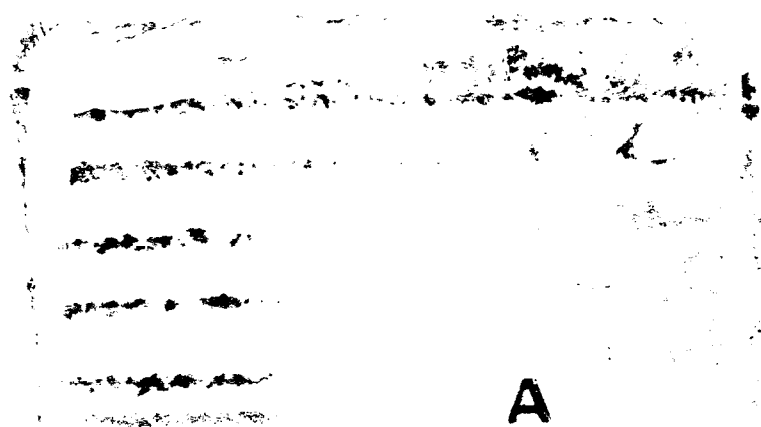


# **INSTITUTIONS : THEIR ROLE IN SIKH HISTORY**



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**RUPINDER KAUR GILL**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

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## PREFACE

History, the grand Old Dame, smiles at the attempts of man to discover the mystery that envelopes his existence. From the fearsome lofty retreats to the concrete wilderness of the day, man's march towards civilization has been marked by his persistent endeavours to develop cults and creeds, institutions and organizations to evolve a set of values that can help him establish an emotionally satisfying relationship with the universe at large. History is not only a record of the rise and decline of civilization, but also preserves man's values that aim at harmony and peace. Mose's Tora, Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Mohammed's declaration from the Mount Hira, the Buddha's Sermon at Sarnath, Guru Nanak's after his re-emergence from the river Bein are rare attempts to direct human energy into channels that can lead to joy and peace. Institutions were built around their revelations for the instructions of mankind.

It is thus the revelatory message of the Prophet that gives birth to institutions for the full flowering of his communion. Like many of his predecessors, Guru Nanak created institutions for the concretization of his message on the coming generation. Since Sikhism is a revealed religion of paramount importance on the Indian scene, the purport of the present study is to examine the various institutions that were raised by the message of Guru Nanak and imparted a unique identity to Sikhism as opposed to the caste-ridden Hindu society of the day.

While chapter one introduced the major thematic concerns of the proposed study, chapter two is devoted to Guru Nanak's message and mission. It brings to the fore Guru Nanak's concern at the social disparities and religious hypocrisies of the day and his aim to create a new, egalitarian social and spiritual order. Chapter three, therefore, unravels Guru Nanak's concept of *sangat*, a truly God-oriented body of the Sikhs devoted to the selfless service and *naam* of the Lord.

Consequently, *sangat* leads to the concept of *langar* where the commensal dining was prevalent and all distinctions of caste and status disappeared with the wind of change. For the meeting of the *sangat*, a place was required. First named *dharamsal*, it later on became the *gurdwara*, the focus of the Sikh faith, is the theme of chapter four. Chapter five is devoted to *langar* and *sewa*, for these twin principles are like the two sides of the same coin. Selfless service is a preliminary condition for the realization of the divine.

Chapter six, *Guru and Guruship* dwells on the psychic and spiritual significance of the Guru in Sikhism. Guru Nanak felt that his mission of building up revolutionary institutions could not be completed during his life time and, therefore, chose his successor and this process continued till the Tenth Master gave *guru-gaddi* to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Chapter seven brings into focus the significance of martyrdom in Sikhism and shows how the martyrdom of the fifth and ninth masters changed the Sikh perspective.

Chapter eight, *Miri-Piri* and *Akal Takht* deals with the concept of *Miri-Piri* which, though an essential part of the Sikh message since Guru Nanak, came out when the Sixth Master donned the two swords of *Miri-Piri* and built Akal Takht as a supreme authority of the Sikhs in all their temporal affairs. This ultimately led to the creation of the *Khalsa* which forms the theme of the ninth chapter. Chapter ten sums up the argument of earlier chapters.

To accomplish this onerous task, I owe and acknowledge my debt of gratitude to my Supervisor, Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, Professor of History, Department of Evening Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh, but for whose encouragement and inspiration, this work would have remained a mere dream. He illumined many a dark crevices of my mind to enable it to appreciate the Sikh institutions from altogether different angles. I have no words to express my gratitude to my Principal, Mrs. Harrinder Dhillon, who persuaded me to do research work and encouraged me at every step and gave me every kind of help to attain my

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I know no dissertation is ever complete. Though every attempt has been made to contact all possible sources, there are still possibilities of lapse. Time and mobility are the facts that can never be ignored. If there are lapses, they are surely mine, the rest is the Guru's grace.

