custom, ritualism, ceremonialism and the theories of ‘Karma’ and ‘Avatars’ were interlinked and coordinated. “To quit the work and duties of (one’s) caste is a sin.”¹³³ The most heinous crime was to commit an offence against the caste order.¹³⁴ The soul of one who neglected his caste -duties might pass into a demon.¹³⁵ Dharma came to mean primarily ritualistic duties, and ritualistic barriers between castes are fundamental to the caste system.¹³⁶ One’s Dharma depended upon the Caste into which the individual was born¹³⁷ and was indissolubly connected with his caste duties. Hence, for the duties of one’s caste, a special term, ‘Varnasrama Dharma’, was coined. As such, ‘Varnasrama Dharma’, the ritualistic duties of castes, became the central

criterion of Hinduism.¹³⁸ By ignoring his ritualistic duties, namely the caste duties, the individual lost both his Dharma and his caste.¹³⁹ Significantly, the codes, which laid the legal basis of the caste society, were titled as Dharam Shastras. In this way, Dharma was, on the one hand, linked to religious duties, and, on the other, to the caste duties, thus, forging another link, apart from scriptural sanction, for endowing religious sanctity to the castes and the caste system. This ideology raised social hierarchy to the level of a religious principle by giving it the sanction of Hindu scriptures, Dharma and other constituents of the caste ideology, which also had religious connotation of one kind or the other. This principle of social hierarchy, in its practical application, was diversified and codified by Hindu law-givers and priests in such great detail as to make the Indian caste society the most elaborate hierarchical social system ever known to the world. We have seen above how the Hindu Dharma made the caste system rigid and inviolable. In short, the caste ideology, we repeat, was not a simple ideology. It was an ideological system, different constituents of which were indissolubly inter-linked and coordinated with one another to serve one set purpose, i.e. of the caste order. In fact, this ideological system was the ideological base on which the superstructure of the caste system was reared and maintained. Rather, we may not be wrong in calling the two systems (the ideological system and the social system-the caste system) two sides of the same coin.

2. *BRAHMINS*

The record facet of the caste system were the Brahmins as a caste. Dr. Bhandarkar writes: "There is hardly a class or caste in India which has not a foreign strain in it. There is admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes-the Rajputs and the Marathas-but also amongst the Brahmins. Looked at from the antiquarian or ethnological point of view, the claims of either community (Brahmins or Kshatriya) to purity of blood are untenable and absurd."¹⁴⁰

This conclusion is supported by almost all authorities.¹⁴¹ Now, the preservation of the supposed purity of Aryan blood in the upper classes is the *raison d'être* for establishing the castes. It was what led to hereditary functionalism and restrictions on connubium and commensalism. A great human conscious effort was needed to arrest the admixture of Aryan and non-Aryan blood and to establish the myth of *Dvijās* or the twice-born. Similarly a great conscious effort was needed to dethrone Buddhism and its political sway which had lasted supreme for over one thousand years. These developments were the handiwork of Brahmins. In addition, the Brahmins, as a caste, were the all-time standing kingpin of the caste system in more than one way. They were its ideologies as well as the focal point around which the system revolved.

(i) As Ideologues

Undoubtedly, the entire non-heretical post-Vedic literature is the handiwork of Brahmins. They are also mainly responsible for the moulding of non-heretical tradition. All through the centuries, no one from within the orthodox society has ever dared to question this remoulding handiwork of the Brahmins.

The literature of the new form of Brahmanism is all the work of, or inspired by, the Brahmin hierarchy.¹⁴² The fifth book of Aitareya Aranyaka is notoriously spurious.¹⁴³ According to one view, even Vedic hymns have been arranged in the Brahmanical interests,¹⁴⁴ and *Manu Smṛiti* has been shortened and reactionary new laws introduced in the old version.¹⁴⁵ About the present *Mahābhārata* there is no doubt that it is a redaction of Vyasa's original historical poem, edited by *Vaiṣampāyana* and reissued a second time with notes and additions by *Sauti*.¹⁴⁶

Puranas too were changed. One undoubted proof of interpolations having taken place is that, although these belong to different periods, 'each and all of the Puranas have

each and all of them the names of the whole eighteen recorded in the text.¹⁴⁷

(ii) As a Pivotal Point

Almost all authorities are agreed that it is the Brahmin caste, which, like a wheel within a wheel, is the axis of the caste-system. It is this caste which sets the guidelines of the system, and determines the direction of its course. It is the Brahmins who have profited most from the-system and are mainly responsible for its maintenance and furtherance.

We have mentioned that the key to the caste system is the urge for gaining a position of vantage in the caste pyramid. Undoubtedly, the pivot of caste hierarchy is the recognized superiority of the Brahmin caste. Not only that, the Brahmins came to occupy the central position in Hinduism, because caste is essentially a social rank; and the social rank of the castes is determined with reference to the Brahmins.¹⁴⁸ The Brahmin 'reception or rejection of water or food is the measure of the status of any given caste in a given place.'¹⁴⁹ All things considered, what governs precedence is the degree of fidelity with which each caste conforms, or professes to confirm, to Brahmanical teaching either as regards marriage or external purity, or as regards the occupations or accessory customs. A 'caste such as might arouse, much prejudice and contempt may, in spite of all this, be treated with lasting esteem for the sole reason that it displays superior fidelity to the Brahmanic practices.'¹⁵⁰

The religious and social authority that the Brahmins came to wield is too well known to need any comment. The recognition of the sanctity of the Brahmin Lavite caste became one of the very few binding factors in the chaotic mass of Neo-Brahmanical dogma and practice. The respect of some of the Hindus for the Brahmins goes so far that, according to a proverb, to be robbed by Sanavriya Brahmins, who had adopted highway robbery as a profession, was regarded as a favour from heaven.¹⁵¹

In the political sphere, too, the Brahmins' influence came to be unchallenged. Even the Epic, which is connected with the nobility and hence tends to attribute to kings, the supermacy which is claimed by the law books for the Brahmins, concedes the incomparable grandeur of the sacerdotal class. '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 caste system, with its water tight compartments, has been always adverse to the establishment of a regular political organization, while the great importance attached to religious rites and ceremonial observances has enabled the priestly class to aggrandize itself to an extent wholly unknown elsewhere. The supremacy of the Brahmins has now become one of the cardinal doctrines of Hinduism.'¹⁵²

The role played by the Brahmins, as a caste, in interlinking the caste ideology and the caste system is thus obvious enough.

3. *THE CASTE SOCIETY*

The third facet of the caste system was the caste society itself. Ideologies, to be effective on the practical plane, have to develop corresponding institutions. These institutions, once developed, have, apart from their ideological content, a compulsive mechanism and drive of their own. In the case of the caste ideology, the primary social institution which embodied it was the caste society itself as a whole. The very constitution of the caste society, its every cell, was built on the principle of caste inequality and hierarchy. The position of each sub-caste, and through the sub-caste that of its every individual member, was fixed permanently by birth in the caste hierarchy. Also, it was a social structure which was all-inclusive for those within its fold and all-exclusive for outsiders. As already pointed out, each and every Hindu had to be a member of one caste or the other. And to be a Hindu, one had to be born as Hindu. All outside

the Hindu fold were either heretics, malechas, or tolerated as untouchable and exterior castes. Anyone once converted to Islam even though forcibly, could not be taken back in the Hindu society, and anyone who partook beef even once, he and his progeny were relegated to the exterior caste status, once for all. So much so, a territory where castes were not established, was declared to be impure. The caste society was equally comprehensive, rigid and inexorable in its operational aspect. Wilson sums up comprehensively the extent to which caste rules govern every member of any caste. Caste, he says, 'gives its directions for recognition, acceptance, consecration, and sacramental dedication, and vice versa, of a human being on his appearance in the world. It has for infancy, pupilage, and manhood, its ordained methods of sucking, sipping, drinking, eating and voiding; of washing, rinsing, anointing, and smearing; of clothing, dressing and ornamenting; of sitting, rising and reclining; of moving, visiting and travelling; of speaking, reading, listening, and reciting; and of meditating, singing, working, playing, and fighting. It has its laws for social and religious rights, privileges, and occupations; for instructing, training, and educating; for obligation, duty, and practice; for divine recognition, duty and ceremony; for errors, sins, and transgressions; for inter-communion, avoidance, and excommunication; for defilement, ablution, and purification; for fines, chastisements, imprisonments, mutilations, banishments and capital executions. It unfolds the ways of committing what it calls sin, accumulating sin, and of putting away sin; and of acquiring merit, dispensing merit, and losing merit. It treats of inheritance, conveyance, possession, and dispossession; and of bargains, gain, loan, and ruin. It deals with death, burial, and burning; and with commemoration, assistance, and injury after death. It interferes, in short, with all the relations and events of life, and with what precedes and follows life...'¹⁵³

Adherence to these rules or usages is normally ensured

through the caste members of the locality who know each other intimately. The members, through the caste council (Panchayat) or otherwise, become the guardians of the caste rules. And the irony of it is that 'the lower the caste in the social scale, the stronger its combination and the more efficient its organization.'¹⁵⁴ In other words, the lower castes are more prone to tighten their own shackles. The infringements of caste rules carried their own censures and penalties which were as varied as the caste rules. But, we shall take here only the case of excommunication from the caste so as to illustrate the inexorable working of the caste mechanism. O'Malley describes the wretched plight of some high-caste persons who had been excommunicated in Orissa. No priest, barber or washerman would render them any service, with the result that 'they had long beards matted with dirt, their hair hung in long strands and was filthy in the extreme, and their clothes were beyond description for uncleanness.'¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Abbe Dubois draws an even more graphic picture of the fate of an excommunicated man. 'This expulsion from the caste, which occurs in cases of breach of customary usage or of some public offence which would dishonour the whole caste it remained unpunished, is a kind of civil excommunication which deprives the person, who has the misfortune to incur it, of all intercourse with his fellows. It renders him, so to speak, dead to the world. With the loss of caste, he loses not only his relations and friends, but sometimes even his wife and children, who prefer to abandon him entirely rather than share his ill-fortune. No one dare eat with him, nor even offer him a drop of water.' 'He must expect, wherever he is recognized, to be avoided, pointed at with the finger of scorn, and looked upon as a reprobate... A mere Sudra, provided he has some trace of honour and scrupulousness, would never join company, nor even communicate with a Brahman thus degraded.'¹⁵⁶

The role of the caste ideology and the Brahmins in the

development and consolidation of the caste-system is well known. What needs to be emphasized is the important part played by the rigid social framework, i.e. the caste society, in maintaining and entrenching the system. We referred briefly to the fact that each salient element of the caste ideology (caste hierarchy; scriptural sanction; sanctions of Hindu Dharma, ritualism, ceremonialism and custom; the taboos and pollution; caste connubium and commensalism; the theory of Karma etc.) fastened each and every individual of a sub-caste with its own separate 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 ideological bonds of human inequality and social discrimination. If one keeps in view how difficult it has been to erase such social prejudices even where these were operating as a single factor (e.g. as colour and racial prejudice between the whites and the Negroes of the U.S.A., or as taboos against the Pagoda slaves of Burma and Eta in Japan, or as endogamy in casteless societies), the improbability of success in cutting the Gordianknot woven by the multiplicative effect of the various factors of the caste ideology becomes quite apparent. And 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.¹⁵⁷

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 to form a horizontal social network within a sub-caste. In fact, the caste bonds, the Sikhs, built the Akal Takht and started the construction of united members of a sub-caste. The operational efficiency with which members of a sub-caste severally and jointly as a group (i.e. as a sub-caste) ensured rigid adherence to the caste norms inflexible in terms of caste. On the top of it, this horizontal social network of each sub-caste was tied vertically, both ideologically as the

ritual¹⁵⁸, the ethical code¹⁵⁹ and the penal code were hierarchically graded and organisationally, to other similarly constituted higher and lower sub-castes. In short, the social fabric and the caste ideology were interlocked around every unit of the caste society. This is what made the caste system synonymous with the caste society. This is what made the Indian caste system, in its ramnified power and influence, more rigid and all-pervasive, as compared to caste-like formations elsewhere. In Risley's 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.' His statement might appear somewhat graphic, but what he means to convey is substantially correct.

The very structural make-up of the caste-society, and the ideological stranglehold of the caste ideology which compounded its every unit, left little, if any, room for reforming or reconstructing it on egalitarian lines from within. To take only one item, Max Weber has come to the conclusion that "India's caste order formed an obstacle to this (i.e. commensal fraternization) which was unsurmountable, atleast by its own forces."¹⁶⁰ Egalitarian values and social formations are the anti-thesis of the caste system and the caste society. For the same reason, there was equally little chance for groups or sections of the caste society to do it independently on their own, so long these continued to function as a part of the whole. Of individuals, we need not speak as they were mere automatons, whose fate was indissolubly linked with that of the sub-caste to which they belonged. The only practical way open for forming an egalitarian society was to cut off completely from the caste ideology and the caste society and to build a new, outside it and on a new ideological basis.

The impact of capitalist economy, its culture and values, is no doubt, beginning to erode not only the caste but also the caste system itself. It has spread a general awareness of the inequitable nature of this social formation and given

rise to several anti-caste movements within the Hindu fold. But this should not mislead us into assessing movements of the pre-British era, with which we are mainly concerned, in the light of the milieu and forces generated by the Western culture and civilization with which the British rule brought us into contact for the first time. For one thing, the caste system is now up against not mere ideas and ideologies, but against another well-organized political and economic system. It is a remarkable phenomenon of history that, although Islam is outstandingly egalitarian, the impact of Islamic rule for centuries together instead of softening the caste rather hardened it. It was probably because Shariatic exclusiveness and politico-religious persecution associated with the Muslim rule prevented the penetration of Islamic egalitarianism outside Muslim polity. Above all, Islamic egalitarianism relied mainly on its religious appeal and not on an organized comprehensive political and economic force (Le. a system) such as capitalism is. Capitalism is not mere an economic setup. It is associated also with human rights, political democracy and mass education. The preponderance of money values in all walks of life brought about by the capitalist economy and the rational approach emphasized by the western culture are digging deep into religious and caste affiliations, sanctions of Dharma and the scriptures, and notions of taboos and pollution etc. If the caste system is still proving a hard nut to crack inspite of this onslaught by another stronger system, (supported as it is by such potent factors as money values, political democracy and mass education), it only buttresses our contention that the only feasible way open to build an egalitarian society in the pre-British period was to rear it Outside the caste society.

SECTION III

THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE SIKHS IN
THE PERIOD OF IDEOLOGICAL ASCENDENCY

The more lasting, hence more important, achievement of the Sikh movement was that it broke away completely not only from the caste, as such, but also from the caste system and the caste society. In this article, we want to concentrate on this latter aspect, and will not, therefore, attempt to recount all the anti-caste achievements given in our book *The Sikh Revolution*.

1. *THE CASTE IDEOLOGY*

The Sikh Gurus directly condemned caste and caste ideology. Guru Nanak called caste ideology as perverse. "According to the Hindus, foul is the ablution of the Chandal, and vain are his religious ceremonies and decorations. False is the wisdom of the perverse; their acts produce strife."¹⁶¹ The Vedas have given currency to the myths that make men reflect upon (human values of) good and evil; such are the illusions created in man.¹⁶² Further, he aligned 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?"¹⁶³ The fundamental hypothesis of the caste is that "Men were not-as for classical confucianism-in principle equal, but for ever unequal."¹⁶⁴ "They were so by birth, and were as unlike as man and animal."¹⁶⁵ The Guru declared: "Call every one exalted; let no one appear to thee low;"¹⁶⁶ "O whom shall we call good or evil, when all creatures belong to thee."¹⁶⁷

The Sikh Gurus also attacked the pillars, referred to earlier, on which the caste ideology rested.

(i) Caste Status

The motivative power behind the caste system was the

upholding of the caste-status of the Brahmin and other high castes. The Guru preached: “O unwise, be not proud of thy caste. For, a myriad error flow out of this pride.”¹⁶⁸ Bhai Gurdas writes that Guru Nanak “made the Dharma perfect by blending the four castes into one. To treat the King and the pauper on equal footing, and while greeting to touch the feet of the other (i.e. regard oneself humble as compared to others) was made the rule of conduct.”¹⁶⁹ Thus Guru Nanak did away with not only caste-status consciousness but also with the status-conscious-ness gap between the rich and the poor. For, far from observing pollution and untouchability, everyone actually touched the feet of everyone else while greeting him. Again, “The four castes were made into one, and castes (Varn) and out-castes (Avarn) regarded as noble. The tWelve sects were obliterated and the noble glorious Panth (created).”¹⁷⁰ Here the abolition of caste and sects is linked with the creation of the Sikh Panth. In order to emphasize its significance, Bhai Gurdas repeatedly¹⁷¹ mentions this achievement. The language used by him (its grammatical construction) makes it clear that he was not repeating a precept enunciated by the Guru in his hymns, but a precept actually practised in the Sikh Panth. Writing about Guru Gobind Singh, Dr. Narang says: ‘Of the five who offered their heads, one was a Khatri, all the rest being so-called Sudras. But the Guru called them Panj Pyaras, or the Beloved Five, and baptised them after the manner he had introduced for initiation into his brotherhood. He enjoined the same duties upon them, gave them the same privileges, and as a token of newly acquired brother-hood, all of them dined together. “The Guru’s views of democratic equality were much more advanced than the mere equality among his followers could satisfy. In his system, there was no place even for the privileges of the chief or the leader. No leader, he believed, could be fit to lead unless he was elected or accepted by the followers. History shows that individuals or classes enjoying a religious or sacerdotal superiority have been only

too loth to forego even a particle of their privileges. But the Guru, though regarded by his faithful followers as the greatest of prophets, was made of a different stuff, and had too much political insight to stand on an exclusive eminence apart from his followers. Therefore, when he had initiated his first five disciples, his Beloved Five, he was initiated by them in turn, taking the same vows as they had done, and claiming no higher privileges than those he allowed them. Soon after he called a meeting of all his followers and announced his new doctrine to them.”¹⁷²

The prevalence of this spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization among the Sikhs is confirmed by evidence from non-Sikh sources. Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din, the author of *Fatubat Namah-i-Samadi* (1722-23), was a contemporary of Banda. He writes that low-caste Hindus, termed *khas-o-khashak-i-hanud-i-jahanmi wajud* (i.e. the dregs of the society of the hellish 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 publicise themselves with the title of *sahibzada* (‘Yaki rab targihb-i-digran pisar-i-khanda-i-guru-i-maqhur gufta b laqub-i-shahzadgi mashur kardah’).¹⁷³ A contemporary historian of Aurangzeb writes, ‘If a stranger knocks at their door (i.e. the door of Sikhs) at midnight and utters the name of Nanak, though he may be a thief, robber or wretch, he is considered a friend and brother, and is properly looked after.’¹⁷⁴ The significance of the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization achieved by the Sikh movement can be realized only if it is contrasted with the caste background in which the change was brought about. Bougle observes: ‘The spirit of caste unites these three tendencies, repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialization. We say that a society is characterized by such a system if it is divided into a large number of mutually opposed groups which are hereditary specialised and hierarchically arranged-if, on principle, it tolerates neither the parvenu, nor mis-

cegenation, nor a change of profession.¹⁷⁵ From the social and political point of view, caste is division, hatred, jealousy and distrust between neighbour.¹⁷⁶ Nesafield also comes to the conclusion that the caste system leads to a degree of social disunion to which no parallel can be found in human history. All authorities on caste are agreed that mutual repulsion and disunity, besides inequality and hierarchism, are the in-built constituents of the caste system.

(ii) Scriptural Sanction

By repudiating the Brahmanical scriptures, Sikhism and the Sikh Panth cut itself away from this perennial source and sanction of caste ideology. “The drum of the Vedas loudly resoundeth for many a faction. Remember god, Name, Nanak; there is none but Him.”¹⁷⁷ “Since I have embraced Thy feet I have paid regard to none besides. The Purans of Ram (the God of the Hindus) and Quran of Rahim (the God of the Musalmans) express various opinions, but I accept none of them. The Smritis, the Shastras, and the Vedas all expound many different doctrines, but I accept none of them.”¹⁷⁸ Since Guru Arjan established *Guru Granth* as the Sikh scripture, the Sikhs have never, not even during darkest hour, owned any other.

(iii) Hindu Dharma

The concept of Hindu Dharma covered a wide range. On the one hand it was linked to Hindu theology, religious beliefs and usages, and on the other hand, to the caste ideology-the Varna Ashrama Dharma. In fact, it became, in practice, the chief vehicle for providing religious sanction to the caste ideology and the caste system. The Sikh Gurus condemned, as seen, the caste end of this Dharma. Their break from the other end of Hindu Dharma, i.e. Hinduism, is equally clear. It has not been possible to define precisely what Hinduism is. Crooke sums up thus: “Hinduism thus

provides a characteristic example of the primitive unorganised polytheism, an example probably unique among the -races of the modern world.

“This is due to the fact that all such action (attempt at organisation) is essentially opposed to its spirit and tradition.....

“The links that bind together this chaotic mass of rituals and dogmas are, first, the great acceptance of the Veda, representing under this term the ancient writings and traditions of the people, as the final rule of belief and conduct; secondly, the recognition of the sanctity of the Brahmin levite-caste as the custodians of this knowledge and the only competent performers of sacrifice and other ritual observances, though the respect paid to them varies in different parts of the country; thirdly, the veneration for sacred places; fourthly, the adoption of Sanskrit as the one sacred language; fifthly general veneration for the cow.¹⁷⁹

The Sikh gurus repudiated the authority of the orthodox scriptures and tradition, ridiculed the sanctity of the Brahmin Levite class,¹⁸⁰ condemned the veneration for sacred places,¹⁸¹ and deliberately used the vernacular for the expression of their ideology. Although the Sikh society has continued to abstain from eating beef, Sikhism has not shared that religious veneration that Hinduism has for the cow. The *pancbagava* (a mixture of cow’s excretions), for example, is sufficient to obtain the remission of any sin whatever, even when the sin has been committed deliberately.¹⁸² But, Guru Nanak says, “The cow-dung will not save thee.”¹⁸³ When the hill Rajas offered, through their *purobit* (Brahmin priest), to take a vow by their sacred cow as a token of their guarantee for abiding by their undertaking, Guru Gobind Singh is reported to have replied: “Leave aside this cow, it is only a dumb animal.”¹⁸⁴ Again, when the Sikhs under Banda were besieged in the village of Gurdas Nangal, and were reduced to extreme conditions: “The Sikhs were not strict observers of caste, they slaughtered oxen and animals and, not having any firewood, ate flesh raw.”¹⁸⁵ These

warriors are remembered as heroes of Sikh History, whereas partaking of beef, under whatever circumstances, would have reduced a Hindu permanently to the status of an untouchable.

Thus, the Sikhs without doubt cut off all those links, which according to Crooke, bind one to Hinduism. Besides this, the Sikh Guru completely rejected the sectarian Hindu gods and goddesses, Avtaras, ritualism and ceremonialism, idol and temple worship, pilgrimages and fasts, Sanskrit scholasticism, etc. If all these concepts and institutions were subtracted from Hinduism, no essential residue is left which Hinduism can call all its own.

“The main plank of Sikhism is uncompromising monotheism and the methodology of Name as the sole means of achieving His Grace and God realization. Excepting these two fundamentals, Sikhism is not wedded to any particular dogma or philosophy. All other beliefs and practices attributable to Sikhism are only subsidiary or contributory. The belief in one universal God is shared by the mystics the world over. There is nothing peculiarly sectarian (i.e. Hindu or Muslim) about it. If anything, this concept of one universal God, and the passionate devotion towards Him as a means of mystic realization, came to be emphasized much earlier in Christianity and Islam than in India. And the emotional heights that his devotional approach reached among the Muslim saints is hardly to be matched elsewhere. Therefore, Sikhism, in these respects atleast, can be said to be nearer Christianity and Islam than Hinduism.

The point we want to make clear is that by cutting itself away from Hinduism, Sikhism delinked itself from that aspect of Hindu Dharma also which was, in day to day action, the main vehicle for providing religious sanction to the Varna Ashrama Dharma. “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 Dharma, that is ritualistic duty, is the central criterion of Hinduism.”¹⁸⁶ Rather, the Sikh Gurus issued their own new version of Dharma, which was, atleast as far as caste was concerned, the antithesis of the Hindu Dharma. Guru Nanak “made the Dharma perfect by blending the four castes into one.”

(iv) Pollution

The last important element of caste ideology we need take note of is. the theory of pollution. The notions of pollution, of which restrictions on commensalism were a part, were the most widespread expression of social exclusiveness inherent in the caste system. It is an indisputable fact that the taboo on food and drink was its most widely practised feature which invited severe penalties. Of the offences of which a caste Panchayat took cognizance, the ‘Offences against the commensal taboos, which prevent members of another caste, or atleast of other castes regarded by the prohibiting caste as lower in social status than themselves, are undoubtedly the most important; for the transgression by one member of the caste if unknown and unpunished may affect the whole caste with pollution through his commensality with the rest.¹⁸⁷ If the member of a low caste merely looks at the meal of a Brahmin, it ritually defiles the Brahmin,¹⁸⁸ and ‘a stranger’s shadow, or even the glance of a man of low caste, falling on the cooking pot may necessitate throwing away the contents.¹⁸⁹ There are Indian proverbs that ‘three Kanaujias require no less than thirteen hearths¹⁹⁰ and that a ‘Bisnoi mounted on a camel followed by a score more will immediately throwaway his food if a man of another caste happens to touch the last animal.¹⁹¹ These proverbs may partly be exaggerations, but these do illustrate the extent to which the taboos on food had taken hold of the Indian life.