Ludhiana  
Dated:  
21.3.2002

*Rupinder Gill*  
(RUPINDER KAUR GILL)  
Lecturer in History  
Khalsa College for Women  
Civil Lines, Ludhiana

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## Chapter-I

# INTRODUCTION

An institution is an organization, having regulative principles that organize most of the activities of an individual in society. Men, while living in society, are expected to conform to its ethos that keep in check any deviation from the accepted norms and is not conducive to its harmony and peace. Its commandments, therefore, acquire a kind of sanctity which an individual can ill afford to violate. Through these organizations, society liberates the pent up human energy for constructive goals and limits the wayward activities of men, by setting up standards for them to maintain. H.E. Bernes describes a social institution as the social structure and machinery through which human society organizes, directs and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs<sup>1</sup>". Thus an institution comes to mean the established norms, forms and conditions of procedure characteristic of a group activity.

An institution is set up with the purpose of providing presumed needs of an individual and his adequate functioning in society. It has

always been the backbone of any social, political or religious system. Institutions like the family, marriage, education, religious and economic are common to all human societies. Social institutions regulate man's conduct in a social order. Educational institutions impart instructions right from kindergarten to the university to provide the (human person) knowledge and skill to become a useful member of his community. Banking provides a sense of direction to the trade and commerce and transaction that man makes to earn his living. Religious institutions in the form of church worship, ritualism and liturgy provide a way to well-knit, homogeneous social order. An institution is thus "organized system of social relationship which embodies certain 'common values', and 'procedures' and meets certain basic needs of society<sup>2</sup>". The emergence of mutually common shared values reflect its shared 'ideas and goals'. The system of relationship is the network of roles through which this behaviour is carried out. So an institution is a set up of behaviour, norms and system of social relationship.

Institutions, as modes and ways to provide direction to human proclivities assume a dynamic role and give life and activity to people. Its fundamental demand is loyalty to its norms, patterns of behaviour evolved by it after centuries of experience. They have basic traits of maintaining, assigning and formulating standards. All institutions are

based on an ideology that forms their matrix. Institutions prepare their members to carry out roles that the institutions assign to them. They develop signs and symbols which serve as short hand reminders to their members. An institution gives a definite, continuous and organized pattern of behaviour to the individual in society and these patterns involve normative ordering and regulations. The social institutions are simply social habits which are systematized, instituted or established by groups.

Kingsley Davis rightly defines an institution as a set of "interwoven folkways, mores and laws built around one or more functions<sup>3</sup>". J.O.Hertzler opines that "when interests, ideas, sentiments and beliefs, in form of folkways, customs, conventions, rights, mores, appear in more coherent and rational form, precipitated type of social procedures or more or less definitely organized structure for regulating the intercourse between the members of social groups, they become institutions<sup>4</sup>". He calls the institution, "great cluster of established, accepted and implemented ways of behaving socially<sup>5</sup>". His focus is, however, on social institution that cater to man's societal instincts. Durkheim puts it more succinctly, "society is a moral order and institutions are its structural constant<sup>6</sup>".



The emergence of various institutions in the history of mankind has always been in terms of the need of the individual. Only those institutions survive which have a higher degree of adaptability and flexibility and accept the role that the people of the day demand from them. History is a witness, how political systems have changed with time. Slavery, feudalism and the concept of the divine right of princes and prelates and the concepts like *sati*, female infanticide and widowhood in India have disappeared with the winds of doctrine. An institution, William Graham Sumner defines as a "concept --- and a structure"<sup>7</sup>. The concept is based on a definite doctrine that provides an institution its basic motivating force for its growth and continuity. Thus it enforces on its members a sacrosanct conformity to its basic principles. It provides a relief to man's peevish propensities and mental inharmonies. In fact, all human tendencies of head and heart, mind and soul crave for a nexus that can place them in proper perspective and order.

## I

Religion is an important institution of society. It plays a pivotal role in human life and is essential for the spiritual and ethical development of man. It has been regarded as one of the most powerful

factors in creation, propagation, and preservation of civilization and culture. It is thus the most pervasive and important force that shapes human life by providing it a sense of direction. Religious institution is a form of association in which men enter into relation with one another on the basis of myths, beliefs and a specific metaphysic that can still be the spiritual curiosity that ever rises in the human breast. Whence and whither, how and why, constantly haunt the human mind, and it is religion that regulates this impulse by setting a goal before the individual.

Religion has two aspects; its scriptural values and its institutional framework. Gunar Myrdal says, "A value system which emphasizes 'live' and 'let live', may help preserve ecological balance of society, but if this belief is institutionally expressed in reverence of particular animals --- such as snakes and cow --- then the effect may be opposite<sup>8</sup>". When a new religion is in the process of formation, the life of a group is integrated through simple rites and religious practices. New concepts and new symbols give expression to its solidarity and then the term institution is often used and applied. It is a method of providing a means of religious expression by individual and his group.

In a religious association the forms of worship and the administration of the sacraments are its institutions, while its object is

the fulfilment of spiritual needs of its adherents. Joachim Wach, however, emphasizes three aspects of religion.<sup>6</sup> “The theoretical, that is religious ideas and images, form and content, the practical or behavioral, that is ritual, symbols, sacraments and sacrifice and the institutional, that is how its values tend to shape the institutions that expressed them. A vital religion, by its very nature, must create and sustain a social relationship<sup>9</sup>”. Thus the values and ideas cannot become functional unless they are institutionalised. Institution is necessary to mobilize resources from different groups and individuals and to maintain the legitimacy of its values, symbols and norms. The institution takes a religious faith, often at first inchoate and flexible, and gives it a systematic form.

Religious institutions represent the religious structure and machinery. These institutions satisfy the spiritual needs of its members as they organize, and execute multifarious activities of human society. It is the institutional framework which provides unity of purpose and gives cohesion and strength to religion and society. Institutions always facilitate the process of religious development and responsible for the stability of the social order. Religion as an institution imposes on its disciples a definite moral and ethical discipline. So, institutions form an integral part of a religion and are concomitant with the very existence

of ordered religious life. They regulate various aspects of religious groups and organize patterns of behaviour of an individual member. Institutions, thus provide an effective functional organization for the propagation and spread of a creed. Religious institutions, therefore, acquire paramount significance, for they promise man's liberation from trammels of existence, time and transience and promise a life of joy and peace.

A religion flourishes through its institutions. Religions like Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism are based on prophetic visions of their founders. These religions have to evolve an organization so that the message of its charismatic leader should continue to influence the future. Around his thoughts, there arise institutions to promote and practise his precepts for the common rung of mankind. A survey of the religious institutions of both the orient and the occident will bring to the fore how these institutions have guided human life by providing its relevance and significance in this vast, inexplicable universe.

## II

In the semitic lore, it is Judaism that enjoys status as a religion that later on gave birth to two most leading faiths of the world,

Christianity and Islam. Absolute monotheism is the main tenet of Judaism and the utterances of the Prophet are duly interpreted by the authorised persons known as Rabbis. Judaism as interpreted by the Rabbis accepts the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) as divine revelation and accords the text an uncontestable authority. On the Mount Sinai, before the burning bush, Moses underwent a profound spiritual experience and brought Ten commandments to his people. He brought the concept of Yehwah, the Omnipotent and just Lord, whose justice was tempered with compassion. Thomas and Thomas aptly observe, "Moses envisioned pity as an integral part of piety<sup>10</sup>".

The attempt was made to establish a theocratic community and build institutions that would look after the religious and social needs of the people. At the top was the high priest who claimed his descent from Aaron, the brother of Moses and under his supervision was the temple priesthood. Synagogues became the most important institution and centres of all religious activity. It also regulated the conduct of the community by commandments and prohibitions. Though Judaism preferred exclusivity, conversions were not prohibited and the circumcision was the primary requirement for any convert. The Jews destined to be wanderers spread all over the globe and by their intelligence and ability built institutions to run trade and commerce to

invite envy of many communities. These institutions also helped them preserve their religious traditions, in establishing a well ordered system of poor relief and to bring equality and social cohesion among the people.

### III

Christianity, though an offshoot of Judaism, came to acquire greater prominence because of the missionary spirit that drove its men to all over the globe. It postulates God as a loving and forgiving father, who sent Jesus, His son, to redeem the sins of mankind. Christ's Sermon on the Mount is an expression of this selfless love which alone can lead man to salvation. Love and forgiveness emerge as the cardinal principles of Christian faith. It is in this context that its postulates like immaculate conception, virgin birth, crucifixion, redemption and the day of judgement and resurrection acquire specific, symbolic and spiritual meaning to this faith. Common meal and baptism are other practices instituted by Jesus.

The most important institution was Church of Rome, which was established by St. Paul. It is hailed as a divine organization which kept the torch of knowledge burning throughout the dark ages of Europe. It enjoyed supreme authority as an intermediary between man and God.