All the transgressions of the taboos on food and drink were always punished, because, as noted above, not to

punish these affected the whole caste with pollution. In some cases the consequences were quite serious and permanent. ‘A separate lower caste (the Kallars) has arisen in Bengal among people who had infringed the ritual and dietary laws during the famine of 1866, and in consequence been excommunicated.’¹⁹²

Underlying the taboos on foods and drinks was the general notion of pollution which was very wide in its sphere of application. Because, it was supposed to be incurred not only by partaking of food and drinks under certain conditions, but by the mere bodily contact with persons of ‘certain low castes, whose traditional occupation, whether actually followed or not, or whose mode of life places them outside the pale of Hindu society.’¹⁹³ Sweeper castes (from which Rangretas came) were one of these. “According to Barbosa, a Nayar woman touched by a Pulayan is outcaste for life and thinks only of leaving her home for fear of polluting her family.”¹⁹⁴ This is, of course, an extreme case. ‘Castes lower than a Brahmin are generally speaking less easily defiled, but the principle is the same, and contact with castes or outcastes of this category used to entail early steps to remove the pollution.’¹⁹⁵

The Sikh Gurus’ stand on this issue is clear from their hymns given below:

“If the ideas of impurity be admitted, there is impurity
in everything.

There are worms in cow-dung and in wood;

There is no grain of corn without life.

In the first place, there is life in water by which
everything is made green.

How shall we avoid impurity? It falleth on our kitchens.

Saith Nanak, impurity is not thus washed away; it is
washed away by divine knowledge.....

All impurity consisteth in superstition and attachment to wordly things.

The eating and drinking which god sent us for sustenance is pure.”¹⁹⁶

“They eat he-goats killed with unspeakable words, And allow
 no one to enter their cooking squares. Having smeared a
 space they draw lines around it,
 And sit within, false that they are,
 Saying, ‘Touch not! O touch not I.’
 ‘Or this food of ours will be defiled.’
 But their bodies are defiled; what they do is defiled;
 Their hearts are false while they perform ablutions after their
 meals.”¹⁹⁷

There was no place in Guru Angad’s congregation for anyone
 who observed caste.¹⁹⁸ All the castes were treated as equals.¹⁹⁹ Only
 those who were not afraid of Vedic and caste injunctions came to his
 congregations; others did not.²⁰⁰ At the Langar (free kitchen) all ate at
 the same platform and took the same food.²⁰¹ Guru Amar Das went a
 step further. No one who had not partaken food at his Langar could
 see him.²⁰² In his Langar there were no distinctions of caste. Lines of
 noble *Gurbhais* (disciples of the same Guru) partook food sitting
 together at the same place.²⁰³ Guru Gobind Singh himself drank Amrit,
 prepared at the baptism ceremony by the five Beloved ones, of whom
 four were Sudras. Koer Singh, a near contemporary, of the Guru,
 records that the Guru ‘has made the four castes into a single one, and
 made the Sudra, Vaish, Khatri and Brahmin take meals at the same
 place.’²⁰⁴ All the members of the Khalsa Dal, who were drawn from all
 castes including the Rangrettas dined together.²⁰⁵ Two Muhammadan
 historians (1783) independently attest to it that the Sikhs, drawn from
 all castes, ate together. “When a person is once admitted to their
 fraternity, they make no scruple of associating with him, of whatever
 tribe, clan or race, he may have been hitherto; nor do they betray any
 of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.
 “²⁰⁶ Commenting on the last part of the statement, the editor (John
 Briggs) says, “This alludes to the touching or eating with persons of
 impure castes in regard to which Hindus are so tanacious.”²⁰⁷ The
 author of *Haqiqat* similarly writes:

“The Sikhs were told: ‘whoever might join you from whichever tribe, don’t have any prejudice against him and without any superstition eat together with him.’ *Now this is their custom.*”²⁰⁸

2. BRAHMINS

The second great pillar of the caste system was the Brahmin caste. The position of the Brahmins in this system is one of the fundamental institutions of Hinduism. It is the Brahmins who were the ideologues of the caste system, and the Dharma was the exclusive product of the Brahmins. ‘Dharma, ‘that is, ritualistic duty, is the central criterion of Hinduism,²⁰⁹ and the Brahmins were the grandmasters of the ceremonies. Even otherwise, the Brahmins were the kingpin of the caste system. The ‘whole system turns on the prestige of the Brahmin.’²¹⁰ The ‘central position of the Brahmins in Hinduism rests primarily upon the fact that social rank is determined with reference to Brahmins.’²¹¹ The Brahmin reception or rejection of water and food is the measure of the status of any given caste in a given place.²¹²

It has been noted that the Brahmins and Khattris, who did not want to forego their privileged caste status, remained aloof when the Khalsa, with complete equality of castes, was created. In the census of 1881, of the total number of Brahmins only about 7000 were Sikhs. The denial of superiority claimed by the higher castes, which distinguished the teaching of Guru Gobind Singh, was not acceptable to the Brahmins.²¹³ For this reason the number of Sikh Brahmins was very low, even though the Brahmins were the third most numerous caste in the Punjab outnumbering all but Jats and Rajputs.²¹⁴ The proportion of Brahmins in the population ‘steadily changes with the prevailing religion....it gradually decreases from east to west, being markedly smaller in the central and Sikh districts.’²¹⁵ These facts are very significant. ‘The Brahmins have no territorial organisation. They accompany their clients in their migrations.’²¹⁶ Therefore, the

insignificant number of Brahmins in the Sikh population corroborates the well known fact that the Sikhs have no priestly class, much less a hereditary Levite caste having vested interests in maintaining a hierarchical structure in the Sikh society.

By eliminating the influence of Brahmins in the Panth, the Sikh society eliminated the kingpin of the caste system from within its ranks. Max: Weber has made a clear distinction between Hindu castes and non-Hindu castes. "There are also castes among the Mohammedans of India, taken over from the Hindus. And castes are also found among the Buddhists. Even the Indian Christians have not quite been able to withhold themselves from practical recognition of the castes. These non-Hindu castes have lacked the tremendous emphasis that the Hindu doctrine of salvation placed upon the caste, as we shall see later, and they have lacked a further characteristic, namely, the determination of the social rank of the caste by the social distance from other Hindu castes, and therewith, ultimately, from the Brahmin. This is decisive for the connection between Hindu castes and the Brahmin; however intensely a Hindu caste may reject him as priest, as a doctrinal and ritual authority, and in every other respect, the objective situation remains inescapable; in the last analysis, a rank position is determined by the nature of its positive or negative relation to the Brahmin."²¹⁷

The elimination of the Brahmin Levite Caste, or for that matter of any other hereditary Levite class, from the Sikh ranks made a major contribution in eroding the caste system among them.

3. *SEPARATE SOCIETY*

The ideological break from the caste ideology and getting rid of the Brahmin Levite, caste were no doubt vital steps forward for undermining the caste system. But these were by themselves not enough. The greatest hurdle was the social framework of the caste system, i.e. the caste social

exclusiveness, inequality and hierarchism were in-built in its very constitution and mechanism. The anti-caste movements could survive only if these divorced themselves from the caste society. Buddhism organized a monastic society outside the caste ranks, but it left its laity to remain in the caste fold. The result was that, when Brahmanism reasserted itself, the lay followers of Buddhism imperceptibly moved into their caste moorings, leaving the order of monks, high and dry, in its isolation. Kabir was far more vocal than Basawa, but the Lingayats established a far more separate identity than the Kabir-panthies; because their deviation (e.g. widow-remarriage, burying the dead and admission of all castes) from the caste usages were very radical. Later, the Lingayats tried to tone down their radicalism. But, in spite of this, they are, perhaps, more an appendage of the orthodox society than its integral part; because even the toned down Lingayatism is not wholly adjustable in the caste order.²¹⁸ Chaitanya, who was more radical with regard to caste restrictions than the Maharashtra Bhakatas, had both low caste Hindus and Musalmans as his disciples. In the Kartabha sect, which branched out of the Chaitanya School, there is no distinction between Hindus, Musalmans and Christians. A Musalman has more than once risen to the rank of a teacher. The members of the sect eat together once or twice in a year.²¹⁹ But, “The goal of Chaitanya was lost when his church passed under the control of Brahmin Goswamis.”²²⁰ The main body of the followers of Chaitanyas reverted to the caste system; and even its, Kartabhai section, like the Lingayats, does not assert a distinct entity apart from the caste society. The creed ‘of Kabir attained the stage of only a Mata (religious path), although of all the denouncers of caste injunctions he was the most unequivocal and vocal. The Kabir-panth remained a loose combination of those who were attracted by Kabir’s religious appeal, or were attracted by some other considerations (e.g. Julahas (weavers), who constituted a majority of the Kabir panthies, were attracted to Kabir because he was a Julaha).²²¹

These instances leave no doubt that anti-caste movements, like those of Kabir and other Bhaktas, whose departure from the caste ideology had been confined only to the ideological plane, remained still-born in the field of social achievement. And, those like the Lingayats and the followers of Chaitanya, who, under the influence of a teacher, did adopt certain anti-caste usages, but either they did not want to break away completely from the caste society or did not pursue their aim consistently enough, remained tagged to the caste-order in one form or the other. The Buddhist monks alone could escape being swallowed by the caste society, because they had made a complete break with the caste order both ideologically and organizationally.

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-Brahmanical and anti--caste character, that is contrary to one of the fundamentals of Hinduism, have been in all essentials returned to the caste order.

The process is not hard to explain. When a principled anti-caste sect recruits former members of various Hindu castes and tears them from the context of their former ritualistic duties, the caste responds by excommunicating all the sect's proselytes. Unless the sect is able to abolish the caste system altogether, instead of simply tearing away some of its members, it becomes, from the standpoint of the caste system, a quasi-guest folk, a kind of confessional guest community in an ambiguous position in the prevailing Hindu Order.²²²

As pointed out by Max Weber, there were only two alternatives before the anti-caste movements: either to abolish the caste system or to be engulfed by it. As the abolition of the caste system at one stroke could happen only through a miracle, the only practical way was to form a society outside the caste system and give it a battle from outside. This lesson of Indian history is very important. The

contaminative power of the caste system was so great that it did not spare Indian Muslims and Christians,²²³ whom the caste society would not re-admit even if they wished it. Then, how could those anti-caste elements or movements escape, whom the caste society was prepared to assimilate and who did not resist assimilation? The Lingayats and the Chatanayites, with all their radical anti-caste innovations, remained as mere sects of Hinduism and as mere appendages of the caste society. Of all the anti-caste movements of Indian origin, only the Buddhists and the Sikhs succeeded in establishing a separate identity from the caste society, and both did it by founding a separate church and a separate social organization. In other words, the chances of success of any anti-caste movement were in direct proportion to the separate identity it established outside the caste society, not only at the ideological level but also at the organizational level. And the foremost prerequisite for this purpose was a clear perception of this aim, a determined will and a consistent effort to pursue it.

The process of founding a separate society (the Sikh panth) started with Guru Nanak himself. He began his career as a teacher of men with the significant utterance. "There is no Hindu, no Musalman." He was asked: "There is one path of the Hindus, and the other that of Musalmans, which path do you follow?" He replied, "I follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Musalman."²²⁴ Guru Nanak's reply clearly indicates his complete break with his Hindu past. Further, Guru Nanak took clear organizational steps in shaping a Sikh society on separate ideological lines. He established Dharamsalas in far-flung places inside the country and outside it.²²⁵ These Dharamsalas became the centres where his followers could meet together, practise the Dharam of his concept, and spread his message to others. In addition, he appointed select persons (Manjis) for the purpose of furthering his mission.²²⁶ In his lifetime, his followers came to be known as Nanak-panthies, and they had their own separate way of saluting each other (Sat

Kartar).²²⁷ The greatest single organizational step that Guru Nanak took was to select, by a system of tests, a worthy successor whom he instructed to lead and continue his mission.

Guru Nanak's successors consistently worked to establish the separate identity of the Sikh Church and the Sikh Panth. They consolidated and extended the institutions of Dharamsala (religious centres), Sangat (congregation of Sikhs), Langar (common kitchen) and Manjis (seats of preaching), all started by Guru Nanak. In addition, Guru Angad invented the Gurmukhi script and Guru Arjan compiled the Sikh scripture. With a distinct organization, separate religious centres, a separate script and a scripture of their own, the Sikhs became an entirely separate church and a new society-the Sikh Panth. The main theme of the Vars of Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind, emphasizes the distinct character of Sikh religion, culture and society as contrasted to other religions and sects. He links, as already seen, the creation of the Panth with the abolition of castes and sects. Mohsin Fani, another contemporary of Guru Hargobind, also testifies that the "Sikhs do not read the Mantras (i.e. Vedic or other scriptural hymns) of the Hindu, they do not venerate their temples or idols, nor do they esteem their Avtars. They have no regard for the Sanskrit language which, according to the Hindus, is the speech of the angels."²²⁸

There were Muslim converts to the Sikh faith but their number was very limited. If nothing else, the fear of death penalty for apostasy prescribed by the Shariat, and which the Muslim rulers of the land were ever ready to impose, was alone enough to prevent their large scale conversions. The Sikh Panth had, therefore, to draw its recruitment almost entirely from the Hindu society. This was also not an easy task, as we have seen how difficult it was to wean away people from their caste moorings and lead them to an egalitarian path. It had to be a slow and gradual process, but the successive Gurus stuck to it without deviation until

Guru Gobind Singh decided that the movement had reached a stage when it was necessary to create the Khalsa.

The creation of the Khalsa was the acme of the Sikh movement. The Sikhs were militarized not only to fight religious and political oppressions, but also to capture political power for an egalitarian cause. In fact, the capture of political power became, as will be seen, the chief instrument for demolishing the hold of the caste system among the Sikhs. However, what is immediately relevant to our subject is the fact that the Khalsa made a clean break with the caste society. Of the five Beloved ones, who became the nucleus of the Khalsa, there were three Sudras and one Jat - at that time on the borderline of Vaisyas and Sudras. For joining the Khalsa ranks, baptism (*Amrit*) ceremony was made obligatory (Guru Gobind Singh himself undergoing that), and when baptised one had to take five vows.²²⁹ These were: (i) *Dharm Nash*, i.e. to sever connection with all previous religions, Dharma, customs, etc.; (ii) *Karam Nash*, i.e. to consider oneself absolved of all past misdeeds, which cut at the roots of the Brahmanical Karma theory; (iii) *Kul Nash*, i.e. severance of all ties with lineage, which destroyed the fundamental basis of caste, i.e. obliteration of stigmas attached to occupation, which destroyed the functional basis of caste; (v) *Bharm Nash*, i.e. discarding ritualism, taboos and notions of pollution, etc. which cut across barriers raised between castes by these factors and which were so essential features of the caste system.

At the time of baptism (*Amrit*) ceremony, the Guru enjoined on all who had joined the Khalsa that they should consider their previous castes erased and deem themselves all brothers i.e. of one family.²³⁰ The newswriter of the period sent the Emperor a copy of the Guru's address to his Sikhs on that occasion. It is dated the first of Baisakh 1756 (A.D. 1699), and runs as follows: 'Let all embrace one creed and obliterate differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes who have different rules for their guidance

abandon them all, adopt the one form of adoration and become brothers. Let no one deem himself superior to others Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another. ²³¹ These may or may not be the exact words of the Guru's address, but their substance is corroborated by the near-contemporary Koer Singh (1751). He records that the Guru said: 'Many a Vaish (Vaishya), Sudra (Shudra) and Jat have I incorporated in the Panth²³² and that the Guru 'has made the four castes into a single one, and made the Sudra, Vaish, Khatri and Brahmin take meals at the same place.'²³³ According to the same authority, it was a current topic among the people that the Guru had '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. ²³⁴ Again, the hill rajas complained to Aurangzeb: "He has founded his own panth; (has) rejected the Hindu and Muslim faiths and other customs of the land; the four castes are made into one and are known by the one name of Khalsa."²³⁵ What is even more significant is that the creation of the Khalsa was associated with the tearing and throwing away of *janeo*, the sacred insignia of the twice-born Hindus. ²³⁶ The contemporary author of *Gur Sobha* is generally very brief in his comments about historical events, but he, too, records that Brahmins and Khatris remained aloof at the time of the creation of the Khalsa because it involved discarding their ancestral rituals. ²³⁷ The later Sikh literature of the 18th century, written by different hands and at different times, though differing on points of detail, is agreed on the main issue that the Khalsa broke away from the caste ideology and the caste society. *Rahetnamas* contain mostly precepts, but these do record the Sikh tradition indicating Sikh culture and the Sikh way of life. "I will weld the four Varnas (castes) into one."²³⁸ "Those who acknowledge Brahmins, their off springs go to hell."²³⁹ "The Sikh, who wears Janeo, goes to hell."²⁴⁰ "He

who shows regard to other religions (panthan), is a heretic and not a Sikh of the Guru.”²⁴¹ “He who abides by the six *Darshnas*, he drags along with him his whole family into hell.”²⁴² “Let your whole concern be with the Khalsa, other gods (*Devs*) are false.”²⁴³ “If any baptized Sikh puts on Janeo, he will be cast into hell.”²⁴⁴ “(A Sikh) should sever connection with Musalmans and Hindus (Musalman Hindu *ki ann mete*).”²⁴⁵ “(A Sikh) should not acknowledge (*kan na kare*), Brahma and Muhammad, he should obey the words of his own. Guru.”²⁴⁶ Chaupa Singh, a contemporary, specifically mentions at three places that Guru Gobind Singh initiated the *pabul* (baptism) ceremony in order to create a separate Panth.²⁴⁷ “Khalsa is one who does not acknowledge Musalman (*Turk*) and Hindu.”²⁴⁸ Kesar Singh Chibber (1769) writes that the Guru created a new Third panth (Khalsa panth) by breaking with both Hindus and Musalmans.²⁴⁹ 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 and Hindus, were discarded and one pure ‘Khalsa’ was established.”²⁵⁰ One Gurdas Singh wrote about the same time: “Ved, Puran, six shastras and Kuran were eliminated’ the both sects (Hindus and Muslims) were engrossed in superstition; the third religion of Khalsa became supreme.”²⁵¹

We hope our reference again to some non-Sikh sources will bear repetition as these substantiate the testimony given above from Sikh sources. Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan (1783) writes thus about the Khalsa-Panth : “They form a particular society, which distinguishes itself by wearing blue garments, and going armed at all times. When a person is once admitted into that fraternity, they make no scruples of associating with him, of whatever tribe, clan, or race he may have been hitherto, nor do they betray any of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.”²⁵² The author of Haqiqat (1783) also writes about the same time that the Sikhs were told: “Whoever might join you from

whichever tribe, don't have any prejudice against him and without any superstition eat together with him. *Now this is their custom.*"²⁵³ Irvine relies on contemporary Mohammedan historians to state that, "In the parganas occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous custom was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather-dresser, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), where in a short space of time he would return to his birth place as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand."²⁵⁴ This was no small achievement, as it will be seen what important role the capturing of political power by men drawn from lower castes played in throwing off their shackles of the caste society. Khafi Khan writes, "These infidels (the Khalsa) had set up a new rule, and had forbidden the shaving of the hair of the head and beard. Many of the ill-disposed low- caste Hindus joined themselves to them, and placing their lives at the disposal of these evil-minded people, they found their own advantage in professing belief and obedience, and they were very active in persecuting and killing other castes of Hindus."²⁵⁵ In other words, these men drawn from low- castes, on joining the Khalsa, not only separated themselves from the caste society, but were active in persecuting their former oppressors, i.e. Hindus of higher castes.

The evidence given above from Sikh and non-Sikh sources demonstrates that the separation of the Khalsa from the caste society was not an accident, an expediency, or a temporary brain-wave of a leader. It was a regular movement which continued in full vigour, at least during its revolutionary phase. The separate identity of the Khalsa continued to be emphasized even in the period of ideological decline. Bhangu (1841) writes: "All ate together from one vessel: no discrimination was left regarding the four *varnas* and the four *asbrams*; *Janeo* and *tikka* (Hindu insignias) were given Up."²⁵⁶ "They (the Khalsa) do not go near Ganga and Jamuna; bathe in their own tank (i.e. at Amritsar); call Jagannath *tunda* (one with a mutilated limb);

do not worship Ram or Krishan).²⁵⁷ One of the reasons why the Jat Khalsa departed from Banda was that he attempted to introduce Hindu usages in the Khalsa.²⁵⁸ All this belies the proposition that the separate identity of the Khalsa was a creation of the Singh Sabha movement under British influence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

4. *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 of its own. This was, in fact, an acid test and a proof of its separate identity from the caste society as well as its *raison d'etre*.

(i) Plebian Base

The Sikh movement had not only an egalitarian political mission but it had also a plebian base. It was necessary that the downtrodden castes and classes should be both the architects and masters of their own destiny. When Guru Hargobind declared his intention of arming the Panth, four hundred men volunteered their services. 'Calico-printers, water-carriers, and carpenters; barbers, all came to (his) place.'²⁵⁹

When asked by the Raja what kind of army Guru Gobind Singh had, Bhikhan Khan replied: "Subject people have come together, rustic Jats, oil-pressers, barbers, Bhati, Lubana, Leather-dressers."²⁶⁰ Bhangu has referred to the plebian composition of the Khalsa at several places.²⁶¹ When the Tarana Dal wing of the Khalsa Dal was reorganized into five divisions, one of the divisions was under the command of Bir Singh Rangretta.²⁶² This division continued to participate in the campaigns of the Khalsa right up to the time of the conquest of Malerkotla.²⁶³ In the great battle with Abadali, called Wada Ghalu Ghara because the largest number of Sikhs in a single battle were killed here, it is specially mentioned that Ramdasias (cobblers) and Rangrettas

took a prominent part.²⁶⁴

The plebian composition of the Khalsa is corroborated also by evidence from non-Sikh sources. Banda's forces were recruited chiefly from the lower caste Hindus, and scavengers, leather-dressers and such like persons were very numerous among them.²⁶⁵ The low-caste people who swelled Banda's ranks are termed by a contemporary Muslim historian, as already quoted, as the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus.²⁶⁶ Another contemporary Muslim writer says that Banda brought into the forefront unemployed worthless people who had hitherto been hidden by the curtain of insignificance.²⁶⁷ Khafi Khan says that, "Many of the ill-disposed low-caste Hindus joined themselves to them (Khalsa)"²⁶⁸ The author of Haqiqat clearly states that Khatries, Jats, carpenters, blacksmiths and grain grocers all joined the Khalsa.²⁶⁹

(ii) 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 idea of equality was inherent in the system of the Gurus and the Sikh movement so long it retained its pristine purity. After he had anointed Angad as his successor, Guru Nanak bowed at his feet in salutation. The same custom was followed by the later Gurus.²⁷⁰ The Sikhs, who had imbibed the spirit of the Gurus, were regarded as equals of the Guru. The collective wisdom of the congregation of Sikhs was of higher value than that of the Guru alone (Guru weeh visve, sangat iki visve). Bhai Gurdas repeatedly makes it clear that there was no status gap between the Guru and a Sikh (Gur chela, chela Guru).²⁷¹ Guru Angad said: 'Regard the Guru's Sikh as myself; have no doubt about this.'²⁷² Guru Hargobind, out of reverence for Bhai Buddha, a devout Sikh, touched his feet.²⁷³ He told Bhai Bidhichand that there was no difference between him

and the Guru.²⁷⁴ The Sikhs addressed each other as ‘brother’ (Bhai), thus showing a perfect level of equality among them. In all the available letters written by the Gurus to the Sikhs, they have been addressed as brothers (Bhai).²⁷⁵ It was in continuation of this tradition that Guru Gobind Singh requested with clasped hands the Beloved Ones to baptize him.²⁷⁶ This shows that he regarded them not only as his equal but made them as his Guru. This was the utmost limit to which a religious head could conceive of or practise human equality.

The spirit of brotherhood and fraternization is even more difficult to inculcate than the spirit of equality. This new spirit was a natural sequence of the Sikh doctrines and approach. What is important is the emphasis laid on this spirit of brotherhood and fraternization in the Sikh literature, and more particularly the extent to which this spirit was practised in the Sikh movement.

As there was no difference between the Guru and the Sikh the devotion to the Guru was easily channelized into the service of the Sikhs. ‘God-orientated service is the service of the Guru’s Sikhs, who should be regarded as one’s dearest kith and kin.’²⁷⁷ ‘The Guru’s Sikhs should serve the other Sikhs.’²⁷⁸ One of Guru Gobind Singh’s own hymns is:

“To serve them (The Khalsa) pleaseth my heart; no other service is dear to my soul.

All the wealth of my house with my soul and body is for them.”²⁷⁹

The codes of Sikh conduct (*Rehatnamas*) continue to record this tradition. ‘He who shirks a poor man is an absolute defaulter.’²⁸⁰ ‘Serve a Sikh and a pauper’.²⁸¹ ‘If some among a group of Sikhs sleep on cots and the poor Sikhs sleep on the floor and are not shown due courtesy, the former Sikhs are at fault.’²⁸² The essence of Sikhism is service, love and devotion... (The Sikh) should be regarded as the image of the Guru and served as such.²⁸³

Bhalla records that these precepts were actually followed

in the Sikh Panth. ‘The Sikhs served each other, regarding every Sikh as the Guru’s image.’²⁸⁴ Bhangu writes: ‘No body bore malice to anyone; the Singhs (Sikhs who had been baptized) vied with each other in rendering service to others.’²⁸⁵ If any Sikh got or brought any eatable, it was never used alone, it was partaken by all the Sikhs. Nothing was hidden from the other Sikhs. All eatables were shared by all members of the Khalsa; if there was nothing to eat, they would say: ‘The Langar is in trance (Masat)’. ‘One would offer food to others first and then eat oneself. Singhs would be addressed with great love.’²⁸⁶ Guru’s Sikh was the brother of each Sikh.²⁸⁷ During the days of struggle with the Mughals, one Niranjania reported to the Mughal governor against the Sikhs: ‘They (non-combatants) would themselves go hungry and naked, but would not bear the misery of the Singhs; they themselves would ward off cold by sitting near fire, but would send clothes to the Singhs; they would grind corn with their own hands and send it to the Singhs; they would twist ropes and send its proceeds to the Singhs. They, who for their living would go to far off places, send their earnings to the Singhs.’²⁸⁸ ‘All members of the Khalsa Dal ‘were issued clothes from a common store.’ Without concealing anything, they would pool all their earnings at one place. If anyone found or brought any valuables, these were deposited in the treasury as common property.’²⁸⁹

The prevalence of this spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization among the Sikhs, as already noted, is confirmed by Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Oin, the author of *Fatuhah Namah-i-Samadi* (1722-23) and Siyam Rai Bhandari a historian contemporary of Aurangzeb.

(iii) Leadership

The leadership of a movement has always an important bearing in determining the direction of the movement. The way the question of the leadership of the Khalsa was tackled is a demonstration that Guru Gobind Singh wanted to

preserve the egalitarian character of the movement.

We have already referred to the significance of the initiation (baptism) ceremony of the Guru at the hands of the Khalsa as pointed out by Gokal Chand Narang. The Guru set this example because he wanted to ensure that the leadership of the movement remained in the hands of the Khalsa who had an egalitarian mission. The Beloved five (of whom four were Sudras) were made the nucleus of the leadership of the Khalsa, and this was done when the Guru's sons were alive.

The fact that the leadership of the movement devolved on the Khalsa Panth as a whole became an article of living faith with the Sikhs. In this connection, the episode of Banda's nomination as leader and his subsequent parting of company with the Khalsa is very illustrative. The Khalsa agreed to follow Banda only on the condition that he would not aspire to sovereignty.²⁹⁰ The Guru instructed Banda to abide by the Khalsa and appointed select Sikhs as his advisers.²⁹¹ After his military successes, Banda aspired to become Guru and a sovereign. The Tat Khalsa (the genuine Khalsa) parted company with him and his followers, because the Guru had given Banda :

‘Service and not sovereignty;

The sovereignty had been given to the Panth by the
Guru (Sacha Padshah) himself.’²⁹²

After Banda, Kapur Singh was elected as the leader of the Khalsa, who, on becoming the leader, did nothing without consulting the Khalsa.²⁹³

With the end of Kapur Singh's era, the revolutionary spirit started waning. His successor was Jassa Singh ‘Kalal’ who was accepted leader by the Khalsa on the advice of Kapur Singh. Jassa Singh struck coin in his own name when the Khalsa conquered Lahore for the first time. This was so much against the spirit of collective leadership of the Khalsa, that a special convention was held, where it was decided to recall that coin from circulation.²⁹⁴ In its place, another coin struck in the name of the Guru was substituted. Polier

(1780) observed, ‘As for the Government of the Siques, it is properly an aristocracy, in which no pre-eminence is allowed except that which power and force naturally gives; otherwise all the chiefs, great and small, and even the poorest and most abject Siques, look on themselves as perfectly equal in all the public concerns and in the greatest Council or Goormatta of the nation, held annually either at Ambarsar, Lahore or some other place. Everything is decided by the plurality of votes taken indifferently from all who choose to be present at it.’²⁹⁵ Forster also gives a similar account. ‘An equality of rank is maintained in their civil society, which no class of men, however wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down. At the periods when general council of the nation were convened, which consisted of the army at large, every member had the privilege of delivering his opinion, and the majority, it is said, decided on the subject in debate.’²⁹⁶ This shows how strong the original spirit of equality and fraternization of the Sikh revolution must have been so that it could reveal its glimpses even in the post-Khalsa period.

(iv) Abolition of Caste Priorities and prejudices

The Chuhras are the ‘out-caste, par-excellence of the Punjab, whose name is popularly supposed to be corruption of Sudra.’²⁹⁷ As such, they were about the most despised caste in the Punjab; mere bodily contact with whom defiled a person of a higher caste. On conversion to Sikhism, persons from this caste were given the honorific title of Rangretta in order to raise them in public estimation, much in the same way as depressed classes are now-a-days called Harijans. A rhyme, ‘Rangretta, Guru Ka Beta’, meaning ‘Rangretta is the son of the guru’, current in the Punjab²⁹⁸ is an indication of the status to which the Sikh movement sought to raise them. We have seen how Rangrettas (whose touch, had they remained in the caste society, defiled not only the person but also the food he carried) were coequal members of the Khalsa Dal, where they dined and

fraternized, without discrimination, with other Dal members drawn from Brahmins, Khattris, Jats and others. When the Taruna Dal (the Youth wing of the Khalsa Dal) was reorganized into five divisions, one of these was under the leadership of Bir Singh Rangretta. It was bestowed a standard flag (Jhanda) from the Akal Takht in the same manner as was done in the case of the other four divisions.²⁹⁹ It was thus given an equal status with them. When Ala Singh defeated the army of Malerkotla with the help of the Khalsa Dal and offered horses to honour the Dal, the first to receive the honour, as selected by the Dal, was Bir Singh Rangretta.³⁰⁰

We have taken the case of Rangrettas because it is very much illustrative, they being the lowest caste from which Sikhs were recruited. But, it is the Jats, who form the majority in the present day Panth and who have been fitted most in the elevation of their social status by joining the Sikh ranks. It is mainly because they were able to retain, unlike the Rangrettas, the gains that accrued to them. The present day social status of the Sikh Jats is taken so much for granted that it is seldom that their past, prior to their joining the Sikh movement, is recalled. 'In A.D. 836, an Arab governor summoned them to appear and pay jaziya, each to be accompanied by a dog, a mark of humiliation prescribed also under the previous Brahmin regime.'³⁰¹ 'Albaruni (C. 1030), whose direct experience of India was confined to the Lahore area, took the Jats to be 'Cattle-owners, low Shudra people.'³⁰² The author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* (Ca. 1655) in his account of Sikhism describes the Jats as 'the lowest caste of the Vaishyas.'³⁰³ In contrast to this position, 'under the Sikhs the Rajput was over-shadowed by the Jat, who resented his assumption of superiority and his refusal to join him on equal terms in the ranks of the Khalsa, deliberately persecuted him wherever and whenever he had the power, and preferred his title of Jat Sikh to that of the proudest Rajput.'³⁰⁴ That this was all due to the Sikh movement becomes clear if the status of Sikh Jats of the

Sikh tract is compared with that of other Jats who are his immediate neighbours. About the non-Sikh Jats in the eastern submontane tract, Ibbetson writes in his census report (1881): '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 the status of the Rajput is so superior that the Jat has no hope of being called Rajput.'³⁰⁵ Similarly, although the Jats of the south-eastern districts of the Punjab differ 'in little save religion from the great Sikh Jat tribes of the Malwa',³⁰⁶ they remained subservient to the Rajputs upto a recent period of the British Raj. There, 'In the old days of Rajput ascendancy, the Rajputs would not allow Jats to cover their heads with a turban', and 'even to this day Rajputs will not allow inferior castes to wear red clothes or ample loin clothes in their village.'³⁰⁷ In the predominantly Muhammedan Western Punjab, the Jat is 'naturally looked upon as of inferior race, and the position he occupies is very different from that which he holds in the centre and east of the Punjab.'³⁰⁸

We are not giving these quotations in order to approve of air of superiority assumed by the Sikh Jats; because the Sikh movement aimed at levelling up social status of all kinds and not at substituting the status-superiority of one caste or class for that of another. However, these instances do show how far the movement succeeded in breaking the order of social precedence established by the caste society and in permanently raising the social status of a social group which now forms the majority in the Sikh Panth.

(v) Political Power

We have seen how scavengers and leather-dressers were appointed local leaders by Banda. "All power was now usurped by the Sikhs, and one Bir Singh, a man of poor origin, was appointed Subedar or governor of Sirhind."³⁰⁹

In the Missal period, ordinary peasants, shepherds (Tara Singh Gheba)³¹⁰ village menials (Oassa Singh Ramgarhia) and distillers, (Oassa Singh Kala!), whom the caste society despised, became the leaders. There was not one else from castes higher than these. The common peasantry of the land suddenly attained political power.³¹¹ “...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.”³¹² Waris Shah, the author of ‘Hir & Ranjha’, describes the state of affairs in the Punjab of this period. “Men of menial birth flourish and the peasants are in great prosperity. The Jats have become masters of our country. Everywhere there is a new Government.”³¹³

All the members of the Khalsa, irrespective of their caste or class, came to be called, as they are even now. Sardars (over-lords). This is not to approve of this development or the feudal nature of the Missal political system, because these were departures from the Sikh ideal of human equality. The point to be noted here is how the Sikh revolution raised the social and political status, not of individuals, but of a large section of the commoners *en bloc*.

This capture of political status by the commoners had a great impact, within the Sikh Panth, in removing some Social barriers raised by the caste society. It was the taste of political power which made the Sikh Jat feel prouder than the Rajput and the Rangrettas as equals to the Sikh Jats. The Rangrettas had all along been equal members of the Khalsa Dal in every respect, but at the time of Missal formation they joined the Missal of Nishanias,³¹⁴ which Missal did not carve out a territorial rule of its own. Had the Rangrettas also opted for political power on their own, it is quite on the cards that their social status within the Sikh Panth might have been different from what it is. In other words, the Rangrettas were not pushed out of the Khalsa brotherhood; only they did not avail of the opportunity to capture political power

for themselves, which was necessary to maintain their newly acquired social prestige and position in the post-revolutionary period. At any rate, it becomes quite clear that political power was a big factor for levelling caste barriers. Therefore, the mission of capturing political power by the Khalsa (*Raj karega Kbalsa*) was as much an egalitarian social mission as it was a political one. It was not for nothing that the caste ideology and the caste society had been at great pains to exclude the commoners from political power. The egalitarian political and military orientation of the Khalsa should be viewed in this perspective. Those who disapprove the militarization of the Sikh movement on religious grounds miss this point. The social status of the lower castes could not be changed without their attaining political power, and that religion was not worth its name which did not strive to change the caste system.

We presented evidence to show that the Khalsa cut itself from the caste system by severing connections with the caste ideology, Brahmins and the caste society. This conclusion is further substantiated by the positive evidence given in the present section regarding the socio-political egalitarian character of the Khalsa polity. None of its salient features (i.e. its Plebian composition; its spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization; its democratic and collective leadership: abolition of caste priorities; and capture of political power by the commoners) could even be conceived, much less realized, while remaining within the caste system or the caste society.

SECTION IV THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE SIKHS IN THE LATER PERIOD

We have seen in the I Section that the institution of caste in India derived its strength not only from a large number of its constitutive elements, but its almost impregnable rigidity flowed from the coordination and integration of

these elements into a rigid system. Therefore, its main strength lay not in the contributory factors, as such, but in the reinforced structural and operative power of the system as a whole. It has been seen that Sikhism made a planned attack to break both the totality of the integrated caste system and also the individual pillars on which it was based.

Partly because religious or radical movements never remain at their original ideological level for long, and partly because of the large influx of proselytes from the caste society, who had retained some of their caste prejudices and usages, in the Missal and later periods, some aberrations did creep in the Sikh society during this time. But what we wish to emphasize here is that, even in the Missal and post-Missal periods, the Sikhs never accepted either the validity of the caste system or that of its constitutive pillars. We drew attention to the three facets of the caste system, namely the Caste ideology, the Brahmins and the Caste society. The main components of the caste ideology, we pointed out, are:

- (i) The pre-eminence of the caste status with the Brahmins as the point of reference;
- (ii) The authority of scriptures; (iii) Hindu Dharma;
- (iv) Custom, ritualism and ceremoniation;
- (v) Pollution;

Even in the Missal and later periods, the Brahmins have never become a point of reference in Sikh society in regard to social status or hierarchy, or for that matter for any purpose whatsoever. The Sikhs have never owed allegiance to any scriptures other than Guru Granth Sahib, or to any Dharma other than the Sikh Dharma. The Guru Granth completely repudiates ritualism and ceremonialism. The Sikhs do not subscribe to the theory or religious sanction underlying the Brahmanical ideology of pollution, and totally repudiate the Brahmanical theories of avtaras and Karma. As regards the second and third facets of the caste

system, there is no Brahmin or any other sacerdotal caste among the Sikhs, and the Sikh Panth has remained a separate entity from the Hindu society. Our study in this section reveals that whatever notions and practices regarding connubium and commensalism, and the village hierarchy, that have remained with the Sikhs in the Missal and post-Missal periods as a heritage from their previous connection with the caste society, have no point of reference with any of the three facets of caste system, namely, the caste ideology, the Brahmins and the caste society. What remains to be considered is, to what extent some of the prejudices and practices inherited from the caste society by the Sikhs have been shed off or modified at various levels of the Sikh society .

1. *AT PANTHIC LEVEL*

Let us first consider the large scale conversions from Hindu ranks to the Sikh society that took place during the Missal and post-Missal periods. Polier (1780) wrote: “the Siques then began to increase greatly in number in all that came, though from the lowest and most abject castes, were received contrary to Hindu customs which admit no change of caste, and even Musalmans were in the number of converts. ³¹⁵ Griffith tells us that “The Sikhs receive proselytes of almost every caste, a point in which they differ most materially from the Hindoos. ³¹⁶ The German Hugel describes the Sikhs of his time as “the descendants from all the lowest castes of Hindus from which they have been proselyted. ³¹⁷ These European accounts deal with the times of the Missals and Ranjit Singh. What is even more significant is that this trend continued in the British period. “From 1881, when there had been 17,06,185 Sikhs to 1921, when there were 31,10,060 Sikhs, there had been a tremendous upsurge in conversion. ³¹⁸ And these converts came from the higher as well as the lower castes of Hindus. Between 1881 and 1891, “Sikhism was attracting converts from Hindus of the Khatri, Arora, Labana, Sunar, Tarkhan, Chuhra and Maihtam castes”, ³¹⁹ and “the most remarkable increase by conversion

had been among the Chuhra Sikhs.”³²⁰ “Between 1901 and 1911 there were large-scale conversions to Sikhism among the Chuhras and Chamars. Hinduism lost some 1,58,806 Chuhras and 1,69,103 Chamars in this period.”³²¹

This consistent movement of conversions to Sikhism from “the lowest and the most abject castes” of the Hindus was, as also noted by Polier and Griffiths, a radical departure from the caste ideology which admits “no change of caste”. Proselytes from Musalmans were equally unacceptable to the caste ideology and the caste society at this time. The very fact that converts to Sikhism were coming in large numbers from Hindu ranks is enough to show that this proselytization despite some of the caste traits and customs retained by the proselytes, was a movement, in its overall effect, leading away from the caste society, and certainly not towards it. We mentioned three main features of the caste system—the caste ideology, the Brahmins and the caste society. The Brahmins are no where in the picture. In maintaining its vital distance from the caste ideology and the caste society, the Sikh Panth, continued to function, on the whole, outside the orbit of the caste system.

The institution of *Langar* (community kitchen) was another factor that kept alive, at the *Panthic level*, the anti--caste heritage of the earlier period. To what extent, in which sections, and at what levels of the Sikh population, the commensal restrictions of the caste society were retained is not quite clear. Forster (1718) and Malcohm (1812) have observed that the Sikhs retained some Hindu commensal prejudices. As against it, we have the explicit statements of Ghulam Hussain Khan and the author of *Haqiqat* (both in 1783), already referred to, that the Sikhs do not “betray any of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind”,³²² and that they eat together with proselytes from whatever caste he might come, and “Now this is their custom.”³²³ There is no doubt that the institution of *Langar*, where people from all castes dine together without discrimination, was started by Guru Nanak himself and has

since then ever continued without any change in its constitution. Malcohm testifies to it indirectly when he writes that upon particular occasions, such as Guru-mat, the Sikhs “were obliged by their tenets and institutions to eat promiscuously.”³²⁴ Moreover, this position can be easily verified, as hundreds of people partake food daily, without any discrimination whatsoever, in the *Langars* attached to the principal Gurdwaras and thousands of them do so when there are large Sikh gatherings called Jormellas or Dewans. In fact, the institution of Langar was created for levelling all kinds of distinctions. To the present day, the women and children eat first and are served by the men as a symbol of humility.³²⁵

The significance of partaking food, even though occasionally, in the *Langar*, in which people drawn from all castes, including the outcastes, join, can only be grasped if it is viewed against the background of the caste ideology and the usages of the caste society. In Hutton’s opinion, taboo on food “is probably the keystone of the whole system.”³²⁶ “Stranger’s shadow, or even the glance of a man of low caste, falling on the cooking pot may necessitate throwing away the contents.”³²⁷ Food has to be cooked “with the precautions of magic ceremony”,³²⁸ for “the eating of grain, cooked with water, is of the nature of a sacrament.”³²⁹ “If the member of a low caste merely looks at the meal of a Brahmin, it ritually defiles him.”³³⁰ It “is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be at least ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes.”³³¹ Of the offences of which a caste Panchayat took cognizance, the “offences against the commensal taboos, which prevent members of the caste from eating, drinking or smoking with members of another caste, or atleast of other castes regarded by the prohibiting caste as lower in social status than themselves, are undoubtedly the most important; for the transgression by one member of the caste if unknown and unpunished may affect the whole caste with pollution through his

commensality with the rest.”³³² The Santhals, a very low caste in Bengal, have been known to die of hunger in times of famine rather than touch food prepared even by Brahmins.³³³ “A separate lower caste (the Kallars) has arisen in Bengal among people who had infringed the ritual and dietary laws during the famine of 1866, and in consequence been excommunicated.”³³⁴ “At the time of the famine, the strict castes were not satisfied with the possibility of cleansing magical defilement by ritual penance. Yet under threat of excommunicating the participants,.....they made certain that often a sort of symbolic *chambre separee* was created for each caste by means of chalk lines drawn around the tables and similar devices.”³³⁵

Needless to say that, in the Langar, people from all castes, including the Mazhabi Sikhs, can, and do, take part in preparing the food, and nobody bothers as to how the food is cooked and who serves it. Nor is there the least notion of being defiled by eating in a row with others. The question of such defilement being carried to others, or cleansing it by ritual penance, therefore, does not arise.

In the political field, when the Sikhs regained their national consciousness, S. Kharak Singh (from an Ahluwalia family) was called the ‘uncrowned king’ (*beta badshah*) of the Sikhs during the Akali movement; and ‘master’ Tara Singh (from a Khatri family) remained the leader of the Akali party till his death. These facts, along with the large scale conversions to Sikh ranks from the lower castes and the continued functioning of the institution of *Guru Ka Langar*, show that the allegiance and adherence to the Sikh ideals at the Panthic level was not questioned either in theory or in practice.

2. JAT SIKHS VIS-A-VIS KHATRI SIKHS, ARORA SIKHS AND RAMGARHIA SIKHS

The number of Khalsa guerillas was at one stage reduced to about 2,000 persons,³³⁶ and Khushwaqt Rai (1811) estimated the number of the Khalsa to be about 2,00,000.³³⁷

In the 1881 census there were 11,26,861 Jat Sikhs, 2,63,479 Tarkhan Sikhs, 37,917 Arora Sikhs, and 35,521 Khatri Sikhs.³³⁸ Later, the Ramgarhia Sikhs were demarcated from the Tarkhan Sikhs by the census authorities, and in 1921 there were 68,000 Ramgarhia Sikhs as against 1,40,000 Tarkhan Sikhs.³³⁹ In the same census, the number of Arora Sikhs rose to 1,18,000 and that of the Khatri Sikhs to 63,000.³⁴⁰ Between 1881 and 1931, the total number of Sikhs increased from 18,53,426 to 43,35,771.³⁴¹

These figures show that a great accession of numerical strength to the Sikh ranks took place during the periods of the Missals, Ranjit Singh and the British rule. It is not surprising, therefore, ranks did not shed off all of the prejudices and proclivities inherited from the caste ideology and the caste society. Moreover, there was a tendency on the part of some sub-castes and tribes within certain areas, to change religion *en bloc*. It happened also in the case of conversions to Islam. This process helped to retain, to an extent, the social distinctiveness and some old patterns of social behaviour of such groups within the newly adopted religious societies. What we find, however, is that the Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs and Ramgarhia Sikhs despite the above mentioned limitations, did not constitute, in their relations with one another, either a Brahmanical caste or a hierarchy, much less a caste hierarchy. It has to be made clear that we do not deny that those elements, who joined the Sikh society from the Hindu ranks in large numbers during the post-Khalsa period, did retain in varying degrees their heritage of caste sentiments, prejudices and customs. What we are aiming at is to bring out that one of the lasting achievements of the Sikh movement was that it cut off the Sikh Panth from the caste system and its society, and the proselytes, despite their heritage, did not revert to that system or society. For making this distinction clear, it is necessary to keep in view the difference between the meaning of the term caste in the ordinary sense (when applied indiscriminately where there are barriers on

intermarriages between mutually exclusive groups, which arise from a variety of prejudices even in societies which are free from the Indian type of caste) and the term meaning caste in the Brahmanical sense.³⁴² We have seen that the Sikh Jats, whose brethren in the Hindu society were assigned a social position on the borderline of Vaisyas and Sudras, became, as a consequence of the Sikh movement, the rulers of the land and regarded themselves as superior to the Rajputs, Ethine K. Marengo, who in her book *The Transformation of Sikh Society* has given a wealth of sociological data about the Sikh society in the 19th century and the 20th century upto 1947, goes so far to say that there was reshuffling of the caste hierarchy among the Sikhs, where the Jat Sikhs came at the top and became the point of reference for other Sikh castes.³⁴³ This inference is neither accurate, nor is it applicable to the Sikh society as a whole.

We referred to Max Weber's opinion that "it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be atleast ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes",³⁴⁴ and to Hutton's view that "Caste endogamy is more or less incidental to the taboo on taking food and this taboo is probably the keystone of the whole system."³⁴⁵

We have seen LP. Singh's findings that "all Sikh Jatis excepting the Mazhabis, interdine", and Morengo's own appraisal does not differ materially from that of Singh's. Atleast, according to her, commensal barriers among Sikhs, excepting the Mazhabis, are not as inviolable as the Indian caste system would insist them to be. In view of this, the Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs, Ramgarhia Sikhs, in fact all Sikhs who interdine, cannot be regarded as castes in the Brahmanical sense. The problem of inter-marriage between Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs and Ramgarhia Sikhs, is basically not different. In the first place, there are no "statistics for inter-caste marriages of the Sikhs for different periods."³⁴⁶ Marengo

has also given two instances, of Udasis and Kesh Dhari Sikhs. “In many cases the Jat Sikhs intermarried with Udasis... The last point is of particular interest. Since the Udasis included Khatri of the Bedi section, as well as members of other castes, this means that the Jat Sikhs were marrying outside the Jat Sikh caste in 1901. Taboos against marriage with other castes were generally weaker among the Jat Sikhs than among the Hindus.”³⁴⁷ Again, “It will be remembered that there was a hypergamous relation between Kesh Dhari Sikhs, generally converts from the Jat or lower Hindu and Muslim castes, and the Sahaj Dhari Sikhs, generally Khatri and Arora Sikhs. The orthodox Kesh Dhari Sikhs took wives from the Sahaj Dhari Sikhs, but would not give them their daughters... A Jat Sikh, seeking a husband for his daughter, looked for a member of a Kesh Dhari group, as a son-in-law. That son-in-law might be of the Jat Sikh caste or not, since the Jat Sikhs were known to marry outside their caste more readily than Jat Hindus.”³⁴⁸

Secondly, although it is important to note the number of intermarriages that take place among these groups, what is even more significant is whether there are any Brahmanical taboos in this respect among them. “Among classes who marry themselves, marriage outside the class is prevented by sentiment and not by hard and fast rules. Marriage outside the class in Europe might be rare and invalid, but in India, if it is contracted outside the caste, it is a sacrilege.”³⁴⁹ Not only it was a sacrilege, it was visited by severe penalties. A large number of lower castes were formed on account of persons of higher castes marrying into lower castes. Before labelling, on connubial grounds, Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs and Ramgarhia Sikhs as Brahmanical castes, it is necessary to establish that, intermarriages between them are inhibited not merely by an old but dying prejudice that they carry along with them from their caste heritage, but by the hard and fast rules of the caste society, according to which “members of different castes *must* marry only within their castes. In the caste

society, the infringement of connubial rules involves severe sanction. The question of such collective punishment by the Sikhs does not arise as it is against the Sikh religion.

How the Jat Sikhs, ,Khatri Sikhs, and Arora Sikhs constitute a hierarchy/is not understood by us, because a hierarchy pre-supposes demarcation of higher and lower grades, and also some degree of fixation of their relative positions either by their own voluntary acceptance or due to outside pressure. As a consequence of the Sikh revolution, the Jat Sikhs do not recognize socially anybody as their superiors;³⁵⁰ and “the Khatri Sikhs did not have the elevated status of the Jat Sikhs in the Sikh caste hierarchy.”³⁵¹ On the other hand, “Khatri Sikhs probably considered themselves above the Jat Sikhs in status”,³⁵² and “One cannot ignore, of course, the feeling of superiority that the Khatri Sikhs felt towards the Jat Sikhs”³⁵³ There is apparent contradiction in these statements. This paradox is resolved if one faces the reality that none of the two groups regarded itself as inferior to the other—the Jat Sikh because of his new position and the Khatri Sikh because of his wealth, education and the consciousness that the Jat had once been his inferior in the Indian caste hierarchy. We bracket the Sikh Aroras with Sikh Khatri in this respect, as they claim Khatri origin and are more or less similarly placed. There was no outside pressure either to fix the Khatri and Arora Sikhs into a lower position. With the development of modern economy, it is the commercial and artisan castes which moved to the towns and cities in large numbers.³⁵⁴ The peasantry, by and large, continued to stick to their land. The result was that Jat Sikhs were sparsely dispersed in the urban areas, where the Khatri and Arora Sikhs were largely located, and the Sikh Jats were not numerically in a position to pressurize the Khatri or Arora Sikhs. Also, in a money economy, it is wealth which matters and this was, as compared to the Jat Sikhs, more in the hands of Khatri and Arora Sikhs.³⁵⁵ There are, therefore, no grounds for inferring that the Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs and Arora Sikhs constituted

a hierarchy. The question of their being a caste hierarchy between these groups, or there being a reshuffling of caste hierarchy in favour of the Jat Sikhs, therefore, does not arise.

Ramgarhia Sikhs do not appear, as alleged, to be a sub-caste of Tarkhan Sikhs, as there are no commensal or connubial barriers between the two as evidenced today by the extensive family ties between them. Any Tarkhan Sikh who leaves his rural surroundings and chooses to call himself a Ramgarhia Sikh automatically become one. Tarkhan Sikhs enjoyed phenomenal prosperity,³⁵⁶ and in 1911 the bulk of the Tarkhan Sikhs were not involved in carpentry.³⁵⁷ In fact, the Ramgarhia Sikhs, as a group, are more affluent than the Jat Sikhs. Ever since the formation of the Ramgarhia Missal, the Ramgarhia Sikhs have regarded themselves as peers of the Jat Sikhs and their prosperity has added to their pride and social status. In short, the Ramgarhia Sikhs do not accept the Jat Sikhs as superior to them. Also, the Jat Sikhs are not in a position to lord over them, as the Ramgarhia Sikhs are concentrated in towns and cities, where they form, in many cases, compact colonies of their own. There is, therefore, neither acceptance of any hierarchy by the Ramgarhia Sikhs, nor any outside pressure to force them into one.

Out of a total of 18,53,426 Sikhs in 1881 the number of artisan castes and menial among the Sikhs other than the Tarkhan was Lohar 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 8,931.³⁵⁸ Of these, Kalal Sikhs although assigned a lower position than most of the artisan castes by the Indian caste system, raised their social status, 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,³⁵⁹ and have shaken off their dependence upon any social hierarchy. The other artisan castes of the Sikhs migrated to the cities in large numbers,³⁶⁰ where, being in small numbers and being widely dispersed, can hardly be treated as

compact groups. They face no social pressure 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.

3. *AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL*

The constitution of village hierarchy in the Sikh villages is a heritage from the remote past, as is evidenced by the fact that, in the Indian Punjab, it is, more or less, similar to the one found in the Pakistani Punjab, which owned Islam at a very early date. In both the 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 names in some cases. When Muslim, a Jhiwar is known as Mashki, a Chamar (Cobbler) as Mochi, and a *Chubra* (Sweeper) as Musalli. The point to be noted is that the social and occupational status of these Muslim artisans and village menials has remained much the same as it was before conversion to Islam and the Muslim rule. It is, therefore, too much to expect drastic changes in the hierarchy of the Sikh Villages or in the social status of the artisans and menial who embraced Sikhism at a very late date during the post-Khalsa period. In fact, there is in many respects a marked difference in the social elevation of the Sikhs drawn from the artisan and menial castes as compared to even their Muslim counterparts in the Pakistani Punjab. But, we shall confine ourselves, for the purpose of our thesis, to finding out in what respects and how far the gradation in the Sikh villages differs from the corresponding hierarchy of the Indian caste system?

“There is no statistical data to determine the extent upto which the artisan castes have improved their social standing within the village by becoming Sikhs. But, the very fact that quite a large number of artisan and menial castes left Hindu ranks and embraced Sikhism during the post-Khalsa period

shows that there was a clear advantage in doing so. Chimba Sikhs, Jhinwar Sikhs and Labana Sikhs (all from exterior castes) had hypergamous relations with their Hindu counterparts.³⁶¹ Hutton points to the low position of the Dhobis and Chimbis who washed clothes.³⁶² 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 removes night soil or dead bodies.³⁶³ The Sikh Chimbis are not at all treated as outcastes. In another important field, the Sikhs from artisan castes have clearly improved their social position in the villages, because all the Sikh Jatis in the village, except the Mazhabis, interdine.³⁶⁴ Secondly, the Sikh Jats have hypergamous relations with the lower castes of the villages.³⁶⁵ These are two basic departures from the two 'Constitutive principles' of the Indian caste system. Also, these Sikhs share absolute religious equality with the Jat Sikhs, whether in the village or outside it. These facts are enough to show that the Sikhs from artisan and menial castes have not that degree of social stigma attached to them as their counterparts have in the caste society. However, the fact remains that the Sikhs, from artisan and menial castes, so long they remain in the village, do have some social inferiority left as a hangover from their heritage of the caste society. But, there is no doubt that the Sikhs from artisan and menial castes have travelled a long distance away from the corresponding social position of their counterparts in the Indian Caste hierarchy, where they are regarded and treated as Sudras with all the well-known religious and social attendant humiliations, discriminations and disabilities.

The real tough problem, both in its dimensions and quality, is that of Chamar Sikhs and Mazhabi Sikhs. The Chamar Sikhs and Mazhabi Sikhs constitute quite a big segment of the population in the Sikh villages and in the village gradation they are at the lowest level. But, there is the stigma of pollution in the Brahmanical sense against them. We will discuss mainly the case of Mazhabi Sikhs as

it covers that of Chamar Sikhs also, who are, in fact, a step higher than Mazhabi Sikhs according to the Barhmanical Caste hierarchy. We again refer to I.P. Singh (1959,61). According to him, though Mazhabis (Sikh converts from Chuhras who are the out-castes par excellence of the Punjab) live in a separate hamlet and have a separate well, 'yet no miasma of touch pollution is attributed to them.' They sit among others in the temple. All *Sikhjatis*, excepting the Mazhabis, interdine. One of the granthis, the religious functionaries, of the village Daleka is a Mazhabi and is given the same respected position as is given to other granthis in the village. Though marriage is generally within the Jati, women may be brought in from lower *jatis*. They face little disadvantage on that account and their children suffer none. Complete abolition of jati division among Sikhs is still urged by itinerant preachers. On one such occasion, a Mazhabi rose to ask whether anyone in the audience would receive his daughters into their families in marriage. "Practically everybody in the audience, consisting of all castes, raised his hand". But when he asked who would give girls in marriage to his sons, no one volunteered."³⁶⁶

Let us see the points, one by one, in the order raised by I.P. Singh. The Mazhabi Sikhs "live in a separate hamlet and have a separate well." This village configuration is inherited from the remote past and could not and cannot be changed without a major resettlement of property even if the Mazhabi Sikhs do have equal social status in the village community.

"No miasma of touch pollution is attributed to them (Mazhabi Sikhs)."³⁶⁷ This is a major advance from the position of their counterparts in the caste society, where "purification is strictly speaking necessary as a result of contact with certain low castes whose traditional occupation, whether actually followed or not, or whose mode of life places them outside the pale of Hindu society. Such castes are those commonly spoken of as outcastes or untouchables."³⁶⁸ Among these outcastes, Hutton counts Chamar, Dhobis, Doods and sweeper castes. "Some castes that are themselves

low, are especially strict in keeping untouchables at a distance....

Eleven will not touch a Bhangi (sweeper), seventeen will not touch a Chamar.... sixteen will not touch a Dhobi...³⁶⁹

“They (Mazhabi Sikhs) sit among others in the temple’, which means they are accorded religious equality. This is certainly the case at the Panthic level, where some of them become religious functionaries in the historic shrines controlled by the Panth through the S.G.P.C. The position of Mazhabi Sikhs at the religious and panthic levels in this matter is totally different from the outcastes obtaining in the Hindu society. The Akali movement started when the Sikhs forced the *pujaris* at the golden temple, Amritsar, to accept the *prasad* (the sacred food) offered by the Mazhabi Sikhs. The whole Panth backed this movement, and no body dare challenge the religious equality accorded to the Mazhabi Sikhs in the gurdwaras ever since their control was taken away from individual Mahants. In the caste society, on the other hand, the hold of the caste orthodoxy is most entrenched at the highest religious level. Hutton has given a number of instances of which we give one. In temples there are (or have been) regular scales of distance beyond which certain castes must remain No Iravan or Tiyan (outcastes) must come within 225 ft. of the curtain wall of the temple of Gurunayar in Malabar.³⁷⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, with all his prestige, was unable to carry the Hindu society with him, and had to be content with advising the exterior castes not to attempt to gain entry to Hindu temples as God resided in their breasts.³⁷¹ Such attempts to obtain entry by exterior castes actually led to communal violence between the caste Hindus and the outcastes at several places.³⁷²

“All Sikh Jatis, excepting the Mazhabis, interdine”. The main Brahmanical ideological consideration underlying absolute commensal taboos against the outcastes is the idea of impurity supposed to be inherent in them, and the way

this supposed impurity is imparted to others through mere contact with them or through partaking food and drinks at their hands or in their company. Not only is the idea of pollution by touch absent, the Sikh Jats as against Mazhabi Sikhs, but at the Langars the Jats actually take food prepared and served by Mazhabis; and the question of any stigma or penalty on that account does not arise at all because the Sikh scriptures and Khalsa tradition frown upon it.

I.P. Singh writes that among Sikh Jats there is readiness to accept Mazhabi brides.³⁷³ This automatically means preparedness to break bride barriers. Evidently, the position of Mazhabi Sikhs is decidedly better than that of their counterparts in the caste society, where the 'outcastes are outside the pale of Hinduism and are not admitted to the Hindu society. "This social bar tends to foster conversion to the Sikh faith, to Islam, or to Christianity, though even after conversion the social stigma does not vanish at once."³⁷⁴ "But it is not uncommonly the case that the open adoption of a definite faith, the substitution of Islam or Sikhism for that half-Hindu half-aboriginal religion which distinguishes most of these outcast classes, is the first step made in their upward struggle."³⁷⁵ The Ramdasias or the Sikh Chamars "occupy a much higher position than the Hindu Chamars."³⁷⁶ In the Karnal district the mere touch of a leather-maker, washerman, barber, dyer, sweeper, defiles food.³⁷⁷ For the UP. peasant, "Nothing is worse than to lose your caste, to eat with a sweeper or to touch an impure person."³⁷⁸ The workers in leather "are looked upon in detestation by orthodox Hindus and the sweepers are "regarded as the very dregs of impurity."³⁷⁹ Marengo points out that the Chamar and Chuhra Sikhs had more literates than the Chamar or Chuhra Hindus,³⁸⁰ and among "Chuhras of the three major religions, the Chuhra Sikhs were more frequent in dropping their traditional occupation than the Chuhra Muslims or the Chuhra Hindus. The Chuhra Sikhs also had larger numbers of people turning to agriculture."³⁸¹ She ascribes this elevation of the social status of the Mazhabi Sikhs partly to

British patronage in enlisting them in the army. What she does not take note of is that the British followed the precedent set by Ranjit Singh, for whom the door for recruiting Mazhabi Sikhs in his army was opened by the tradition of the Sikh revolutionary struggle in which the Rangrettas had taken part as comrades in arms with their other Sikh brethren. Secondly, the number of Chamar Sikhs, who joined the Sikh society in larger numbers than Mazhabi Sikhs,³⁸² and whose social status was also raised on becoming Sikhs, in the imperial Army (1191) was only twenty four.

4. *PROGRESS MEASURED IN RELATIVE TERMS*

Human progress is always slow and never linear. It cannot, therefore, be measured by absolute standards, and should be assessed in comparative terms.

We hardly need to recall how the Sikh revolution transformed the Sudra Jat to a Sikh Jat who regarded his status as higher than that of the Rajput. "The position of the Jats in the Hindu hierarchy varied from their position in the Sikh hierarchy*. Within the framework of the Hindu caste hierarchy, the Jat Sikhs would be considered along with Jat Hindus, as belonging to the traditional classification of Sudra. Within the Sikh caste hierarchy, * the Jat Sikhs were at the top of the ladder."³⁸³

"Inter-marriage between groups of Sikhs derived from Hindu castes was considered to be much freer than in the case of Muslim groups converted from Hindu castes, and of course, neither group fully observe the Hindu rules regarding intercaste marriage."³⁸⁴

The Jat Sikhs were known to marry outside their caste more readily than Jat Hindus.³⁸⁵

"Among the Jat Sikhs... there was no bar to marriage with women of lower castes, Rose informs us, and the sons would succeed equally."³⁸⁶ As against it, the Hindus Jats of the Meerut Division avoid hypergamous relations with lower

castes. If the caste of women is known to be low, this fact is kept secret. In the Brahmanical system, hypergamy leads to a lowering of the social status of the off-spring, and the sons of Jats from 'mol-Iana marriages' in the Meerut division are regarded lower than the sons of regular marriages.³⁸⁷

The Jat Sikhs do not have a rigid system of hypergamy in regard to their exogamous groups, the Jat Hindus have.³⁸⁸

By adopting the outward symbols of Gobind Singh, "the lower caste converts attempted to avoid the disabilities of their original caste groups and to move upward, through corporate caste mobility."³⁸⁹

The Tarkhan Sikhs may be said to have made the greatest strides ahead as compared to the Tarkhan Muslims or Tarkhan Hindus,³⁹⁰ and the Tarkhan Sikhs and Kalal Sikhs, compared to Tarkhan and Kalal Hindus and Muslims, were generally the most literate.³⁹¹ On the other hand, in the caste society, there was a tendency to move backwards. "Till quite lately Jats and the like would smoke with him (Tarkhan) though lately they began to discontinue the custom."³⁹²

"The Chuhra Hindus occupied 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*, wearing his hair long and abstaining from tobacco, the Chuhra convert might change his standing in the hierarchy."³⁹³

"By changing their name to Ramdasias, the Chamar Sikhs could alter position in the Sikh caste hierarchy, becoming Sikhs and refusing to marry or interdine with Chamar Hindus."³⁹⁴

"While the Sikhs were becoming literate, their women were becoming particularly so. This was in accordance with the generally higher position of Sikh women, compared to their position in Hindu or Muslim society."³⁹⁵

SECTION V

CONCLUSION

The achievements of a movement are not fully appreciated unless the circumstances and limitations under which it worked, are taken into account. The progress accomplished is greater if the gap covered moves from a minus degree to 75 degrees, rather than if it moves from 60 degrees to 80 degrees. The achievements of the Sikh movement should be judged in the context of the Indian Caste system and not in that of the societies free from that taint. No other Indian movement enabled the Sudra Jat to regard his status as higher than that of the Rajput: raised Jats, carpenters and Kalals to be the rulers of the land; and made the Khatria, Aroras, Jats, artisans, village menials and outcastes (sweepers and Chamars)—the lowest of low in Indian estimation forget their caste biases and merge into a genuine brotherhood on equal terms.

The greatest social achievement of the Sikh revolution is that it severed connection of the Sikh Panth with the Indian caste system. What we have attempted to show is that there is no caste hierarchy either at the Panthic level, or between Jat Sikhs, Khatri Sikhs, Arora Sikhs and Ramgarhia Sikhs. The gradation in the Sikh villages lacks all the main three features of the Indian caste system. It is not governed by the caste ideology. Even in the village, Sikhs do concede, though grudgingly, that all Sikhs are brothers,³⁹⁶ and accord a Mazhabi Granthi (religious preacher) as much respect as a Granthi from any other group.³⁹⁷ Secondly, there is no Brahmin caste, which is indispensable to the Indian caste system, as its functional and manipulative fulcrum. Thirdly, there are no Jat panchayats, as distinct from village Panchayats, in the Sikh villages to enforce sanctions against the breach of caste norms and practices. In other words, the gradation in the Sikh village is free from the ritual, ideological and operative compulsions of the Indian caste system. This accounts, in no small measure, for the better

social situation of the artisans, menials and outcastes in the Sikh villages as compared to their brethren in the Hindu Jat villages of Haryana and Meerut Division, where the influence of the Sikhism has not been direct. The Jat hegemony in the Sikh villages relies mainly on the numerical strength of the Jats and their pivotal position in the village economy as owners of land. These and similar factors are operative with corresponding effects, more or less, in class societies as well. The question, therefore, we repeat is not whether there are or there are not caste like prejudices and practices in the Sikh villages today. These were already there when those villages became Sikh villages. The acid test is how far freedom from the compulsions of the Indian caste system helped the Sikh villagers and the Sikh Society to shed or loosen their caste, bonds, prejudices and practices as compared to the Hindu Society. Seen in this light the gains are significant.

Not only that, the Sikh movement worked in the spirit and the level of its egalitarian deology for a period of 275 years (1486 to 1769, i.e. from the time of the missionary tours of Guru Nanak to the establishment of Missals). But what is even more unique, the highest of the so-called high castes worked under the distinguished leadership of the lowest of the low, who were free to rise to that position purely on the basis of ideological merit and service to the society.

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INTER-CASTE MARRIAGES

JAGJIT SINGH

It has been said that the Sikh movement did not do much to promote inter-caste marriages. This assertion has probably been made in order to detract from the anti-caste achievements of the movement. It appears that the role of endogamy¹ in the caste complex has either not been understood, or has been over-emphasized.

(i) Endogamy and the caste complex

Hutton writes: 'Indeed, it seems possible that caste endogamy is more or less incidental to the taboo on taking food cooked by a person of at any rate a lower, if not of any other caste, and in the view of the writer this taboo is probably the keystone of the whole system. It is not uncommon in some parts of India for a man of one caste to keep a concubine of a lower caste, or even a non-Hindu, and he is not outcaste by his caste fellows on that ground, though he may be, and often is, on the ground that he has eaten food cooked or served by her or taken water from her hands. This suggests that the taboo on marriage is the necessary and inevitable outcome of the taboo on food and drink, rather than the cause of it.'² Hutton thus under-scores the point that the problem of endogamy is only a part of

* In dealing with restrictions on inter-caste marriages, we exclude exogamy, because it is not born out of the considerations of social discrimination, and hypergamy, because the sikh who form the majority of the Sikh Jats, who form the majority of the Sikh population, are not adverse to taking wives from the lower castes.

the caste complex, and not an independent or a premier part at that. As such, its role should be viewed in this context and in the right perspective. The removal of endogamy is not indispensable for breaking up the caste structure. For, the caste has been losing its hold in India since it came in contact with the Western culture and the capitalist economy. But, all the same, not many inter-caste marriages have taken place since then so as to make any appreciable contribution to this development.

What is fundamental to the caste system is the preservation of the caste status, and the ritualistic and religious sanction which helped maintain that status. The restrictions on inter-caste marriages are made inflexible by the religious and ritualistic rules of the caste ideology. 'Among classes who marry among themselves, marriage outside the class is prevented by sentiment and not by hard and fast rules. Marriage outside the class in Europe might be rare and invalid, but in India, if it is contracted outside the caste, it is a sacrilege.'³

What makes endogamy formidable and obnoxious in the caste society is that inter-caste marriages, as pointed out by Ketkar, are not prevented, as in class societies, primarily by sentiment, but by the 'hard and fast' rules of the caste ideology. These 'hard and fast' rules are not applicable exclusively to endogamy. Most of these rules, especially the social approach underlying them, cover in their ramifications almost the entire spectrum of caste mechanism. For, example, caste endogamy is the product of the notion that Aryan blood is pure and the non-Aryan impure, and that the admixture of the two should be avoided. As the mixture of the Aryan and non-Aryan bloods had already taken place on a large scale, caste endogamy was enforced at a later stage to compartmentalize this mixture so as to prevent further admixture. Exactly, the same principle or notion about the purity of Aryan blood and the impurity of non--Aryan blood underlies the injunctions against inter-dining among castes and pollution by contact or sight. 'Despite

their indispensability for a millennium, the impure castes have remained absolutely impure; because of the blood they inherit which could not be accepted as pure under any circumstances. All such people are magically defiled.' 'Their very presence may infect the air of a room and so defile food in it that it must be thrown away to prevent evil enchantment.'⁴ The idea that certain persons defile if they sit down to a meal in one row is present in the Sutras.⁵ Similarly, Gautama upholds that an impure person imparts pollution by his touch and even by his near approach.⁶ In the later periods, these rules were further elaborated and made rigid. In the medieval Occident, 'there were factual barriers restricting the connubium between differently esteemed occupations, but these were no ritual barriers, such as are absolutely essential for caste. Within the circle of the 'honourable' people, ritual barriers were completely absent; but such barriers belong to the basis of caste differences.'⁷ 'Nowhere are endogamy and the exclusion of commensalism more rigidly observed than by the occupational castes, and this is by no means true only of the interrelation of high and low castes. Impure castes shun infectious contact with non-members as rigidly as high castes. This may be taken as a conclusive proof of the fact that mutual exclusiveness was predominantly caused, not by social, but by ritualistic factors based on the quality of many of these castes as ancient guest or pariah people.'⁸

All the above facts emphasize that the foundation on which the super-structure of injunctions against inter-caste marriages, inter-caste commensalism inter-caste contact pollution, etc., rested, was the same. Ritual barriers or magical distance between castes in their mutual relationships (whether it applies to inter-caste marriages, inter-caste commensalism, various notions about pollution or to the stigma attached to certain occupations) is a fundamental basis of the caste. 'The caste order is orientated religiously and ritually to a degree not even partially attained elsewhere.'⁹ 'Complete fraternization of castes has been and

is impossible because it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be atleast ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes.⁷¹⁰

(ii) Restrictions in other societies

Another important point to be borne in mind is that caste restrictions on marriages are not the only restrictions current on marriages between exclusive groups. Individual and group prejudices against marriages, based on considerations of various kinds (viz., health, beauty, colour, race, class etc.) exist in societies where there are no castes. In other words, caste endogamy is superimposed on prejudices about marriages between mutually exclusive groups common to non-caste societies as well. This leads to two corollaries. First, the problem of restrictions on marriages between exclusive groups or classes is not solved by the undoing of the caste endogamy. Secondly, the problem of removing prejudices regarding marriages, as it is in non-caste societies, is hard enough to solve. Because, in view of the very personal nature of the marriage relations and the human prejudices involved, no positive regulations can be prescribed in this field. Except for marriage restrictions imposed by the caste system, few societies have tended to lay down positive laws governing marriages between different social groups or classes. No wonder that Plato's suggestions in this regard always remained as the odd ramblings of a philosopher's mind; and the attempt in Rome to regulate marriages through the Theodosian Code failed miserably. For the same reasons, the racial problem between the Whites and the Negroes in the U.S.A., or elsewhere, continues to be intractable. The super-imposition of caste endogamy on the other prejudices regarding marriages made the problem doubly complicated.

(iii) The Approach of the Sikh Movement

Guru's stand on the issue is very clear. When the Muktas (the select band of Sikhs in the congregation of Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur who were given this honorific title for being foremost in living upto the ideals of Sikhism) advocated inter-caste marriages, the other Sikhs openly expressed their inability to follow this line. The matter was represented to the Guru himself. The Guru indicated that the advice of the Muktas should be followed. He said, "The four castes are one brotherhood. The Guru's relationship to the four castes is common (i.e. equal). There is no doubt about it... Muktas are my own life. What they do is acceptable."¹¹

'Caste is probably what Professor Bartlett would call one of the 'hard points' of Hindu culture, and any attempt to modify it by a direct attack on it is likely to provoke resistance and discord, and reformers will need to aim at some 'soft point', some other feature of the culture, that is, through which the 'hard point' can ultimately be circumvented and isolated.'¹² It is probably on this account that, 'In regard to the matter of the right to enter Hindu temple, the exterior castes were advised by Mr. Gandhi not to attempt to gain entry, as God resides in their breasts.'¹³ If this cautious approach was necessary in the twentieth century, it was much more so in the times of the Sikh Gurus. They had to avoid taking steps that might affect adversely the very objectives of the movement. They were not idle dreamers interested only in the postulation and declaration of a utopian stand. They could not afford to sit in isolation tied to an abstract maxim. They were the leaders of a movement. Although they never swerved for a moment from their objectives, and even paid with their lives for not doing so, they had to weigh beforehand the feasibility of each and every step they took in the light of its likely consequences on the course of the movement as a whole. As leaders keen to achieve practical results, they were aware of the necessity

not only of carrying their followers with them, atleast a majority of them, but also of ensuring their zealous participation. Evidently, they would not like to take such steps as might sidetrack the main problems. There were open rifts in Sikh ranks at different places between those who wanted to stick to the old rite of Bhadan (cutting off the hair of the child at a certain stage of his life) and those who wanted to give it up following the Guru's injunction not to shave.¹⁴ Where differences could crop up on such a minor issue, the Gurus could not risk the future of the movement by insisting on inter-caste marriages.

The abolition of the caste was not the only goal of the Sikh movement. It had also to fight the religious and political oppression of the rulers. In fact, the pursuit of this objective became more urgent especially when the Mughal rulers launched a frontal attack to convert the Hindus to Islam. The Sikh movement depended for all its recruitment to its ranks entirely on elements drawn from the caste society. It could not afford to cut itself off completely from the base of its recruitment. By doing so, none of the three social objectives of the movement would have been furthered. Neither would it have succeeded in building a society outside the caste order; nor could it have successfully challenged the religious and political domination, or captured political power for the masses.

It is in this context that the anti-caste stance of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh movement should be judged. No socialist or communist movement has ever cared to adopt the issue of inter-class marriages as its plank. They know that human prejudices regarding marriages would automatically disappear with the levelling up of class differences. Similarly, the Gurus attacked the very fundamentals of the caste, i.e. caste status consciousness and the ritualistic barriers between the castes. They hoped that caste endogamy would disappear with the disappearance of caste-status consciousness and these ritualistic barriers. They

did not want to side-track the comparatively urgent problem of challenge.

Secondly, as we have said, the Gurus did not want to cut off, as far as possible, the movement from the base of its recruitment. Two instances would amplify the point we want to stress. It was Guru Nanak who started the institution of Langar where people of all castes and creeds dined together. It was a very big step towards breaking the caste ritualistic barriers. But, it was Guru Amardas who made it a rule that nobody could see him unless he had dined at the Langar. Possibly this could not be done all at once in the beginning, because it required time to educate and influence the people in overcoming the ritual or taboo by which one could not eat 'in the sight of people not belonging to one's caste.' In the famine of 1866 in Bengal, when people were forced by starvation to eat in the public soup kitchens opened by the Government, 'they made certain that often a sort of symbolic *chambre separee* was created for each caste by means of chalk lines drawn around the tables and similar devices.'¹⁵

Again, Guru Gobind Singh himself took away the *Janeo* of Alim Singh when he felt it necessary to prevent him from reverting to the caste society.¹⁶ But, the same Guru advised his Sikh not to insist on anybody wearing *Janeo*,¹⁷ nor coerce anyone to forgo it. The same was the Guru's approach regarding inter-caste marriages. While he approved of the proposal of the *Muktas*, he did not prescribe or insist on inter-caste marriages, leaving it to the Sikhs to follow it on their own.

REFERENCE

1. Rose, 11, p. 361
2. Hutton, p. 71
3. Ketkar, p. 117
4. Max Weber, p. 13
5. Ghurye, p. 79
6. *Ibid*

7. Max Weber, pp. 34-35
8. Ibid., p. 106
9. Ibid., p. 44
10. Ibid., p. 36
11. *Rehatname*, pp. 68-69
12. Hutton, p. 130
13. Ibid., p. 202
14. *Sri Guru Sobha*
15. Max Weber, p. 37
16. Macauliffe, V, p. 157
17. *Mahima parkash*, ii, p. 831

PART VI

*THE MILITARIZATION OF
SIKH MOVEMENT*

THE MILITARIZATION OF SIKH MOVEMENT

JAGJIT SINGH

The militarization of the Sikh movement, the creation of the Khalsa, and its prolonged struggle for the objective of capturing political power by the down trodden masses, are the hard facts of Indian history which cannot be ignored. These were not fortuitous developments, or what have often been called 'the accidents of history'. The Sikh movement was an organic growth of the Sikh religion or the Sikh view of life. The founding of the Sikh panth outside the caste society in order to use it as the base for combating the hierarchical set-up of the caste order, and the creation of the Khalsa for capturing the state in the interests of the poor and the suppressed, were only a projection, on the military and political plane, of the egalitarian approach of the Sikh religious thesis. But, some writers, having failed to grasp the socio-political significance of the Sikh religion, have tried to cloud the genesis of the Sikh movement by suggesting that the militarization of the movement was initiated and reinforced by the influx into it of a large number Jats. The refutation of this hypothesis is important, because its elimination would leave no plausible alternative in the field to contend the thesis that the militarization of the Sikh movement was a logical development of the Sikh view of religion. The subject is considered in two sections. The first deals with some specific points about the subject raised by Dr. McLeod, and in the second the problem is examined in a wider context.

SECTION I THE JATS AND SIKH MILITARIZATION*

Dr. McLeod has stated that ‘the arming of the Panth could not have been the result of any decision by Gum Hargobind’, and that, ‘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.’¹ This proposition raised three issues—the question of leadership and initiative, the impact of Jat cultural patterns and economic problems.

1. *THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP*

On this issue, it has to be seen whether effective leadership and initiative lay with the followers of the Gums or the Gums themselves.

There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that any of the succeeding Gums was nominated in consultation with, or at the suggestion of, the Sangat (the Sikh followers). The choice of the successor was always a personal decision of the nominating Gum. The faithful were expected to accept the nomination without any reservation. Even when the nomination of the ninth Gum was vaguely indicated by the word ‘Baba Bakale’², the devout Sikhs diverted all their attention to finding out the intended Baba at Bakala. It was the founder Gum, Gum Nanak himself, who had arrived at the decision that, in order to carry forward his aims and ideals, he must have a successor. Evidently, the choice of the successor was the most important decision of the Gums, who, whenever necessary, applied extremely rigorous tests before making the final selection. Those who, for whatever reason, did not accept the nomination, had to opt out of

the main current or were discarded, as it happened in the case of the Minas, the Dhirmalias and the Ramrayyas. No deviation from the avowed ideology was ever tolerated. Baba Atal, a son of the sixth Gum, is said to have shown a miracle. It being against the Sikh ideology, the Baba was given such a stem reprimand by the Gum for his lapse that he had to give up his mortal coil. Ram Rai, who merely misquoted the Gum Granth in order to please Emperor Aurangzeb at Delhi, was completely disowned by his father, the seventh Gum. It would, therefore, be too simplistic to suggest that the fifth Guru, who laid down his life for the sake of the faith and its ideology but did not agree to change an iota of the Sikh scriptures, would choose a person who would follow an ideological line different from him; or that the sixth Gum, who had made his own son lose his life for an ideological error, would himself allow any distortion of the ideology so as to accommodate his Jat followers.

The entire Sikh history is a refutation of the assumption that the Guru, even though not elected or selected by the Sikhs, were mere figure-heads, had no clear-cut objectives and plans for the community of which they were the accredited and unchallenged leaders, and were stampeded into unauthorised action by the will, predilections or the leanings of their followers. A glance at the landmarks of the Sikh history will further clarify this point.

The turning points in Sikh history during the Gum period were: (i) the break with the Indian ascetic tradition, (ii) the building of a society not based on the caste structure, and (iii) the militarization of the Panth. All these changes were so radically opposed to the Indian religious tradition that it would be idle to suggest that a mere chance combination of ideologically indifferent elements and circumstances placed in juxtaposition could have achieved them. Only a purposeful and determined leadership could have brought about the said departures.

The decision to eschew asceticism was Gum Nanak's taken at a time when there was practically no organized Sikh

sangat. Kabir also preached against asceticism. Why, then were there no marked social and political growths among Kabir-Panthies similar to those of the Sikh? This difference lay in the systematic work that the Sikh Gurus did for their ideals, as is instanced by the third Guru having deliberately separated the Sikhs from the passive recluses. Similar is the case regarding the caste system.

Kabir was unequivocal against the system of castes, but the Kabir-panth never developed into a social entity distinct from the caste-ridden Hindus; because he showed no purposive drive or the will to organize a separate Panth outside the caste society as Guru Nanak and his successors did. The Kabir-Panth did not have to surmount more difficult circumstances than the Sikhs in overcoming caste prejudices. It is Guru Nanak who started the institution of a common kitchen for all. But, it is only the third Guru who made it obligatory for everyone to partake food from the Langar. This calculated approach is indicative of the hesitation or opposition expected from their rank and file to the Gurus' new line of thinking. When the tenth Guru, after quite a long interval of preparation by the previous Gurus, decided to break away completely from the caste society and created the Khalsa, there were dissensions and disputes among the Sikh ranks.³ But, it was entirely because of the initiative, guiding influence and drive of the Gurus that the movement, despite all opposition, never swerved from its ideals.

The arming of the Sikh community was the third turning point in the Sikh history. This was the necessary sequence of Guru Arjan's decision to 'defend his faith by the open profession thereof', to raise the institution of the 'True Emperor', and to help the rebel Khusro. And yet there is an unwarranted conjecture that what Jahangir was really concerned about was the growing Jat following of the Gurus, and that the reasons given by Jahangir himself in his autobiography for his ordering execution of the fifth Guru should be discounted.

2. *THE ARMING OF THE PANTH AND JATS*

It is an accepted fact that there was a rift in the Sikh ranks at the time of Guru Arjan's succession. It is nowhere known, however, that those who opted out in favour of Prithi Chand excluded Jat Sikhs. Not far from Amritsar, at Jandiala, was the religious headquarter of Handalias, a schismatic sect of Sikhs, who were themselves Jats and had Jat following.⁴ But, neither Prithi Chand nor Handalias, both of whom had set up separate Guruships in opposition to the Sikh movement, ever came into conflict with the administration. On the other hand, they cooperated fully with the authorities. Prithi Chand was instrumental in the persecution of Guru Arjan, and, in later history, the Handalias became active agents of the authorities for the persecution of the Sikhs.⁵ The gurus of this sect (Handalias of Jandiala) took service with Abmed Shah and drew terrible vengeance on themselves from Charat Singh when he attacked Jandiala in 1762.⁶ If the mere intrusion of Jat elements into the Sikh ranks could arouse the fears of the authorities, it should have done so in the case of Prithi Chand and Handalias too; because there is no evidence to indicate that the Jat followers of these two sects were less armed than the Jat followers of the Gurus. But the real difference was that one party chose the path of challenging the political authority of the day, while the other was interested in mere ritualism, without the socio-political concerns of the Sikh faith. That Guru Arjan made his momentous choice deliberately, and that it was his own, is established by the fact that he told Jahangir that he was a worshipper of the Immortal God and recognized no monarch save Him. The Sikhs of Lahore wanted to compromise with the authorities by paying the fine on his behalf but he forbade them to do so.⁷

If the arming of the Panth was at the instance of the Jats, why did Bhai Buddha, the most leading Jat, remonstrate with Guru Hargobind when he found him insisting on the militarization of the Sikhs?⁸ According to McLeod the

enrolment of Jats in large numbers to the Sikhs ranks is supposed to have begun in the time of Guru Arjan. He was Guru for nearly twenty five years. Why this arming of the panth, which McLeod assumes must have preceded Guru Hargobind's decision, was taken notice of by Jahangir and his subordinates in the last nine months of the Guru's life and not earlier by Akbar or his Administration? Akbar too could not have been less alive to any potential threat to his political authority.

Nor is there any basis for McLeod's presumption that the Jats were armed but the Khatri were not. Ibbetson writes: "The Khatri occupies a different position among the people of the Punjab from that of other mercantile castes. Superior to them in physique, in manliness and in energy, he is not, like them, a mere shopkeeper, but a direct representative of the Kshatriya of Manu."⁹ It is true that the Khatri of the present times have taken more to trade. "They are not usually military in their character, but are quite capable of using the sword, when necessary."¹⁰ Nothing prevented the Khatri from bearing arms in the earlier troubled times we are dealing with. When the Taruna Dal branch of the Khalsa Dal was reorganized into five divisions, two of these were headed by Khatri and one by a Ranghreta.¹¹

Nor was Guru Hargobind's decision to arm the Sikhs taken casually or accidentally. In the first place, it was done under the specific instructions of Guru Arjan.¹² Secondly, at the very time of his installation as Guru, it is he who directed Bhai Buddha to amend the ceremony followed on such occasions and adorn him with two swords of Meere and Peere, signifying the blending of religious and temporal authority. It was not customary for the Sangat to suggest changes or innovate ceremonies, much less a radical departure such as this one. He followed this up by founding the 'Akal Takht', a seat of temporal authority as distinct from the place of worship alone, and set up two flags fluttering before it, one distinctly signifying religious and the other temporal authority. Such steps amounted to the declaration

of a parallel government and marked an open change in the external character of the movement. Here we have the indisputable authority of Bhai Gurdas, the Guru's contemporary, that far from persuading the Guru to take these steps, there were grumblings among the Sikhs against the line taken by the Guru.¹³ Even Bhai Buddha, chief among the Sikhs and the Jat, initially argued against it with the Guru. There is no mention, whatsoever, that -the other Jats among the Sikhs supported the Guru on this issue, or that Sikhs ever grouped themselves on caste lines to deliberate on any subject. The Masands, leaders of the local Sangats, approached the Guru's mother in 'order that she should dissuade the Guru from inviting trouble from the rulers. By inference, had those among the Sikhs, who were opposed to Guru Hargobind's policy of militarization, been consulted, they would not have supported Guru Arjan in bestowing his blessings on Prince Khusro, as that would have invited the Imperial wrath. As the interval between these events is not long, it is reasonable to suppose that the composition of the Sangat could not have changed materially. The incident of the 'hawk' also indicates that the initiative for challenging the political authority came from the Guru. As to the creation of the Khalsa, Sainapat, a contemporary, and Koer Singh, a near contemporary, expressly state that the tenth Guru's step was opposed by many members of the higher castes.¹⁴ The dramatic manner in which the nucleus of the Khalsa, the five Beloved Ones, was chosen,¹⁵ shows how Guru Gobind Singh had kept his counsel to himself. A surprise was sprung on the Sangat. Far from influencing or pressurizing the Guru to found the Khalsa only five among all the Sikhs came forward to offer their lives, and the total number of others who were also initiated on that day was twenty-five only.¹⁶ The creation of the Khalsa caused a serious rift among the Sikh ranks, but the Guru did not deviate from his plan. At Anandpur, on another occasion, he allowed those who wanted to discontinue the military struggle (Bedavilas) to depart but stuck to his plan.

Aagin, at a time when he had lost his army and had no visible chance of success left, and when some Sikhs suggested to the Guru at Muktsar to discontinue the struggle against the state and offered to bring about conciliation between him and Aurangzeb, the Guru chided them for their presumptuousness in trying to advise the Guru.¹⁷

These glaring facts should be enough to show that the initiative and determination for carrying on the armed struggle against the established state was invariably that of the Guru and not that of his followers. The working of a movement or a system cannot be evaluated merely by taking into account the objective or environmental factors. The Indians far outnumbered the British in the administrative machinery of the Government of India; and even in the army the ratio of the Indian soldiers to the British soldiers was roughly three to one. But one cannot conclude from this that the Indians were in effective control of the Government of the country. For the purpose of any assessment, the directive purpose and the levers of power have to be correlated with the objective conditions.

3. *THE JATS AND ARMS*

It is McLeod's assumption that the Jats who used to come to Guru Arjan to pay homage must have come armed. In the first place, it was no Indian religious custom to go armed to any holy person. Rather, the general practice was, as a mark of respect, to disarm oneself beforehand. In fact, Ghulam Hussain Khan asserts that upto the time of Guru Gobind Singh the Sikhs wore only religious garb, without any kind of arms¹⁸. Nor is it established that the bearing of arms was a Jat peculiarity. If the Mughal policy was to disarm the population, it would not have left the Jats out. If not, why other elements of the population, especially Khattris and those who later became Mazhabi Sikhs, did not also bear arms? In all probability, the exploited class of peasants were, by and large, unarmed. Arrian noted that husbandmen are not furnished with arms, nor have any

military duties to perform.¹⁹ The revenue and other demands on them were so excessive that they were compelled to sell their women, children and cattle to meet them. ‘The peasants were carried off, attached to heavy iron chains, to various markets and fairs, with their poor, unhappy wives behind them, carrying their small children in their arms, all crying and lamenting their evil plight.’²⁰ When these peasants resisted, their uprisings misfired, because ‘the purely peasant uprising of a few villages would, perhaps, have constricted pitifully with the military efforts of even the smaller Zamindars.’²¹ All this points to the probability that the common peasants were unarmed. There is, therefore, no reason to believe that the Jats who came to the Guru were differently placed. When the Sikh visitors to Guru Gobind Singh complained that they were harassed on their way by Muhammadans, the Guru advised them to come armed. That is, probably, also the reason why Guru Gobind Singh in his letters (Hukamnamas) lays special stress that his Sikhs should come armed to Anandpur. The ‘Rehitnamas’ also insist that the Khalsa should remain always armed.²²

4. *AIMS AND OBJECTIVES*

There is another aspect which needs elucidation. What was the motive force, the urge, which led to the militarization of the Sikhs?

The Sikh ideology clearly involved the finding of solutions for the multifarious socio-political problems posed by the times. It is, therefore, important to understand that in the matter of identifying the motivation, the ideology of a movement would normally furnish the closest clue for investigation and verification. In any case, there is no ground for ignoring this approach and instead for putting a premium on random speculation. A good deal of misunderstanding about the Sikh history could be avoided if the prejudice against the religious duty of fighting just political battles and the use of force for a just cause are shed. The Gurus did not ‘dabble in politics’ casually or accidentally, as some

historians have put it; they regarded it as their duty to fight not only social injustice but also political oppression. Guru Arjan could have chosen to remain indifferent to political affairs. Similarly, Guru Hargobind could have avoided the setting up of a parallel political authority. Further, why did Guru Har Rai, if he was not working for a set objective, offer military help to Dara Shikoh, knowing full well the consequences that followed a similar step taken by Guru Arjan? Again, Guru Tegh Bahadur deliberately did not follow Aurangzeb's advice to disarm his followers.²³ Instead, he embraced martyrdom to save the oppressed Kashmiri Pandits, because the resolve to resist religious persecution and combat political oppression was a part of the Guru's programme. Guru Gobind Singh leaves no doubt about his mission of life: "I took birth in order to spread faith, save the saints, and extirpate all tyrants."²⁴ That his Sikhs also understood it to be so, is shown by the contemporary Sainapat, who wrote that the purpose of creating the Khalsa was 'to destroy the evildoer and eliminate suffering.'²⁵ The near-contemporary Koer Singh also recorded that the Guru was born to destroy the Mughals.²⁶ (i.e. the tyrants of the times ?) Even the later Sikh writings unanimously speak of this being an objective of the mission.²⁷ Sainapat twice makes a very significant remark that, while founding the Khalsa, the Guru at last revealed what had till then been kept a secret.²⁸ This indicates that the creation of the Khalsa was a pre-planned objective of the mission. All these signposts that charter the course of the Sikh movement, extending over a long period, drive one to the conclusion that the Gurus were working with the set aim of combating social and political injustice and of remoulding the social structure.

5. *THE ROLE OF JATS*

Before discussing the role of Jats, we should like to make one point clear. Leaving aside its interactions with the external factors, the Sikh movement in its internal development was essentially the product of the Sikh

ideology. But mass movements, especially those which set before them the objective of capturing political power, cannot afford to admit only ideologically conscious members. Such persons are always in a minority. So long as the Gurus were alive, there was no question of views and interests contrary to the Sikh doctrine coming to the surface, because the word of the Guru was final. After them, there was an interplay of action and reaction between the ideologically conscious and less conscious elements, within the Sikh movement. Like all such movements, the Sikh movement may also be roughly divided into two phases, the period of ideological ascendancy and that of its decline. In the first phase, the Khalsa period, Sikh ideology remained supreme in determining the character and the direction of the movement. In the second phase, the period of Missals and Ranjit Singh, the hold of ideology on individuals and the movement, as it always happens, relaxed. With the passage of time, regression in the ideological level is not peculiar to the Sikh movement. Revolutions have always been haunted by reaction. What we seek to emphasize is that it would be wrong to judge the history of the Khalsa phase of the Sikh movement in the light of later developments. That would be putting the cart before the horse. During the period of the Gurus, and for most part of the eighteenth century, it was the Sikh ideology that influenced the Jats and the other elements who joined the movement and not the Jat character that moulded the movement during its revolutionary phase.

It has been assumed that the Jats must have joined in large numbers because Guru Arjan established some religious centres in the rural areas of Majha. But, there is no data to infer this or that the Jats were the prominent element among the Sikhs when Guru Hargobind decided to militarize the movement, or that the Jats used to come armed when they came to pay homage to the Gurus. The Jats are well known for their indifference towards deep religious affairs.²⁹ The short interval of time between the

opening of these centres and the time when the influx of Jats into the Sikh ranks is supposed to have aroused Jahangir's misgivings is not such as to favour the theory of large scale enrolment of the Jats in Sikhism. Bhai Gurdas has given the names of about 200 prominent Sikhs of Guru Arjan. Of these ten were Brahmins, eight Jats (including two whose caste is given as Jatu, which is a Rajput sub-caste), three fishermen, three calico-printers, two chandals, two brick-layers, two Bhattas, one potter, one goldsmith and one Muhammadan. The rest either belonged to the Khatri and other castes connected with commerce, trades, etc., or did not have their castes specified.³⁰

The above figures indicate clearly the caste-wise composition of Guru Arjan's important Sikhs. The constitution of the general Sangat is not likely to have been materially different when Guru Hargobind became the Guru and started militarization. The number of Khatri and castes connected with commerce, profession, etc., is many times more than the combined number of Jats and lower castes. Among the latter category, the low castes outnumber the Jats. The conjecture about Jats having joined Guru Arjan in large numbers is contradicted even by Mohsin Fani, who says: "Some Sikhs of the Guru do agricultural work and some trade, and a multitude takes up service."³¹ These figures, thus, knock out the bottom of the assumption that the setting up of rural centres increased the proportion of Jats among the Guru's followers to such an extent as to cause apprehensions in Jahangir's mind. Besides, as already stated, it would be going beyond the limits of historical propriety to reject the autobiographical testimony of Jahangir about his motives for ordering Guru Arjan's execution and instead to impute a conjectural motive to the emperor for his action.

Bhai Gurdas's testimony about the reaction of the Sikhs against the Guru's steps for militarization has already been indicated. He does not mention many Jats in his enumeration of important Sikhs of Guru Hargobind. True, Mohsin Fani says that many Jats joined as the Guru's

followers. This author was twenty years younger than Guru Hargobind, who was eleven years old when he became the Guru, took the decision to arm the Sikhs, built the Akal Takht and started the construction of Lohgarh fort. In view of his earlier observation about the Jats being in a minority in the time of Guru Arjan, Mohsin Fani's statement that the Jats joined as the followers of Guru Hargobind refers evidently to a period subsequent to the latter's decision to militarize the Sikhs. This would correspond to the evidence noted by Macauliffe that, on learning of the military preparation initiated by Guru Hargobind, five hundred warriors from Majha, Doaba and Malwa regions volunteered their services to the Guru³² Moreover, Mohsin Fani's evidence has no weight compared to the authentic, reliable and contemporary evidence of Bhai Gurdas. In fact, "the adversaries of Guru Hargobind derisively called his forces weak because they were composed of barbers, washermen, cobblers, and the like."³³ In any case, how could a minority group make its impact felt to such an extent as to change overnight the very direction of the movement? It has already been made clear that the vital decisions were always made by the Gurus themselves. The Sangat never forced the Gurus to action. But, supposing, for argument's sake, that Guru Hargobind wanted to take into account the views of the Sangat in making his momentous decision, that opinion could naturally have been of the leading Sikhs, of whom Jats, according to Bhai Gurdas, formed a negligible minority. And it would be illogical to suggest that these few Jats, even if they had views different from those of other non-Jat Sikhs and the Guru, could impose their will on the rest on such a crucial and ideological issue. Actually, the Guru, according to Bhai Gurdas, stuck to his decision, despite the opposition from Baba Buddha, the most revered Sikh, his mother, the Masands, and some others.

From the time of Guru Har Rai to that of Guru Gobind Singh, there was no overt military activity except that of maintaining some armed men. Before founding the Khalsa,

Bhikhan Khan, an opponent of the tenth Guru, spoke contemptuously of his forces being composed of low-caste men.³⁴ Almost all the participants whose names are recorded in connection with the battle of Bhangani (Le. pre-Khalsa period) were non-Jats.³⁵ The first three well-known martyrs from amongst the Sikhs, during Guru Tegh Bahadur's time, were Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dyala, all non- Jats. Out of the five Beloved Ones (the Five Piaras), only one was a Jat, and he too belonged to Hastinapur, outside the Punjab. According to Koer Singh, Guru Gobind Singh said : "Vaisayas, Sudras and Jats I have incorporated in the Panth."³⁶ Of the twentyfive Muktas mentioned by Koer Singh, three was Bhatias, five Khattris, four Aroras, three Lubanas and two water-carriers.³⁷ The castes of the rest are not given. The forty men at Chamkaur included five Bhatias, four Aroras, some Khattris and Kalals (distillers), two Ranghretas (sweeper caste), two Brahmins, Sangat Singh of the Trans-Indus areas, sons of the Guru and the Guru Himself.³⁸ Those who took part in Banda's campaign, at least in its initial stage, were recruited chiefly from the lower caste Hindus.³⁹ About Sirhind's conquest by Banda, Irvine writes, "The scavengers and leather-dressers and such like persons, who were very numerous among the Sikhs, committed excesses of every description."⁴⁰

In the face of all this, there is no basis for suggesting, much less for asserting, that the growth of militancy within the panth could be the result of the impact of the so-called Jat cultural patterns. Besides, it is not understood how these so-called Jat patterns could be so powerful as to submerge established ideological considerations and the views of the large majority of the influential participants in the Sangat. Whether or not the original Jat patterns of culture, or Jat traits, corresponded to the characteristic features of the Sikh movement, will be seen hereafter.

6. THE FIVE K'S.

Another hypothesis advanced is that the Khalsa accepted the

five symbols (the five K's) under the influence of Jat cultural patterns. Unless the Jat cultural patterns are identified and correlated with the five K's or other characteristics of the movement, this view remains conjectural. For, there is no evidence to suggest that the five K's were distinct and characteristic Jat features. Megregor writes of the people of the Punjab who opposed Alexander when he crossed the Ravi : "Some had darts, others spears and axes. No mention is made of bows and arrows, so generally employed by the Sikhs of the present day, as weapons of war."⁴¹ No mention is also made of the weapons used by the Jats in their encounters with Mahmood Ghaznavi, Timur and Babar. If the Kirpan (the sword) was ever used as a weapon by the Jats, Manu had specified it as Kshatriya's weapon⁴² much earlier, and its use in Indian history was more conspicuously associated with the Rajputs. In fact, any group resorting to militancy would adopt the weapons current in the times. Then why trace the adoption by the Khalsa of this 'K' (Kirpan) to the Jats cultural patterns?

Another important 'K' is the Keshas (hair). Alberuni noted that one of the strange customs that differentiated the Hindus from the people of his own country was that the Hindus 'do not cut any of the hair of the body.'⁴³ 'Formerly the whole population (of Dogars), as is the case with the poor classes still, wore their long hair over their shoulders without any covering either of sheet or turban.'⁴⁴ This shows that the keeping of hair was, if it ever was, not a Jat peculiarity. Anyhow, the point is not about keeping the hair as such, but about the sanctity that came to be attached to them; so that the Singhs would give up their lives rather than allow these to be removed.

Rose writes: "The Jats of the Punjab cannot be said to have any distinctive tribal cults. When Muhammadans or Sikhs they follow the teachings of their creeds with varying degrees of strictness. When Hindus they are very often Sultanis or followers of the popular and widespread cult of Sakhi Sarwar Sultan...The only distinctive Jat cults are

tribal... Among the Hindu & Sikh Jats, especially in the north-central and central Districts, a form of ancestor worship, called *jathera*, is common.⁴⁵ Sikhism which transcends tribal consciousness and customs, is opposed to all forms of ancestor-worship, and the position of the non--Jats was not so subservient in the Panth as to enable the Jats to impose their cultural patterns, if any, on the Panth against known Sikh tenets. In any case, this Jathera-worship, or any other similar tribal cult, can in no way be linked with the sanctity attached by the Sikhs to any of the five 'K's. About the Sultani cult, the District Gazetteer of Amritsar (1892-93, p. 50) records that: 'Sikh Jats freely intermarry with Sultani Jats, but will not eat cooked food from their houses, or share any food with them. Even in one family, a member who has become a Sikh will eat separately from another member who has remained a Sultani.'⁴⁶ This further illustrates that Sikhism, far from borrowing Jat cults, was a force which worked to draw the Jat Sikhs away from the cults prevalent among the Hindu Jats.

Had there been any substance in Mcleod's conjectural hypothesis, how would one explain the total disappearance of these cultural symbols, supposed to have been borrowed by the Sikhs from Jats, from amongst the non-Sikh Jats of the Punjab and the neighbouring states? How, during the days of the general persecution of the Singhs, only the Khalsa of genuine faith retained their hair at the cost of their lives, while other Jats, who joined them for temporary gains, had no compunction to remove these in order to save their skins? How, in the modern times, the Jats among the Sikhs, comparatively speaking, have become lax in keeping their hair and the non-Jat Sikhs have grown strict⁴⁷ in their adherence to these symbols? Further, whether the five 'K's were borrowed by the Panth from the Jats or not is not the relevant point; because symbols by themselves do not lead to anything, much less to militancy. Revolutionary movements are not made by the symbols; it is such movements that give meaningful significance to them.

Unfortunately, the above hypothesis completely misses the significance of the prescription of the five 'K's. The Guru's step was clearly aimed not only at carving out a new community, distinct from the others, with its own cultural patterns, socio-religious ideology, and approach to life, but also at cutting away the members of this community from their previous moorings and affinities so as to avoid reversionary trends. That is why, at the time of the baptism ceremony, one of the injunctions was that: 'hereby are destroyed all your connections with previous religious systems, customs, rituals, occupational stigmas, etc., etc.'⁴⁸ There is a clear record of the Guru's determination to create a new and distinguishable people. On being told that few Sikhs appeared to have stood by Guru Tegh Bahadur at the time of his martyrdom because there was no distinguishing mark on a Sikh, the Guru is reported to have said: "I will assign such distinguishing marks to the Sikhs that a Sikh present even among thousands will not be able to conceal himself."⁴⁹ The Khalsa were, thus, given a new uniform which nowhere existed before.

Undoubtedly, the contribution of the Jats, with their fighting qualities, to the Sikh struggle is very valuable, but, the contribution of the castes lower than the Jats has also been quite significant during the Khalsa or the revolutionary phase of the movement. If the inspiration of the Sikh ideology could turn these people, who had been rendered spineless by the caste system for centuries, into a fighting class, the Sikh movement needed no goading from the Jats for its militarization. Also, if the bearing of arms and martial qualities are the only requirements for shaping a revolutionary movement, why could not the Jats produce one elsewhere?

7. RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

It has also been suggested that the militarization of the Sikh movement was the result of the economic pressure. Agrarian troubles were no doubt one of the factors for the downfall of the Mughal empire. Religious persecution of non-

Muslims was another reason. Rattan Singh Bhangu has not ignored the fact that those who were oppressed by the State or the Administration joined the Khalsa.⁵⁰ But the question is, why, in the Punjab, the Khalsa alone became the centre of resistance? Why did the Kashmiri Pandits travel all the way to Anandpur? Why did the Jats of Haryana, who were in no way less oppressed, build no resistance on their own? If economic causes or religious persecution alone, without an ideology, an oriented leadership and an organization, could give rise to movements, then there should have been a general revolt throughout the length and breadth of the country. But nothing of the kind happened.

There were, in broad' terms, four types of peasant upheavals. Firstly, there were the uprisings which the common exploited peasants undertook on their own. These were sporadic and unorganised, and instead of bearing any fruit invited further oppression and misery. Secondly, there were peasant revolts built around the leadership of Zamindars, as distinguished from Jagirdars, which were localized affairs. These, when successful, either served the personal ends of the local Zamindars or ended merely in plundering. If the Zamindars could unite for a common purpose, they would have become a force to reckon with, because the total number of their armed retainers, as estimated by Abul-Fazl, was 44 Lakhs. The third category was the successful revolt of Bharatpur Jats. It had only the limited objective of establishing the rule of a Jat family. The fourth category comprised the Satnami revolt and the Sikh movement, wherein, along with the peasants, the other lower castes also played a major role. Here also, the Satnami revolt was in the nature of an ephemeral flare-up.⁵¹ It collapsed suddenly and did not carry on any sustained struggle, because it lacked ideology preplanned and objectives and a determined leadership. It was only in the Sikh movement that we find the combination of objective conditions with a distinct ideology, clear-cut revolutionary

aims to be achieved, and an inspired and determined leadership. This is the reason why its course and character were different from those of others and lasted for over three generations even after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh. (The responses to economic problems were, thus, not uniform.) It is, therefore, idle to trace the source of a revolutionary movement, divorced from its ideology and leadership, to sheer economic causes.

8. *THE DEVI CULT, THE JATS AND THE KHALSA*

Another conjecture made by Dr. McLeod is that the synthesis of the Devi cult with the Jat culture had much to do with the evolution of militancy in the Panth, in inspiring it to deeds of valour, and in playing a determining role in its history.⁵²

This suggestion is self-contradictory. For, while, on the one hand, it completely ignores the basic role played by the Gurus' ideology in the development of militancy in the Panth and the creation of the Khalsa, on the other hand, it banks on an alien religious inspiration that goaded the Jats to militarize the movement and to fight zealously for socio-religious causes. In other words, the argument concedes that the Jat culture, left to itself, was incapable of galvanizing the Jats for a purposeful military action. The assumption is not only very conjectural, but misses all the established facts:

(i) Guru Hargobind went to Kiratpur after having finished all his battles in the plains. So the question of Jat Sikhs or Guru Hargobind getting inspiration from the Devi cult becomes an anachronism.

(ii) When Guru Hargobind was at Kiratpur, one Sikh named Bahiro cut off the nose of the Devi's idol. When the hill Raja complained to the Guru of this, the Sikh's answer was, how the Devi, that could not protect herself, could save others.⁵³ This indicates what respect the Sikhs had for the Devi.

- (iii) The news-writer, who reported to the emperor about the founding of the Khalsa, specifically mentioned Durga as one of the deities which the Guru forbade the Sikhs from paying homage to.⁵⁴
- (iv) The various forms of Devi are the consorts of Siva; hence Devi-worship cannot be advocated by one who decries Siva worship. There are many verses of Guru Gobind Singh to this effect.⁵⁵
- (v) If the number of important temples built and fairs held in honour of the various forms of Devi are an indication of the prevalence of the Devi cult, it should be the least common among the Jats of the Sikh region. Because such temples and fairs are the most common in the hilly tracts of the Himachal. Next comes Haryana. But in the Sikh Jat tract there are only two such important temples. The votaries of one of them at Batala are confined to a sub-caste of khattris,⁵⁶ while, the second one, the Bhaddar Kali temple at Niazbeg, is about 7 miles from Lahore and has only a local reputation.⁵⁷ The fair which was held there was attended by people who collected from Amritsar and Lahore towns and the neighbouring villages.⁵⁸ As this part of Lahore district is not a Sikh majority area (for that reason it forms a part of Pakistan), it is not unreasonable to surmise that the number of the Jat Sikhs attending this fair were never significant. As against this, there are many important Devi temples scattered all over the eastern districts (i.e. Haryana).⁵⁹ Rose, who has not omitted to note even petty cultural practices like those of the Sikh water-carriers worshiping Bhairo,⁶⁰ makes no mention that Sikh Jats worship the Devi.

If the cult of Devi had inspired the Jats who visited Anandpur, how is it that it disappeared altogether from among them afterwards? If the Sikh water-carriers, who form a microscopic minority among the Sikh population, could retain Bhairo worship, why could not the Jats retain

Devi worship? Also, if the Rajputs of hilly Punjab, which is the home of Devi cult, and the Hindu Jats of Haryana, where the Devi cult is widespread, could not be inspired by it to take up arms for higher religious or political ends, how is it that it inspired only the Sikh Jats, whose visits to Kiratpur or Anandpur to pay their respects to the Guru were very short and occasional?

SECTION II WIDER CONTEXT

It is a normal procedure of historiography to view movements in the broader historical and social perspective of their times. To judge certain features of a movement in isolation, by not coordinating them with the context of the movement as a whole, or by divorcing them from their historical background, is bound to lead to a distorted image. The protagonists of the hypothesis that the Sikh movement, in its genesis and development, was a product of the Jat traits, have signally failed to adopt the normal methodology accepted by historians. In fact, they have not even attempted to correlate the Jat characteristics, which are supposed to have played such a determinative role, with the initiation and the growth of Sikh militancy. The role of Jat characteristics in the Sikh movement assumes an appropriate perspective only if it is viewed in the light of the traits and political activities of the peasantry in general, and of the Jats of regions other than that of the Sikh tract in particular. Also, the positive or negative relationship of Jat characteristics, if any, with the main features of the Sikh Revolution has to be proved or disproved. In this section, we propose to do this under the following heads: 1. Organization; 2. Lack of Solidarity; 3. Egalitarianism; 4. The Sikh Egalitarian Revolution; 5. Lack of political initiative and aspirations among peasants and Jats; 6. Ideology; 7. Conclusion.

But, before we do come to that, we should be absolutely clear on only point. We are concerned only with the revolutionary Sikh

movement. The fallacy of those, who argue that the militarization of the Sikh movement was initiated and reinforced by the influx into of a large number of Jats, arises in no small measure from their logic which fails to distinguish between the revolutionary and post-revolutionary phases of the movement. They try to judge the former in the light of the latter. By following a similar line of thinking, one can as well not demarcate between the remarkably egalitarian era of Prophet Muhammad and his immediate deputies on the one hand, and, on the other, that of the Muslim polity when it degenerated into a full-fledged autocracy; or between the stirring events of the French Revolution proper,- and its sequel-the Bonaparte regime; or, for that matter, between the revolutionary and post-revolutionary phases of any revolutionary movement. Ups and downs are common to all ideologically inspired upsurges, because of the inherent human limitations and environmental hurdles. Progress towards idealistic human goals has never been linear; counter-revolution has followed revolution as its own shadow. There is a marked behavioural contrast when an individual, or a group, or a movement, is inspired by biological pursuits, and when it is governed by mundane considerations. The study that is presented hereafter bears this out. There is a world of difference between the Jats who joined the Sikh revolution under the inspiration of the Sikh ideology and those who did not; or, within the same movement, between those who were ideologically motivated and others who were not; or between the same individual or a group, at different periods, when it had the ideological inspiration and when it lost it. Otherwise, there is not much of a basic difference between the character of one Jat and another, or, for that matter between that of human beings the world over. Therefore, it would be as illogical to interpret the Sikh Revolution in terms of its period of decline as it would be to ascribe the rise of waves in an ocean to the very gravitational forces that bring them down to their original level.

1. ORGANIZATION

Organizations are the channels through which the ideologies of movements flow, and these also help to give the movements their shape and direction. The structural framework of a movement can, therefore, be a quite useful clue in reflecting its content. Let us compare the Jat typical organization with that of the Khalsa and *see* in what way it supports our conclusions.

(a) Jat organization

‘The Jats are a tribe so wide spread and so numerous as to be almost a nation, counting 70,86,100 souls, having community of blood, community of language, common tradition and also a common religion for not less than 1,500 years.’⁶¹ Ethnic affinity and community of language, tradition and religion are great potent factors in creating and strengthening social cohesiveness. But, in the case of Jats, the term ‘Jat’ represented more a common denomination rather than a commonly shared social or political solidarity. They never approached even that degree of amorphous awareness of common nationality which the Marathas had all along before Shivaji gave it a definite shape. Recorded history upto the time of Gokala, Raja Ram and Churaman does not indicate any joint political venture on the part of the Jats beyond the tribal or clannish level. In fact, the tribal ties had loosened long ago. What did bind together the Jat groups emotionally, socially or politically, where and when it did, were the ties of the clan, the sect or the *gotra* among them.

The most prominent and effective unit of social organization among the Jats that is recorded is the *khap** in the Meerut division where the clannish feeling among Jats is considerably strong.⁶² Here most of the Jat clans have their own *khap*⁶³, which have their own *khap* councils. These

* *Khap* may be approximately defined as a group of village occupied by a single Jat clan within a contiguous area

councils have only adjudicative authority and meet when called upon to deliberate or decide upon specific issues. The judges on these councils are elected for a particular meeting and purpose, and do not hold office on a permanent basis

or for a prescribed term.⁶⁴ No single person or body of persons is vested with executive or administrative authority over the whole clan.⁶⁵ It does not belong to individual leaders either, and usurped authority is practically non-existent.⁶⁶ During the time of Muslim religious persecution, these *kehaps* became champions for protecting religious faith;⁶⁷ and raised large standing armies for that purpose⁶⁸ and for protecting the area from outside invasion.⁶⁹ Although these *kehap* councils never succeeded completely in defending the political freedom of the *kehaps* of the Meerut Division, they did succeed in getting some kind of political recognition from the Delhi Court, several concessions in the field of internal autonomy, religious freedom and relief from various kinds of taxes.⁷⁰ But, what is of importance for our consideration is that these *kehap* councils remained absorbed with their local problems and never ventured into the field of establishing a political domain of their own, even at a time when the Mughal Empire was tottering and when even European adventurers were carving out, single-handed, their principalities in the nearby region.

Outside the Meerut division, in the adjoining area on the other side of the Jamuna, a primary subdivision of tribes in the Karnal district is into *thapas* or *thambas*.⁷¹ In the Rohtak district, within the *pargnas* were the *tappas*, the boundaries of some of which followed closely the distribution of tribes.⁷² However, in the Karnal and Rohtak districts, there is no record of these *thapas*, *thambas* or *tappas*, or of any other common councils beyond the village level, having even adjudicatory functions corresponding to those of the *kehap* councils. The people belonging to these *thapas* or *tappas* met only for ceremonial purposes. Beyond that towards the West, *thapas*, *thambas* or *tappas*, or some such clannish assemblies, other than the village panchayats,

are not mentioned at all. Large tracts of country, each occupied by villages of one Got, are not formed here (Jullundur district) as they are in other parts of the country.⁷³ To the east of the district (Ludhiana) and especially in the Samrala tehsil, the multitude of “Gots” amongst the Hindu Jat is a very remarkable feature. Not only do adjoining villages belong to different “Gots”, but inside each village will generally be found two or three Pattis of distinct origin. To the south and west, on the other hand, we do find that the Jats in some instances came in bodies; and villages belonging to the same “Got” lie in groups or within short distances from each other. But the rule throughout the district is the variety of “Gots”, and the few grotips of villages that there are, belonging to one “Got”, are the exception.⁷⁴ It is only in the Ferozepur district that the Jats of Sidhu and Brar *gots* occupy large continuous areas; but here the Jat clans were in a state of continuous flux, engaged in ousting one another and leaving little time for any social organization to strike root, > in the soil. One branch of the Sidhu Brars rapidly gained a footing in the south of Gill country, and drove the former inhabitants northwards, taking possession of their principal places.⁷⁵ There was a long struggle for possession of the country between the Brars and the Bhattis. ‘The Man Bhullars greatly oppressed the Brars in the *tappa*. * Duni Chand appealed to Guru Har Rai who lived at Gurusar. The Guru advised the Bhullars to make peace. The descendants of Mohan, despite continued struggle with the Faridkot Brars, retained possession of the Bagha territory.⁷⁶ ‘The Mohanbi branch of the clan (Brars) are said to have founded Mahraj about the year 1650 after struggle with the Mans and Bhullars, who then held that tract. The second influx seems to have taken place some fifty years later when the Gills were driven out of the Bagha Purana *ilaka* and their city of Danda Manda was destroyed.⁷⁷ To the position of the *gots* of Jats in the Amritsar district, we shall have occasion to refer later.

* Name given to a track of the district

Two important points emerge from the facts stated above. The most highly evolved typical Jat organizational social unit, the *kehap*, had no political ambitions. At the most, it was concerned with the preservation of internal harmony and the rights of its members, or defence from outside aggression. Secondly, as one proceeds to the Punjab proper, even this *kehap*, *thamba* or *tappa* type of social organization is absent. The Jats of Karnal are notorious for their independence, acknowledging to a less degree than any other caste the authority of the tribal headman.⁷⁸ Describing the Jat of the Sikh tract in the Punjab, Ibbetson writes: "The Jat is of all the Punjab races the most impatient of tribal or communal control, and the one which asserts the freedom of the individual most strongly."⁷⁹ In other words, there are no signs of any shared motivation which could urge the Jats for sustained joint action, much less for political adventure. And the Jats of the Sikh tract lacked even the *gotra* solidarity beyond the village level.

(b) Sikh Organization

Guru Nanak spent most of his time in missionary tours to far flung places within the country and outside it. He could not have completed his extensive itinerary had he remained for long at one place. In other words, he could not have come in long contact with many people, in one limited region. It is only towards the fag end of his life that he settled at Kartarpur, which became the first permanent centre to which the disciples of the Guru were drawn. The latter Gurus established similar permanent centres, but the main organizational pattern of the Sikh Panth throughout the Guru period appears to have remained much the same. The Sikhs were scattered here and there like tiny dots in the vast mass of non-Sikh population. They had their local centres called Dharamsalas, later called Gurdwaras, where they would meet for religious functions. They went only occasionally to pay their homage to the Gurus at any of their permanent centres or wherever the Gurus happened to be.

The Sikh congregation which met at a Dharamsala was called a *Sangat*, and this Sangat was the biggest local unit of the Sikh organization. These Sangats were connected with one another more through the Gurus or their deputies in the *illaqa*, the Masands, than through direct contact with one another.

There were no mass conversions to Sikhism of entire clans, or of the population of contiguous areas, as it happened in the case of Islam in Sindh, Pakistani Punjab and Bangla Desh. This is clear from the fact that, before the large scale migration of people on the creation of Pakistan disturbed the previous equilibrium of population in the Punjab, the Sikhs were in absolute majority only in the Moga tehsil of the Ferozpur district. The reason is obvious. Mass conversions to Islam took place either under pressure of the Muslim administration, or due to the allurements of becoming the correlative religionists of the rulers. Sikhism at that time held out no such prospects. It was a rebel religion. To become a Sikh was to invite hostility both of the caste society and of the established political order. Therefore, by and large only those people joined the Sikh ranks for whom the Sikh religion and its ideology had a special appeal.

Bhai Gurdas has given the names of about 200 prominent Sikhs up to the time of the Sixth Guru in his *Var* Eleven. In a number of cases he has given their places of residence as well. He mentions only two regions, Kashmir and Punjab, not a part or a contiguous area of the latter, like Majha or Malwa, but the Punjab as a whole. Besides these regions, he names 26 places (mostly towns) to which those Sikhs belonged, including such far flung places as Kabul, Lahore, Patti, Sirhind, Thanesar, Delhi, Agra, Gwalior, Ujjain, Buhraipur, Gujrat, Lucknow, Paryag, Jaunpur, Patna and Dhacca (Dacca in East Bengal). Another significant feature of the breakup of Bhai Gurdas's figures is that the group of Sikhs mentioned as belonging to a particular place are not shown as derived from one caste or clan. If his *pauris* (stanzas) are taken as separate units, either the clans

or castes are not mentioned at all, or the Sikhs mentioned in one stanza (pauri) are in composite groups derived from different castes. Bhai Gurdas's figures no doubt relate only to prominent Sikhs and these may also be approximate. But, these do support the view that people joined the Sikh ranks more as individuals rather than as clusters of castes or clans; and that the Sikhs, who were not very numerous, were spread over a large part not only of the Punjab but of India. In other words, what bound the Sikhs together in the Sikh Panth was the primacy of the Sikh ideals rather than any caste, clan or regional interests and sentiments.

The militarization of the Sikhs by Guru Hargobind is an important landmark in the history of the Sikh movement, but the Guru's battles were more in the nature of a rehearsal for the events to come. The real organizational base of the revolutionary struggle was laid down by the creation of the Khalsa, recruitment to which was strictly on an individual and voluntary basis, and limited to individuals who swore by the Khalsa ideals. No caste or clan loyalties were involved; because no one could become a member of the Khalsa brotherhood without being baptized, and no one could be baptized without taking the five vows which required the rejection of previous faiths (Dharm-nas) as well as caste and clan affiliations and practices (Kul-nas and Karm-nas). 'Kul-nas' meant the obliteration of all previous lineage affiliations based on family or clan; and 'Karm-nas' meant obliteration of distinctions based on occupation. 'Karam-nas' together with 'Kul-nas' disavowed all caste distinctions based on occupation and heredity. In actual working also, as we shall see, the Khalsa was constituted of people drawn from all castes, clans and regions, including "the lowest of low in Indian estimation."

The third major stage in the growth of the Sikh organization is the formation of Misals. The Misal period coincides with the weakening of the hold of the Sikh ideology within the Panth. But, even then the Misals were not formed on the basis of caste or clan affiliations. There

is not one Misal which is named after the name of a caste or a clan, and members of all Misals were free at all times to leave one Misal and join another at their own sweet will. *Majha* (that part of the present Amritsar district lying south of the old Mughal G.T. Road which passed through Govindwal, Tarn Taran and Sarai Amanat Khan to join Lahore) was the heart of the Sikh Revolution. The Sandhu Jats are the strongest got in the district and muster especially strong in the southwest corner of the Tarn Taran pargana.⁸⁰ But, this is the part of the Majha which was in the control of the Bhangi Misal, whose leaders belonged to Dhillon *got*,⁸¹ a *got* which is less numerous in the district than the Sandhus.⁸² The Ahluwalias originally belonged to the despised Sudra caste of *Kalals*, or distillers of spirit, and they were in microscopic numbers (only 2121) in the Amritsar district.⁸³ Yet, their Misal occupied a part of Majha.⁸⁴ Similarly, Ramgarhias (so called because leaders belonged to village Ramgarh), belonging originally to the carpenter caste, held an important part of the Amritsar district,⁸⁵ although they formed a minority among the Sikhs, and were thinly spread as village menials over the whole rural Sikh tract with a few families being located in almost every village. All these developments could not have taken place had clannish or caste sentiment been the basis of Misal organization. This also coincides with the position, which has been noted, that there were no clan organization beyond the village *Panchayata* among the Jats, whether Sikh or non-Sikh, in the Sikh tract, corresponding to the *kbaps*, *thambas*, or *tappas* in the Meerut Division and the Haryana region.

(e) *Comments*

With the loosening of tribal ties, which happened long ago, the highest form of effective organization evolved by the purely Jat consciousness was at the *gotra* level. The history of the Jats does not reveal any other form of organization. Where and when the *gotra* affiliation weakened, as it happened in the Sikh tract, this development further

helped the process of rendering the Jats a socially and politically incoherent mass. The Jat, as a Jat, knows no other bond to articulate his Jat consciousness. There is not one instance throughout the Sikh movement, including its post--revolutionary phase, when the Jats within it joined hands together on *gotra* or Jat lines. Further, we have seen that people, whether Jat or non-jat, were drawn to the movement by its ideology as individuals rather than as clusters of castes or clans. They had to take the vows of *Kul-nas*. and *Karm-nas* when they were baptized into the Khalsa brotherhood. In the face of all this, it becomes difficult to comprehend how the mere presence in the movement of Jats in large numbers (assuming this to be so for the sake of argument) enabled them to develop a comprehensive *supra-gotra* Jat consciousness, which would have been indispensable for giving the movement, as alleged, a definite turn, and then maintaining that direction despite several ups and downs. Such a phenomenon, if it did happen, has to be delineated and not just assumed, especially because it is incongruous with the history of the Jats elsewhere. There is nothing common between the Jat units of organization, based on *gotra* and regional contiguity, and the Sikh Sangats, comprising members drawn from all castes and widely dispersed in northern India. Similarly, there is no organizational correspondence between the Jat *gotra* organization' and the Khalsa, whose doors were always open to all, irrespective of the considerations of caste or clan. At the time of the creation of the Khalsa, there was only one Jat among the five Beloved Ones; and, at the time of the reorganization of the Taruna Khalsa Dal, only two of the five divisions were headed by leaders drawn from the Jat stock. At one time, the leader of the entire Khalsa body was Banda, and, at another time, Jassa Singh Kalal, both non-Jats. We have noted that there were no *gotra* organisations among the Jats of the Sikh tract and that the khalsa had no organisational roots in the Jat *gotra* affiliations. Therefore, there is no basis to assume that Jat consciousness managed to turn Sikh

militancy according to its own proclivities, or to its own advantage, without having effective control either on the leadership or the organizational composition and set up of the Khalsa. Not only the Jats but the peasantry in general, left to themselves, have nowhere as it will be seen, shown much aptitude for political initiative or ambitions.

2. *LACK OF SOLIDARITY*

The spirit of factiousness among the Jats is proverbial. It is probably a hangover of their tribal heritage; for, in defining a tribe, it is the sharing of blood-feuds which is given pride of place. ‘Gurgaon belongs to that part of the Punjab where the true village community has survived in a much more complete form than elsewhere.’⁸⁶ In the Rohtak district, ‘The village communities are of as perfect a type as any in India.....’⁸⁷ This could lead to a false impression of Jat solidarity beyond the village level as well. The facts speak otherwise. In Gurgaon district, during the Mutiny, ‘no sooner was the pressure of our (British) rule removed, than old feuds, which had apparently long been buried, burst into life.’ There was a long-standing strife between a tribe of Jats, known as Surot, and another tribe of Jats known as Rawats. All the villages of the Chirkot clan (a Meo clan) and some of the other villages of the neighbourhood were divided into two factions.⁸⁸ In the Rohtak district, during the Mutiny, ‘The people gave themselves up to the enjoyment of fierce feuds. The Dahiya and Dalol Jats in Sampla engaged in perpetual quarrels. The Ahalwat Jats attacked Sampla. In Guhana, Ahulana attacked Samri and Barodeh; Madinah attacked Kathurs; Butanah destroyed Naran Khera; Sanghi & Khirwali were engaged in one continuous skirmish; the Mehim villagers, now in Hissar, made a general attack on those on the present west border of Rohtak; and the Ranghars plundered every one indifferently for three whole months the district presented one long scene of mad rioting.’⁸⁹ In Karnal district, ‘Every village was protected by brick forts and surrounded by a deep ditch and a wall of some sort;

every village was at deadly enmity with its neighbours; and there are several instances where two contiguous villages in memory of a blood feud dating from the Maratha times, refuse to drink each other's water, though otherwise on friendly terms.⁹⁰ This is about the region where the village communities were perfect and clannish ties strong⁹¹ and where there existed some sort of ceremonial ties between members of the same *thapa* or *tappa*. Regarding the spirit of factionalism among the Jats in the Sikh tract, the author of '*Robber Noblemen*' has built round it a whole thesis for her book; and we have already referred to a continuous struggle between Jat clans in the Ferozepur district for the possession of land there.

As against it, there is not a single instance mentioned during the long revolutionary phase of the movement (a period of about 275 years, starting from the missionary tours of Guru Nanak upto the establishment of the Misals), where there was any grouping of Sikhs along caste or clan lines, or of factionalism among them on caste or clan basis. On the contrary, there was exemplary fraternization among Sikhs drawn from all castes and clans. In fact, the Khalsa could not have achieved the military and political success it did without a commonly shared sentiment of solidarity among its members, because this solidarity was even more necessary than the organizational set up for the success of its mission. This fraternal solidarity within the Sikh Panth or the Khalsa, attested to by many non-Sikh authorities, could by no stretch of imagination be reconciled with one of the most prominent traits of the Jats-their traditional factionalism.

3. *EGALITARIANISM*

Besides their martial qualities, it is the egalitarian spirit among the Jats which has misled historians to characterize the Sikh movement in terms of Jat traits. They have failed to grasp that there is a qualitative difference between Jat and Khalsa egalitarianisms.

(a) Jat Egalitarianism

The egalitarian spirit of the Jats is undoubted. It is recognized from the time of the earliest historian, who took notice of them, to the time of the British administrators who are unanimous in their opinion on this point. This spirit of equality among Jats was reinforced by the *bhaichara* system of land tenure. In this system 'land was equally divided among the lineages of founding ancestors or original conquerors. This system of land tenure was a Jat idea, because Jats did not acknowledge the right of their chiefs to the sole proprietorship of the land conquered and colonized by them.⁹² 'Not only does the bhaichara land tenure system maintain the egalitarian structure of Jat society in the economic field, but the concept of *bhaichara* is extended to the kinship, social and political.⁹³ However, this egalitarianism of the Jats was confined only to their own ranks. Otherwise it had important qualifications.

(i) Attitude towards higher castes

The Jats, and the Indian peasantry in general, submitted to the Brahmanical caste hegemony and non-Jat rule without ever questioning its validity. Their very profession, tilling the land, was held as degrading. 'Chach, the Brahman usurper of sind, humiliated the Jats and Lobanas. He compelled them to agree to carry only sham swords; to wear no undergarments or shawl, velvet or silk..... to put no saddles on their horses; to keep their heads and feet uncovered; to take their dogs with them when they went out.....'⁹⁴ Muhammad bin Qasim maintained these regulations.⁹⁵ Amran, the Barmecide governor of the Indian frontier, summoned the Jats to Alrur, where he sealed their hands, took from them the jazya or poll-tax and ordered that every man⁹⁶ of them should bring with him a dog when he waited on him. 'The Jats were content to cultivate their fields and admitted the aristocratic Rajputs to be their social superiors.⁹⁷ Rohtak district is regarded as the Jat region *par-excellence*.

Here, “In the old days of Rajput ascendancy, the Rajputs would not allow the Jats to cover their heads with turban, nor to wear any red cloths, nor to put a crown (*mor*) on the head of their bridegroom, or a jewel (*nat*) in their women’s noses. They also used to levy seigniorial rights from virgin brides.”⁹⁸

(ii) Towards lower castes

The attitude of the Jats towards castes lower than them is equally revealing. In the Jat area of Meerut Division, the Chamars are the most numerous caste group. ‘The attitude of the Jats is unbending, and they try to humiliate and exploit the Chamars by word and deed whenever they find an opportunity.’⁹⁹ In U.P., previous to the British rule, ‘the village menials were little better than serfs, *ascripti glebae*, at the mercy of the leader of the village body.’¹⁰⁰ The sweepers ‘are regarded as the very dregs of impurity,’¹⁰¹ and for a peasant ‘nothing is worse than to lose your caste, to eat with a sweeper or to touch an impure person.’¹⁰² In Gurgaon district, the lowest of menial tribes live outside the village.¹⁰³ In the district of Karnal, Jat, Gujar or Ror do not, as a rule, eat or drink with any of the menial castes; and leather maker, washer man, barber, dyer and sweeper are regarded as absolutely impure.¹⁰⁴ The position ‘of chamars in Ludhiana district very nearly approaches that of servitude,’¹⁰⁵ and the Mazhabis are kept at a distance by most Sikhs of other castes.¹⁰⁶

Thus, the Jats maintained their spirit of equality only within their own ranks. But, in their attitude towards castes higher and lower than theirs, they conformed to the hierarchical pattern of the caste system. In other words, they had no qualms in submitting to the higher castes and in dominating the lower ones.

(b) Sikh egalitarianism

The spirit of equality, fraternization and brotherhood

among the Sikhs and the Khalsa, and consequently among those Jats who joined the Khalsa ranks after owning the Sikh ideology, was altogether different from that of the Jats who remained aloof. Bhangu records about The Khalsa Dal that, the ‘Guru’s Sikh was the brother of each Sikh.’¹⁰⁷ All members of the Khalsa Dal ‘were issued clothes from a common store. Without concealing anything, they would pool all their earnings at one place. If anyone found or brought any valuables, these were deposited in the treasury as common property.’¹⁰⁸

The prevalence of this spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization among the Sikhs is confirmed by evidence from the non-Sikh sources. Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din, the author of *Fatubat Namah-i-Samadi* (1722-23), was a contemporary of Banda. He writes that low-caste Hindus, termed *khas-o-khashak-i-hanud-i-jahanmi wajud* (i.e. the dregs of the society of the hellish 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 publicise themselves with the title of Sahibzada (“Yaki ra b targhib-i-digran pisar-i-l handan-i-guru-i-maqhur gufta b laqub-i-shahzadgi mashur kardah”).¹⁰⁹ A contemporary historian of Aurangzeb writes, ‘If a stranger knocks at their door (i.e. the door of Sikhs) at midnight and utters the name of Nanak, though he may be a thief, robber or wretch, he is considered a friend and brother, and is properly looked after.’¹¹⁰ Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan writes (1783 A.D.) about the Khalsa panth, ‘When a person is once admitted into that fraternity, they make no scruple of associating with him, of whatever tribe, clan, or race he may have been hitherto; nor do they betray any of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.’¹¹¹ Commenting on the last part of the statement, the editor says, ‘This alludes to the touching or eating with persons of impure castes, in regard to which the Hindus are so tenacious.’¹¹² The author of *Haqiqat* also writes about the same time that ‘the Sikhs were told: “Whoever might join

you from whichever tribe, don't have any prejudice against him and without any superstition eat together with him." "Now this is their custom."¹¹³ Here we have very good independent testimony from two sources that upto 1783, at least, the Sikhs drawn from all castes dined freely with each other. The *Haqiqat* clearly states that Khattris, Jats, carpenters, blacksmiths and grain grocers all joined the Khalsa,¹¹⁴ and 'now this is their custom.'

This egalitarianism of the Sikhs was not born either of the Jat clannish sentiment or of the Jat *bhaichara* social and economic structure. In the period of Sikh history we are dealing with, the Sikhs, as already noted, were either very sparsely and widely located in the general non-Sikh population, or they came together in roving militia bands. In other words, the *bhaichara* system of the Jat type could never be visualized among them. Therefore, the Khalsa egalitarianism was not at all related to the Jat polity in any way. It was the product of the Sikh egalitarian ideology which embraced all persons without any distinctions of caste or clans. Unlike the Jat egalitarian, there was no dichotomy in the Sikh egalitarian approach towards the higher or the lower castes. Consequently, there is no ground either for confusing Sikh egalitarianism with Jat egalitarianism, or for tracing the source of the former to the latter.

4. THE SIKH EGALITARIAN REVOLUTION

There is no doubt that Jats are a martial race. Probably, this is another major reason which has misled some historians to infer that the militarization of the Sikh movement, its development and direction, must be due to the Jats joining it in large numbers. What they have ignored is that it is primarily the goals a movement pursues which determine its content and character. If militancy alone is to be the criterion for judging movement, one would be led to see no difference in the historical significance of the Pindari excursions, the establishment of the Bharatpur *raj* and the Maratha national expansion. The Pindaris became

a bigger military force, and overran a much larger area, than the Bharatpur Jats ever did. The contemporary British officials, Malcolm and Stewart, were amazed at the varied military qualities of the Pindari leaders.¹¹⁵ Lord Lake was even prepared to elevate Amir Khan to the position of a ruler of a state provided he accepted British protection.¹¹⁶ Metcalfe expressed concern to Lord Minto regarding Amir Khan establishing his sway over Udaipur and Indore.¹¹⁷ But these Pindaries, who had more men at arms than the Bharatpur Jats and showed more skilful military leadership and tactics, did not establish any independent state of their own, like the Bharatpur State, which they could very well have done. It was simply because their main objective was organized banditry and sensuous pleasure and not political power. Similarly, a British Governor General's minute clearly brings out the contrast between a people inspired by an ideology and a militia held together by self-interest alone. The Marathas, it says, 'were a nation fighting against oppression and religious persecution, hence bound by the strongest reciprocity of feeling to each other; the Pindaries are an assemblage of all tribes and religions, who unite because it suited their convenience and will separate when it ceases to do so.'¹¹⁸ The Marathas were, in addition, swayed by a commonly shared sentiment of Maratha nationality, and their political and military expansion assumed the biggest dimension in that period of Indian history. But, the Marathas and the Bharatpur Jat movements cannot be compared to the Sikh egalitarian movement, as the former two were bound down to the caste ideology and circumscribed by the feudal orbit. These examples make it clear that it is highly misleading to trace the genesis and growth of movements without correlating them to their social and political objectives and goals. Nowhere else do we find, among the peasant revolts or revolutions within India or outside it, a parallel development, at peasant initiative, comparable to the Sikh egalitarian social and political revolution.

(a) *An Egalitarian Revolution*

The Sikh movement was an egalitarian revolution, social as well as political; but it is its political aspect which has a direct bearing on our subject. It is true that the egalitarian politics aims of the Sikh revolution were not fully realized, as it has happened in the case of so many other revolutions, but what it did actualize far exceeds the ultimate achievements of the French Revolution. Its achievements to indicate, atleast, the egalitarian character and direction of the movement. Irvine who bases his account on that of contemporary Mohammedan historian, writes: 'In all the parganas occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather dresser, the lowest of low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), when in a short space of time he would return to his birthplace as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well-born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him home. Arrived there, they stood before him with joined palms, awaiting his orders.....'¹¹⁹ 'All power was now usurped by the Sikhs, and one Bir Singh, a man of poor origin, belonging to pargana Haibetpur Patti in the Barri Doab, was appointed Subedar or governor of Sirhind.'¹²⁰ This happened within eighteen months of Guru Gobind Singh's death, i.e. very close to the Guru period when the Khalsa for the first time achieved political power temporarily. The next sixty years or so were spent in the revolutionary struggle against the Mughals.

In the Misal period, i.e. when political reaction had overtaken the movement, ordinary peasants, shepherds (Tara Singh Gaiba), village menials (carpenters) and distillers (a despised caste) became the leaders of Misals. There was not one from caste higher than these. The common peasantry of the land suddenly attained political power.¹²¹ Khushwaqt Rai has written in his history ' *Tarikhi-i-Sikhan* '

(1811) : “.....men disappeared and God’s own country was captured by an ass; the sect of Singhs took possession of the country of the Punjab. Since then upto this time, the whole administrative machinery of the country is in disarray, and the normal system of governance, official codes, the set up of levies and awards.....and the allowances occurring from estates bestowed by Kings and nobles, were abolished for the people. The lowest of the low-bred and the meanest of the mean people got elevated to high government positions. The nobility and grandees retired to secluded places on account of the elimination of their tribe.”¹²² Here is a translation of one extract taken from *Imadud-Saadaf* written by Syed Ghulam Ali Khan: ‘To cut the matter short, at present, the whole country of the Punjab is in the possession of this community and most of their exalted leaders are of low origin, such as carpenters, animal skin-treaters and Jats.’¹²³ The author of *Haqiqat* writes (1784-85) : ‘*Sikhan b istiklal-i-tamam mulk-ra abad kbardand w firqa-i-sipahi w asbraf hama ra wiren sakhtand w tayyat w abl-i-hirfa ra razī kardand.*’ ‘On attaining power the Sikhs repopulated the whole country. They dispersed the ashraf (the privileged feudal classes), and the firqa-i-sipahi (the soldier class represented by Mansabdars and faujdars) and conciliated the rayyat (the tillers of the soil) and the ahl-i-hirfa (the artisans and the craftsmen, i.e. the working classes).’¹²⁴ According to the same author, the Guru ‘*sought to uplift the qaum-i-arazil* i.e. the downtrodden. He was keen on inflicting *kbift* (humiliation) on the *mardum-i-avvan* (the privileged classes).’¹²⁵ The author of *Asrari Samdi* states, though in a hyperbolic style, that there was not a single amir (rich man or noble) in Hindustan whom Banda spared.¹²⁶ This statement tallies with that of Bhai Gurdas, the second, that the Khalsa scattered to the winds the Zamindars and the *amirs*,¹²⁷ Muslim saint Bulle Shah:

The Mughals drank the cup of poison,
The coarse-blanket-wearers were raised to be rajas
(rulers).

The Mughal nobles are all wandering about in silence, Well have they been swept off.¹²⁸

Even when feudalistic tendencies had started setting in the Misal system, there were 'at no stage of Sikh feudal history, a haughty noblesse, as in Rajputana or medieval Europe... The Punjab system was not feudal in the European sense. The all-pervading sense of brotherhood and a super-added theocratic outlook would not, ad east in theory, allow distinctions of rank.'¹²⁹ The leaders of the Misals were more *de jure* than *de facto* chiefs, because their followers were mostly friends and volunteers who regarded themselves as their companions and partners.¹³⁰ Forester observed that an ordinary member of the Khalsa did not regard himself as anybody's servant except his Guru's.¹³¹ The Sikh society was very much circumspect in safeguarding its internal equality.¹³² This was the reason why Ranjit Singh had to camouflage his monarchy. He knew that he merely directed into a particular channel a power which he could neither destroy nor control.¹³³ 'Free followers of Gobind could not be observant slaves of an equal member of the Khalsa. Ranjit Singh concealed his motives and 'everything was done for the sake of the Guru, for the advantage of the Khalsa and in the name of the Lord.'¹³⁴ He never installed himself on the throne as a king.¹³⁵ In the very first public Darbar he declared that his government would be styled as the Sarkar-i-Khalsa.¹³⁶ After Ranjit Singh, effective political power did not remain in the hands of his descendants or chiefs. The elected army panchayats usurped executive authority under the designation of '*Panth Khalsa jeo*'.¹³⁷

As against it, what the French Revolution achieved was the establishment of a bourgeois Republic. At no stage, common peasants and the *sans-culottes*, much less social strata lower than these, came near to wielding political power, directly or indirectly. Guru Gobind Singh 'opened, at once to men of the lowest tribes, the prospect of earthly glory.'¹³⁸ 'Grocers, carpenters, oilmen....rallied into bands.....so well Gobind amalgamated discordant elements for a time.'¹³⁹

In the French Revolution, even the *sans-culottes*, who were in the van of revolutionary insurrection, would not join, on equal terms, the wage-earners, the homeless and the like.

(b) Plebian Base

The Sikh movement had not only an egalitarian political mission but it had also a plebian organizational base. It was necessary that the downtrodden castes and classes should be both the architects and masters of their own destiny. The Sikhs and their armies were, neither constituted of, nor dominated by one caste. There were drawn from ideologically inspired persons of all castes, mostly from the downtrodden ones. When Guru Hargobind declared his intention of arming the Panth, 'Calico-printers, water-carriers, and carpenters; Barbers, all came to (his) place.¹⁴⁰

Bhikhan Khan had a very poor opinion about Guru Gobind Singh's army.

'Subject people have come together, rustic Jats, Oil-pressers, barbers, Bhati, Lubana, Leather-dressers. Many Baniyas, Aroras, Bhatsi Sudras, Calico-printers, Jats, carpenters, twelve castes and Sanat (low caste) are joined these are trained in the use of arrows. They include Kalals and goldsmiths, who do not know how to wield a spear.'¹⁴¹

Bhangu has referred to the plebian composition of the Khalsa at several places.¹⁴² When the Taruna Dal wing of the Khalsa Dal was reorganized into five divisions, one of the divisions was under the command of Bir Singh Rangreta.¹⁴³ This division continued to participate in the campaigns of the Khalsa right up to the time of the conquest of Malerkoda.¹⁴⁴ Regarding the great battle with Abdali, called Wada Ghalu Ghara because the largest number of Sikhs in a single battle were killed here, it is especially mentioned that Ramdasias (cobblers) and Rangretas took a prominent part in it.¹⁴⁵

The plebian composition of the Khalsa is corroborated

by evidence from non-Sikh sources. Banda's forces were recruited chiefly from the lower caste Hindus. Scavengers, leather-dressers and such like persons were very numerous among them.¹⁴⁶ The low-caste people who swelled Banda's ranks are termed by a contemporary Muslim historian as the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus.¹⁴⁷ Another contemporary Muslim writer says that Banda brought into the forefront the unemployed and worthless people who had hitherto been hidden by the curtain of insignificance.¹⁴⁸ Khafi Khan says that 'these infidels (Sikhs) had set up a new rule, and had forbidden the shaving of the hair of the head and beard. Many of the ill-disposed low-caste Hindus joined themselves to them, and placing their lives at the disposal of these evil-minded people, they found their own advantage in professing belief and obedience, and they were active in persecuting and killing other castes of Hindus.'¹⁴⁹

Irvine writes: 'After the Khatri and the Jat peasants, the most noticeable components of the Sikh body are the lower caste artisans and men of the outcaste or menial tribes. This fact attracted the notice of the Muhammadan writers, as we see in our account, taken from them, of the disturbances following on the death of Guru Gobind Singh.'¹⁵⁰

Polier wrote (1780 A.D.) that 'the Siques then began to increase greatly in number... all that came, though from the lowest and most abject castes, were received, contrary to the Hindu customs which admit of no change of caste, and even Mussalmans were in the number of converts.'¹⁵¹ Griffiths (1794) tells us that the Seiks receive Proselytes of almost every Caste a point in which they differ most materially from the Hindoos.¹⁵² The German Hugel describes the Sikhs of the times as 'the descendants from all the lowest castes of Hindus, from which they have been proselyted.'¹⁵³ These early accounts of the Europeans are all the more valuable, because, as already pointed out, these deal with the times of the Misals and Ranjit Singh, when the Sikh revolution had receded.

(c) Collective leadership

The leadership of a movement has always an important bearing in determining its direction. Corresponding to the egalitarian political mission of the Khalsa and its plebeian base, the leadership of the movement, after the Gurus, also devolved on the Khalsa Panth as a whole. This collective leadership of the Khalsa has an added significance. This, together with the plebeian base of the movement, was meant to ensure that, as far as possible, the movement should not come to be dominated by a higher caste or a group, and should pursue its egalitarian mission of capturing political power by all those, without any distinction, who subscribed to the Khalsa egalitarian ideals. The initiative for this development was taken by Guru Gobind Singh himself.

Writing about the significance of the initiation (baptism) ceremony of the Khalsa, Gokal Chand Narang states: "Of the five who offered their heads, one was a Khatri, all the rest being so-called Sudras. But the Guru called them Panj Pyaras, or the Beloved five, and baptised them after the manner he had introduced for initiation into his brotherhood. He enjoined the same duties upon them. Gave them the same privileges, and as a token of newly acquired brotherhood, all of them dined together.

'The Guru's view's of democratic equality were much more advanced than the mere quality among his followers could satisfy. In his system, there was no place even for the privileges of the chief or the leader. No leader, he believed, could be fit to lead unless he was elected or accepted by the followers. History shows that individuals or classes enjoining a religious or sacerdotal superiority have been only too loth to forego even a particle of their privileges. But the Guru, though regarded by his faithful followers as the greatest of prophets, was made of a different stuff, and had too much political insight to stand on an exclusive eminence apart from his followers. Therefore, when he had initiated his first five disciples, his beloved five, he was

initiated by them in turn, taking the same vows as they had done, and claiming no higher privileges than those he allowed them. Soon after he called a meeting of all his followers and announced his new doctrine to them. ⁴⁵⁴ One day before the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs asked him as to whom they were to follow after him. The Guru replied that he was personified in the Khalsa and that he had conferred the leadership on the Khalsa body itself. ¹⁵⁵

The fact that the leadership of the movement devolved on the Khalsa Panth as a whole, became an article of living faith with the Sikhs. In this connection, the episode of Banda's nomination as leader and his subsequent parting of company with the Khalsa is very illustrative. The Khalsa agreed to follow Banda only on the condition that he would not aspire to sovereignty. The Guru instructed Banda to abide by the Khalsa and appointed select Sikhs as his advisers. After his military success, Banda aspired to become Guru and a sovereign. On this Tat Khalsa (the genuine Khalsa) parted company with him because the Guru had given:

‘Banda service and not sovereignty; The sovereignty had been given to the Panth by the Guru (Sacha padshah) himself.’ ¹⁵⁶

After Banda, Kapur Singh was elected as the leader of the Khalsa. He was elected because he was, in those days, engaged in doing a humble service. Kapur Singh ‘Did nothing without taking the Panth into confidence.’ ¹⁵⁷ With the end of Kapur Singh's era, the revolutionary spirit started waning. His successor was Jassa Singh ‘KalaI’. Jassa Singh struck coin in his own name when the Khalsa conquered Lahore for the first time. This was so much against the spirit of collective leadership of the Khalsa, that a special convention was held, where it was decided to recall that coin from circulation. ¹⁵⁸ In its place, another coin struck in the name of the Guru was substituted. Polier (1780) observed, ‘As for the Government of the Siques, it is properly an aristocracy, in which no pre-eminence is allowed

except that which power and force naturally gives; otherwise all the chiefs, great and small, and even the poorest and most abject Siques, look on themselves as perfectly equal in all the public concerns and in the greatest Council or Goormatta of the nation, held annually either at Ambarsar, Lahore *or* some other place. Everything is decided by the plurality of votes taken indifferently from all who choose to be present at it.¹⁵⁹ Forster also gives a similar account. ‘An equality *of* rank is maintained in their civil society, which no class *of* men, however, wealthy *or* powerful, is suffered to break down. At the periods when general council *of* the nation were convened, which consisted *of* the army at large, every member had the privilege *of* delivering his opinion, and the majority, it is said, decided on the subject in debate.’¹⁶⁰

“All Sikhs were theoretically equal; their religion in its first youth was too pure a theocracy to allow distinctions *of* rank among its adherents.”¹⁶¹ It became an article *of* faith with the Khalsa that wherever five *of* the Khalsa, committed to Sikh ideals, met to take a decision, the Guru was present there in spirit to guide them. It was to this level that the leadership was spread. It was this spirit and faith which sustained the movement when the Khalsa guerrillas were split up and scattered into small groups without a central *or* common leadership. Writing on the election *of* Kapur Singh as a leader, Arjan Das Malik comments: ‘It is a paradox *of* Sikh history that a man who was elected in this cavalier fashion later proved to be the most competent leader that the Sikhs could ever had. This can be explained only in one way. Such was the uniform high standard *of* motivation and training that each one *of* the Khalsa was as good a commander as he was a soldier.’¹⁶² Thus, it was the wide consciousness *of* the egalitarian issues at stake and the extension *of* the sense *of* responsibility and leadership to a broad base that gave consistent direction and tenacity *of* purpose to the Sikh Revolution. The Mughal authorities had come to believe more than once that they had exterminated

the Khalsa to the last man; but the Khalsa 'always appeared, like a suppressed flame, to rise into higher splendour from every attempt to crush them'.¹⁶³

We have purposely dealt at some length with the subject of the political goals of the Khalsa, its egalitarian base and the nature of its leadership, as these questions are vital for understanding the character of the Sikh militancy. The issue, whether or not the Jat traits and culture determined the direction and development of the Sikh militarization, cannot be properly assessed by divorcing it from the political colour and content of the Sikh movement. The history of the peasants in general, and that of the Jats in particular, does not favour the hypothesis propounded by Dr. McLeod and others. Let alone the Jats, nowhere else do we find among the peasant, revolts or revolutions, within India or outside it, a parallel development, at peasant initiative, comparable to the Sikh egalitarian social and political revolution.

5. *LACK OF POLITICAL INITIATIVE AND ASPIRATIONS AMONG PEASANTS*

(a) Outside India

Engels mentions two main causes for the failure of the German Peasant wars, perhaps the greatest peasant upheaval in history. The peasant masses never overstepped the narrow relations and the resulting narrow outlook.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, the peasants of every province acted only for themselves, and were annihilated in separate battles one after another by armies which in most cases were hardly one-tenth of the total number of the insurgent masses.¹⁶⁵ Secondly, they 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,¹⁶⁶ and were also readily demoralized when they met a strong resistance or a reverse.¹⁶⁷

Eric R. Wolf, who in his book 'Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century' covers a case study of six countries, does not present a different picture.

The insurrection in Mexico was “an agrarian revolt in gestation”.¹⁶⁸ One of the prominent features of the Zapatista revolution was ‘the participation from the first of disaffected intellectuals with urban ties.’¹⁶⁹ About the Russian Revolution, we need quote only Lenin. ‘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.’¹⁷⁰ The very basis of the concept of the ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariate’ is that the peasantry is, suspect in the role of a revolutionary vanguard. In China, ‘Peasant mobilization thus proved impossible without political and military leverage.’¹⁷¹ It was the Communist Party that provided it. And the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party were drawn most frequently from a relatively thin upper layer of the Chinese population—the sons of landlords, merchants, scholars or officials. All of them had higher education, and most of them had studied abroad.¹⁷² In Vietnam, too, it was again the Communist party which roused and organized the peasants. Truong Chinh pointed out in 1965 that, ‘our party was born in an agrarian country where the working class was numerically weak. In the great majority, our cadres and our militants originated in the petty bourgeoisie.’¹⁷³ The Cuban revolution was a great gamble by a group of determined educated revolutionaries which paid off. “None of us”, writes Guevara, ‘none of the first group who came in the “Granma” (the landing boat), who established in the Sierra Maestra and learned to respect the peasant and worker while living with them, had worker’s or peasant’s “backgrounds.”’¹⁷⁴

Wolf comes to the weighty conclusion that, in all the six cases of peasant wars he studied, there was a fusion between the alienated intellectuals, what he calls “rootless” intellectuals, and their rural supporters. “Yet this fusion is not affected easily...The peasant is especially handicapped in passing from passive recognition of wrongs to political

participation as a means of setting them right. First, a peasant's work is most often done alone, on his own land, than in conjunction with his fellows... Second, the tyranny of work weighs heavily upon a peasant; his life is geared to an annual routine and to planning for the year to come. Momentary alterations of routine threaten his ability to take up the routine later. Third, control of land enables him, more often than not, to retreat into subsistence production should adverse conditions affect his market crop. Fourth, ties of extended kinship and mutual aid within the community may cushion the shocks of dislocation. Fifth, peasant interests—especially among poor peasants—often cross-cut class alignment. Finally, past exclusion of the peasant from participation in decision-making beyond the bamboo needed to articulate his interests with appropriate action. Hence, peasants are often merely passive spectators of political struggles...¹⁷⁵

To quote Wolf again: 'But what of the transition from peasant rebellion to revolution, from a movement aimed at the redress of wrongs, to the attempted overthrow of society itself? Marxists have long argued that peasants without outside leadership cannot make a revolution; and our case material would bear them out. When the peasantry has successfully rebelled against the established order - under its own banner and with its own leaders - it was sometimes able to reshape the social structure of the country side closer to its heart's desires; but it did not lay hold of the state' ¹⁷⁶

In the French Revolution, too, the peasantry of France played only a secondary role, which was limited to localized action against landlords. Of the Revolution's reverberations outside France in Europe, Roberts writes: 'The third widespread response was that of the rural population of almost every country; whatever the theoretical benefits they might derive from the implementation of French legislation, they nearly always turned at some point to open resistance, sporadic though it might be. Except in northern Germany, the peasantry were everywhere in Europe the most

persistently alienated of the Revolutions' potential supporters, whatever the benefits the new order might appear to bring them at first sight...It was among the better-off and the urbanized that the supporters of the French were to be found, not in the countryside which they formally liberated from 'feudalism.'¹⁷⁷

We are not out to establish a theoretical theorem, having universal validity. But, there are certain uniform lessons that flow out from the practical experience of so many revolts or revolutions cited above in which the peasants participated. Left to themselves, the peasants are concerned more with their narrow interests and problems rather than with broader political issues. Nowhere did they initiate a political revolution. In fact, it was extremely difficult to rouse them for political action. When and wherever they participated in political revolts or revolutions, on their own, they did so primarily for their own parochial ends. Secondly, everywhere the peasants needed sufficient ideological indoctrination; and the initiative for such an indoctrination in all these cases came from outside the peasants own ranks, usually from the intelligentsia. These lessons are quite important for evaluating the role of Jats in the Sikh movement.

(b) Among Jats

The peasants in India were, in addition, torn asunder by prejudices and inhibitions of the caste system. Because of the complete grip of the caste ideology, it was beyond the sphere of the peasant, the Vaisya, either to do fighting Or aspire for political leadership or rule. This sphere was the monopoly or privilege of the Kashatriya only, accordingly, how they, by and large, meekly submitted to the oppression and humiliation inflicted by the rulers, we need not go into. Let us come directly to the Jats, a militant section of the Indian peasants.

The Jats form the majority in Sindh; they are three times more than the Rajputs in the Punjab, and are approximately equal to the number of Rajputs in Bikaner, Jaisalmer and

Marwar. Yet, “fragmentary notices of the Jats occur in the Muhammadan historians of India.”¹⁷⁸ It was so because they were politically inconsequential. As against them, the pages of Indian history are full of Rajput exploits.

A deputation of Jats and Meds, waited upon King Dajushan and begged him to nominate a king, whom both tribes would obey. Accordingly, Dajushan appointed his sister to rule over them and they voluntarily submitted to her.¹⁷⁹ Bikaner sources tell us that, ‘In recognition of the fact that the Jats had been original masters of the country and in memory of their voluntary submission to Rajput rule, the Bikaner rulers instituted a ceremony in which each new ruler of the Rajput dynasty had a special symbol put on his forehead by one of the Jat Chiefs who thus invested the new ruler with the rights of a sovereign.’¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the Minas voluntarily accepted the Kacchewas as their rulers.¹⁸¹ The Minas are not Jats, but this example also serves to show how people at the tribal level, without political aims, were an easy prey to politically ambitious minorities. The *khaps* in the Meerut Division, as we have seen, had quite sizeable private armies, but their role was purely defensive. The Rohtak district was situated, at one time, on the border of the Maratha and the Sikh spheres of political control, and was overrun by one party or the other. The strong Jat villages of Rohtak district perpetually defied both the Marathas and the Sikhs, and George Thomas could collect his revenue only by means of a moveable column constantly marching about the country.¹⁸² But this Jat defiance never gathered momentum beyond the village level in order to assert the political independence of their region.

“From the earliest times, the Jats have been remarkable for their rejection of the monarchical principle and their strong partiality for self-governing commonwealths. One of the names by which they were known to the ancients was ‘Arashtra or kingless’.”¹⁸³ Their chiefs were tribal chiefs rather than rulers. The one time exception of Jat monarchical principality of any consequence that we come across in

recorded history is that of Bharatpur, if, of course, we ignore the small unit of Dholpur. Its founder was Churaman. He was not inspired by any lofty ideals, nor was any of his successors, who consolidated the Bharatpur State. Churaman helped Emperor Bahadur Shah in his campaign against the Sikhs at Sadhaura and Lohragh;¹⁸⁴ and finally submitted to Emperor Farrukh-siyar, agreeing to pay a penalty of fifty lakhs of rupees.¹⁸⁵ Similarly Suraj Mal was a pure opportunist. He turned, for personal reasons, against the Syed brothers, to whom he owed so much for his rise to power. When the magnificent army under Sadashiv Rao went to meet Ahmed Shah at Panipat, “the crafty Suraj Mal, professing to be disgusted with the arrogance of his allies, withdrew his forces from Sadashiv’s camp.¹⁸⁶ Major Thorn says that Suraj Mal received Agra from Ahmad Shah as the reward of his neutrality during the struggle at Panipat.¹⁸⁷ At any rate, it is a fact that Suraj Mal dispossessed the Maratha governor of Delhi of his treasure when he was fleeing through the Jat territory.”¹⁸⁸

It is only in the Jat uprisings under Gokala and Raja Ram that we find the Jats motivated by consideration other than those of plunder or personal gain. These were however, short-lived religious outbursts against blatant outrage of local Hindu sentiment by Muslim rulers, which began and ended with the persons of Gokala and Raja Ram. By no means were these sustained movements, much less revolutionary ones. Movements are built around fixed long-range objectives and need organisation, determined leadership and tenacity of purpose to achieve those objectives. The Jats lacked all these. It was for this reason that, although the Jats around Mathura and Agra remained a constant thorn in the body of the Mughals and several expeditions were sent to curb their marauding propensity, their restless spirit never assumed the dimensions of a purposeful anti-Mughal or anti-Muslim movement. The same fate overtook, and for similar reasons, the Satnami revolt. Although there was a continuity in the restive spirit of the Jats, there was no ideological

continuity between the Jats revolts under Gokala and Raja Ram on the one hand and the political adventures of Churaman and Suraj Mal on the other. The overriding motivation of Churaman and Suraj Mal, as is shown by their opportunistic compromises with the Mughal rulers, was to carve out a dynastic principality. They stepped in to fill the vacuum created by the death of Raja Ram, not to continue his anti-Muslim revolt but to exploit Jat restiveness for their own personal ambitions. Quite in tune with the peasant trait the world over, and in addition having been brainwashed by the caste ideology, the Jats, as a body, could not, in any of the cases cited above, evolve enduring political goals of their own. Their martial qualities were, therefore, at the disposal of anyone who was skilful enough to manipulate them. It could be the Churaman group, for whom the weakening of the Mughal authority and the disappearance of political sanction behind the caste system had opened the way for aspiring to political power. It could be the British, who used the 6th Jat Light Infantry, recruited from Haryana, to crush their own kith and kin when the Jats of that region rose against the British in 1809.¹⁸⁹

(c) Jats and the Sikh Revolution

There is, in fact, no common ground for comparing the Sikh movement with any other political adventure or revolt in which the Jats participated. It was not a feudal venture like that of Churaman and his successors. Guru Gobind Singh was not interested in political power for himself,¹⁹⁰ and he devolved the leadership of the movement on the Khalsa when his own sons were still alive. Unlike the Jats of the Bharatpur region, the Khalsa did not blindly follow a leader like Churaman or Suraj Mal, to help him establish a dynastic rule or to share in his plunder. The Khalsa parted company with Banda when he aspired for sovereignty, and made Jassa Singh Ahluwalia withdraw the coin that he struck in his name. Even under the Misals, the Sikh polity had more characteristics of a commonwealth than those of personal

rule. It was also qualitatively different from the ephemeral Jat religious uprisings under Gokala and Raja Ram. It was a revolution, and an egalitarian revolution at that. There is a fundamental difference between ordinary revolts or rebellions, which do not challenge the social or political system itself, but only seek changes or adjustments within its framework. The Sikh movement was an egalitarian social and political revolution, which aimed at the establishment of an egalitarian society in the place of the caste order and at the capture of political power by the people themselves. Such revolutionary aims were not owned, at that period, by the peasantry of any country outside India, much less could these be even conceived here in a society ridden by caste and politically dominated by foreign feudals. It is the goal, the ideological inspiration, of a movement which determines its quality and its direction, and it is the organisational base of that ideology and the tenacity of purpose associated with it that in a great measure constitute its internal strength. For the lack of ideological goals, the Jats remained either an inert political mass, or their religious fervour misfired, or their valour became a hand-maid of feudal interest. It is the Sikh ideology which welded the Jats or non-Jats who joined it, into a political force that uprooted the Mughal domination and made the tillers of the soil and the hewers of wood, the political masters of the Punjab.

It was seen in the first section that the militarization of the movement was initiated by the Gurus themselves in pursuance of the Sikh mission, and it was not done under the influence or pressure of the Jats who joined it. The discussion we have carried on above amply demonstrates that the political and militant development of the movement was directed by its egalitarian goals, which were also fixed by the Gurus. Far from taking a hand in shaping the political goals of the Khalsa, the Sikhs, whether of Jat or non-Jat origin, felt, in the beginning, that they were unequal to the task of wresting sovereignty from the Mughals.¹⁹¹ The plebeian composition of the Khalsa and its collective

leadership were intimately linked to its egalitarian goals. Without these, it is quite probable that, in the absence of the Gurus to steer the course of the movement, it might not have implemented its egalitarian programme to the extent it did. And, the Khalsa acquired a dominant plebeian base because it was Guru Gobind Singh who called upon the 'sparrows' to kill the 'hawks', i.e. called upon the downtrodden to carve out their own political destiny. The plan for evolving the collective leadership of the Khalsa was also initiated by the Guru. The Sikh cosmopolitan egalitarianism (whose doors, as we have noted, were open in theory and in actual practice to the lowest of the low, and where anyone who chose to be present in the Khalsa General Assemblies, the Sarbat Khalsa, could have his say and exercise his right in the making of decisions)¹⁹² was qualitatively different from the Jat parochial egalitarianism. The Jat political consciousness, under the spell of caste ideology, could not have even conceived of evolving egalitarian political goals of the type in which they had to share power with the artisans (carpenters) and Kalals, much less work under their leadership. Nor could Jat parochial egalitarianism have adjusted itself to a cosmopolitan egalitarian organisation in which the outcastes (the Rangrettas) were equal and honourable members. There is, therefore, no basis for assuming that, without having a hand in determining the Khalsa political goals, and without exercising control over its organisation and leadership, the Jats, as such, could shape the growth and the development of the movement, during the long period of its revolutionary phase according to their own traits and proclivities.

6. IDEOLOGY

Lefebure has given expression to a very important political axiom. "For the last half century, students have applied, themselves and rightly so, to the task of showing how the revolutionary spirit originated in a social and economic environment. But we should commit no less an

error in forgetting that there is no true revolutionary spirit without the idealism which alone inspires sacrifice.”¹⁹³ About the French Revolution, Rude writes: “. . . .it needed more than economic hardship, social discontent, and the frustration of political and social ambitions to make a revolution. To give cohesion to the discontents and aspirations of widely varying social classes, there had to be some unifying body of ideas, common vocabulary of hope and protest, something in short, like a common ‘revolutionary psychology’.”¹⁹⁴

If a common ‘revolutionary psychology’ was needed to give cohesion to the varying classes in the French Revolution, a ‘unifying body of ideas’ was much more indispensable for welding the mutually antagonistic castes which joined the Sikh Revolution. Moreover, the Sikh revolutionary struggle passed through a prolonged period of guerrilla warfare the like of which few other movements have experienced. A general massacre of the Sikhs was launched a number of times and the Mughal authorities came to believe that they had annihilated the Sikhs almost to the last man. Forster writes: “Such was the keen spirit that animated the persecution, such was the success of the exertions, that the name of a Sique no longer existed in the Mughal dominion.”¹⁹⁵ Yet, at every attempt to crush the movement, it arose, Phoenix like, from its ashes till it uprooted the Mughal rule from the region and established its own.

Arjan Das Malik has quoted authorities and given illustrations to show that sustained guerrilla warfare is not possible without an ideological inspiration.”. . . .a guerrilla is. an intesely 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.’”¹⁹⁶

What was the ideological inspiration that inspired the Sikh revolutionaries? Let history speak for itself. William Irvine writes about Banda and the band of his followers when brought as prisoners to Delhi: “All observers, Indian and European, unite in remarking on the

wonderful patience and resolution with which these men underwent their fate. Their attachment and devotion to their leader were wonderful to behold. They had no fear of death, they called the executioner Mukht, or the Deliverer. They cried out to him joyfully “O Mukht! kill me first.”¹⁹⁷

The English ambassadors in Delhi at that time reported to their head that about 780 prisoners had been brought to the place along with Banda and that one hundred *of* them were beheaded each day. ‘It is not a little remarkable with what patience they undergo their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one apostatized *from* his new *formed* religion.’¹⁹⁸

Khafi Khan writes, many stories are told about the wretched dogs of this sect, which the understanding rejects; but the author will relate what he saw with his own eyes. When the executions were going on, the mother of one of the prisoners, a young man just arrived at manhood, pleaded the cause of her son with great feeling and earnestness before the emperor and Saiyad Abduallah Khan....
...Farrukh Siyar commiserated this artful woman, and mercifully sent an officer with orders to release the youth. That cunning woman arrived with the order of release just as the executioner was standing with his bloody sword upheld over the young man’s head. She showed the order *for* his release. The youth then broke out into complaints, saying: “My mother tells a falsehood; I with heart and soul join my fellow-believers in devotion to the Guru; send me quickly after my companions.”¹⁹⁹

Muhammed Latif comes to the conclusions: “The pages of history shine with the heroic deeds of this martial race, and the examples of self-devotion, patriotism and forbearance under the severest trials, displayed by the leaders of their community, are excelled by none in the annals of the nations.”²⁰⁰

“According to a contemporary Mohammedan author, the Sikh horsemen were seen riding, at full gallops, towards their sacred favourite shrine of devotion. They were often

slain in making this attempt, and sometimes taken prisoners; but they used, on such occasions to seek, instead of avoiding, the crown of martyrdom.”; and the same authority states, “that an instance was never known of a Sikh, taken in his way to Amritsar, consenting to abjure his faith”.²⁰¹

Ahmed Shah Abdali, the victor of Panipat, recognized that for the complete reduction of the Sikh power it would be necessary to wait until their religious *fervour* had evaporated.²⁰² Even during the faction-ridden period of the Misals, the Sikh chiefs could find a common meeting ground at the sanctified Amritsar Golden Temple, and the only commenting *force* left between them were the Akalis, the conscience keepers of the Sikh faith.

There is a spark in human nature which yearns eternally *for freedom* and equality: The Gurus ignited this spark. In Cunningham’s words: “The last apostle of the Sikhs did not live to see his own ends accomplished, but he effectually *roused* the dormant energies of a vanquished people and filled them with a lofty, although fitful, longing *for social freedom* and national ascendancy, the proper adjuncts of that purity of worship which had been preached by Nanak. Gobind saw what was yet vital, and relumed it with a Promethean fire.”²⁰³ The Sikh movement derived its strength also because Guru Gobind Singh ‘opened, at once, to men of the lowest tribe, the prospect of earthly glory.’” The objective of capturing political power *for egalitarian ends* fired the imagination of the masses, and for this reason more and more of the down-trodden people were drawn to the Khalsa ranks as the struggle progressed. It was because of its deep commitment to the egalitarian cause that the movement pursued the armed struggle to its bitter end until its aims were achieved. This was why the movement, though hard pressed, rejected a number of offers of a compromised peace by Abdali; who could not comprehend that in this case he was not pitted against feudal lords whose interests could be adjusted within his own ambitions. Here he was face to face with an ideologically surcharged people’s

movement committed to achieve its own egalitarian political aims; in which there was no room for compromise with feudalism or aristocracy. However, what is more germane to our topic is the fact that the genesis of the Sikh revolutionary spirit lies in the Sikh religion and the religious faith of the Sikhs in the Gurus. It is the Sikh religion which stands for social and political equality. It is the Gurus who worked laboriously over a long period to institutionalize the egalitarian values in the form of the Sikh Panth. And it is through their religious faith in the Gurus that the Sikhs came to enshrine the values of human freedom and equality in their hearts. Again, it is due to the deep commitment of the Gurus to the revolutionary cause that they channelized the religious faith reposed in them by their followers into a course which aimed at achieving political freedom wedded to egalitarian objectives.

The Sikh ideology not only inspired the movement, but it was the mainstay of its revolutionary phase. The Sikh guerrilla had no earthly hope of success. Even the Mughal Governor was amazed, when he exclaimed “O God ! to eat grass and to claim kingship”²⁰⁴ They were sustained only by their faith in the Guru’s word. As Bhangu put it:

“The Singhs had no resources; were without arms and clothes. Were naked, hungry and thirsty. Had no ammunition with them. Had no access to shops or markets; Those who fell sick died for lack of medicine. They were sustained by the hope of Guru’s benediction; this was the only treasure they had.”²⁰⁵

It goes without saying that the Sikhs religious faith was the creation of the Sikh Gurus and not that of the Jats, who are well-known for their indifference towards transcendental religion.²⁰⁶ Otherwise, it is up to the scholars, who trace the genesis of the Sikh Revolution of Jat traits, to explain how the Sikh revolutionary psychology evolved from the purely Jat beliefs and traits. There is no historical record of the Jats of the Sikh tract having ever shown, before the Sikh movement,

even that turbulent spirit and resistance which the Jats around Agra, Mathura and Bharatpur showed, and against whom several Mughal expeditions were sent to curb their turbulence. If the Jats around Agra, Mathura and Bharatpur remained tied down, at all times, to the caste and feudal strings, how did the Jats of the Sikh tract alone evolve, on their own, a remarkable 'revolutionary psychology' and zeal, and a deep commitment to an all embracing egalitarian cause?

In fact, it is the Sikh ideology which transformed those, who participated in the Sikh revolutionary struggle, and it is not the Jat traits which determined its ideology content. As there is marked difference in the chemical behaviour of unionized and ionized atoms of the same element, so do we find a marked behavioural contrast between those of the same stock, whether Jat or non-Jat, who, when and where, were charged by the Sikh ideology and those who were not.

Two prominent features of the character of the Jats of all the regions, their laxity in domestic morality and their propensity for stealing, are mentioned from their very early history. As against it, Qazi Nur Muhammed pays the Khalsa a rich tribute for respecting the honour of women and for not befriending thieves²⁰⁷ and this testimony of his is supported by others.²⁰⁸ It is on these very two counts that the comments of competent observers in the post-Khalsa period again become unfavourable to the Jats of the Sikh tract.²⁰⁹

All the members of the Khalsa Dal, including Rangrettas addressed one another as Bhai (brother).²¹⁰ There was complete equality and fraternization within its ranks. One of the five divisions of the Taruna Dal was commanded by Rangretta Bir Singh²¹¹ and he was chosen to be the first to receive honour after the battle of Malerkotla.²¹² There is no mention of any factions within the Khalsa Dal on the basis of caste or clan. But, in the post-revolutionary period, factional strife became a prominent feature of the Misals and Jat Sikhs in Ranjit Singh's army refused to associate on equal terms with Rangrettas in the regiments.

All those who joined the Khalsa were volunteers and were not

mercenaries. Whatever they brought from their homes, or whatever came to their hands, was deposited in the common store.²¹³ The Khalsa ideal was to dedicate one's soul and body (Tan, Man, Dhan) to the revolutionary cause.²¹⁴ A large number of Singhs, especially the Shaheeds or Akalis, lived up to that ideal. But, the followers of Dala, the Brar Jats, had no hesitation in demanding pay for their services from Guru Gobind Singh.²¹⁵

The insignia of so-called Nawabi was not acceptable to anyone of the Khalsa and had to be thrust on reluctant Kapur Singh.²¹⁶ What a contrast between this spurning of power and the lust for power that seized the Misal Chiefs !

Even the faction-ridden Misals would unite to face the common danger posed by Abdali, but the universally believed, rumours of an impending invasion by the British failed to unite the parties of the Sikh Raj.²¹⁷ Abdali came to the conclusion that the conquest of the Khalsa shall have to wait till their religious fervour subsided. But Lord Hardinge could foresee that the Sikh soldiers of the Sikh Raj 'will relapse into the rude state of their grandfathers, from which they only emerged fifty years ago, and, to which they will have no objection to return'.²¹⁸

If it is not the Khalsa ideology, to what else is the glaring contrast in the behaviour patterns of the people of the same stock, noted above, due to? Forster noted that, under relentless persecution launched by the Mughals, "Those who still adhered to the tracts of Nanock, either fled into the mountains at the head of the Punjab, or cut off their hair, and exteriorly renounced the profession of their religion."²¹⁹ In other words, all that was needed to save one's life was to cut off one's hair and melt into the multitude. Who were the steel-frame of the movement? Those who renounced their faith, or those ideologically surcharged Khalsa guerrillas who took to the mountains?

7. CONCLUSION

Dr. McLeod's hypothesis regarding the militarization of the

Sikh movement is untenable on more than one count. The very basic assumptions on which his thesis rests are belied by facts. There is no data to infer that Jats were the predominant element among the Sikh when Guru Hargobind decided to militarize the movement, or in the battles of Guru Gobind Singh and those of Banda. Rather, all the available historical evidence points the other way. Similarly, there is nothing to suggest that the Jats used to come armed when they came to pay homage to the Gurus. Even this is a presumption that the Jats were the only people who bore arms, if the population was not disarmed.

Dr. McLeod's other two basic assumptions are equally baseless. The keeping of sword (*kirpan*) and hair was not a speciality of Jat culture, which the Sikh movement is supposed to have borrowed from it. Nor did the Sikh movement need the inspiration of the Devi cult for its militancy. Guru Hargobind went to the hills after finishing all his battles in the plains, and no Devi cult survives among the Sikh Jats. Besides, it remains a mystery, how the Jats, without control of the leadership and the organization of the Khalsa in their own hands, could possibly manoeuvre it according to their own predilections.

The most important consideration, however, is that the Sikh militancy has to be viewed, not in isolation, but in its relation to the Sikh egalitarian revolution. The Sikh movement aimed at capturing political power by the Khalsa and the Sikh militancy was geared to achieve this purpose. The two should not be divorced from each other arbitrarily. As we have seen, the peasantry have lacked political initiative throughout the world, and peasants in India, including the Jats, were additionally inhibited by the caste ideology. Also, the Jat pattern of egalitarianism, which was limited to the Jat *Bhaichara*, cannot be equated or confused with the egalitarian character of Khalsa brotherhood in which 'lowest were equal to the highest.'²²⁰ Therefore, it becomes pure speculation to assume that the Khalsa egalitarian political goal, and the militarization of the Sikhs

for achieving that objective, evolved out of the interaction of Jat cultural traits with the environmental factors. Moreover neither the Jat pattern of social organization, nor their factional spirit, fit in with the organizational set-up of the Khalsa and the spirit of fraternization that prevailed in the Khalsa ranks.

It is surprising that Dr. McLeod and other scholars of his way of thinking, have completely ignored the basic issues noted above. Possibly, they have fallen into the error which Lefebure cautioned historians to avoid. There can be no revolution, much less an egalitarian one like the Sikh Revolution, without a “revolutionary psychology”. And “there is no true revolutionary spirit without the idealism which alone inspires sacrifice.” The Jats, in common with the peasantry in general, lack political initiative; they are governed by caste considerations in their dealings with the Sudras and they are generally indifferent towards idealism or higher religious aspirations. Therefore, it is too much ‘to surmise that the revolutionary psychology of the Sikh Revolution was a creation of the Jats. It is the Sikh ideology which inspired and sustained the Sikh revolution. It is the hold of this ideology which was the dominant feature of the revolutionary phase of the movement, and it was the extent to which this hold loosened which marred its post-revolutionary phase.

Another possible reason which misleads such scholars is that they either ignore the revolutionary phase altogether, or they lump it together with the post-revolutionary phase in a manner so as to undermine its distinctiveness, or they interpret it in the light of the latter. It is true that revolutionary upsurges do not last long because of the inherent limitations of human nature and of the environmental factors. But, besides inching humanity forward towards its ultimate goal of freedom and equality, the revolutionary movements provide a perpetual source of inspiration for future efforts. Nor are the revolutionary upsurges inconsequential in terms of tangible achievements. They are

an integral part of the 'historical process'. Without the impulse supplied by Islam, the Bedouins might have been content in plucking dates in the Arabian desert and not aspired to vast empires. Similarly, there would probably have been no Misals or Ranjit Singh without the guerrilla warfare waged by the Sikh revolutionaries. And this prolonged revolutionary guerrilla struggle is inconceivable if we take away the ideological lead and inspirations given by the Gurus and the deep commitment to the revolutionary cause provided by the Sikh ideology.

This is also true that such periods, when ideologies sway the minds of vast masses, are rare in history. But, they are to be valued on that very account. Because, they are exactly the occasions when humanity, or a section of it, is 'on the move' towards its progressive goals. The Sikh Revolution was such a one.

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