Salvation was possible only through the intervention of the church. Church has set up a dichotomy of the sacred and the secular, of the supernatural and the natural. Thus it proclaims a prior standard by which social institutions of the natural order are to be judged and to which they should be subjected.

Since Christianity enjoyed royal patronage, it was regulated on a strict hierarchical order. From Pope at Rome to an ordinary priest in parish, all religious functionaries looked upon the laity as the flock of sheep to be tended and guided to a destined goal. The Pope at Rome wielded power over the states and princes ungrudgingly acknowledged their allegiance. With the election of the Pope, the intrigues and corrupt practices came to be associated with it. It brought the moral life of the Pope to the lowest ebb and evil practices crept into the holy order. The original purity and nobility of the teachings of Jesus suffered a serious set back.

Though the church and liturgy still play a great role in the life of the community, it brought great social and political changes. No religion in the world has seen the emergence of as many denominations as Christianity. From the medieval monasteries and convents to the Seventh Day adventist church of today, the variations are indeed wondrous and wide. Christian institutions, therefore, have

been changing with time and circumstances. The church, though true to its basic tenets, has been adapting itself to local circumstances to convey the message of its Messiah.

## IV

*Islam*, which means submission to the divine will, derives its tenets from Judaism and Christianity, though its principle basis is the revelation of the Prophet Mohammed that he had had in the cave at Mount Hira. *Islam* advocates strict monotheism and rejects any kind of idolatry in most uncompromising terms. It teaches man to live in the will of the *Allah*. To submit to His will and to follow the path shown by the Prophet is the principal duty of a true *Muslim*.

The religious institution of this faith is supported by the five pillars; the profession of faith; the five-time prayer; fasting; payment of alms and once-in-a-life time pilgrimage to *Mecca*. It is a religion that claims, like the early Christianity, no clergy, no church and no liturgy in the true sense of the term. This monotheistic concept of God united the Arab tribes and enabled them to form the international community.

The Quran asks the Muslims “Not to revile those whom others worship, besides Allah, lest they, out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance<sup>11</sup>”. Despite this injunction, there emerged the concept of



*Jihad* which, like the Christian crusades, had far reaching consequences. As Islam, extended its boundaries, it regarded any advance as a form of *Jihad* to conquer distant territories. It was a religious sanction for the Islamic expansion. Since Islam enjoyed the royal patronage, coercion became the order of the day to convert infidels into Islam. It accounts for the religious intolerance and unaccountable atrocities of the Muslims towards those who came under their rule. But it ignores the vital truth that inherent Islamic features of egalitarianism and humanitarianism had much to do with its acceptance by a large section of the people conquered by the Muslim rulers.

Islam is not a mere religion. It signifies a cultural whole, for it does not separate religion from politics. The Prophet combined in himself the dual role of a religious leader and an able administrator. The Church and the state, religion and society were united in an organic whole. This was the reason the Quran deals with economic, social and political or administrative matters also. It also discouraged begging and calls upon all Muslims to rise above it and to work and earn their livelihood. The object of Islamic economic system is to secure the widest and most beneficent distribution of wealth through institutions set up by it. *Zakat* is the important institution provided for

it, in which two and half per cent of total property or assets of an individual were set apart for relieving poor of distress, providing stipends to students and for advancing social welfare. The ideal of the Islamic religious institutions and the perspectives they promise is indeed praiseworthy. *Shariat* or the tradition still rules its corporate life and is binding on all who owe their allegiance to the Prophet.

## V

In India, Hinduism is the oldest religion. Being an evolutionary religion, it has no founder, no definite set of doctrine and is not a cradle religion. The four *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the matrix out of which were born the religious institutions, that provide values to the Hindu mind till this day. The central core of the Hindu ethics has been the *Varnashram Dharma*, which organised society into four *Varnas* and the life into four *ashramas*. The concept of spiritual evolution was determined by these two basic institutions, and without its knowledge one cannot understand and appreciate the essence of Hinduism. All these institutions revolve around the basic postulates like the inexorable law of *Karma*, transmigration, *samsara*, *maya* and *moksha*, that is salvation from transience decrepitude and decay.

The caste system emerged as the most important and distinguished institution in Hinduism. It has been described as the steel framework of Hindu social structure by O'Malley. Caste is determined by birth and cannot be changed or renounced. There are fixed professions or occupations with little freedom for an individual to shift to some other type of world. Majority of the Hindus do not belong to any distinctive group with theological and ritual unity, "Caste, that is, the ritual rights and duties it gives and imposes, and the position of the Brahmins, is the fundamental institution of Hinduism. Before everything else, without caste there is no Hindu<sup>12</sup>".

Apart from *Varna Ashrama*, it was the *Karmakand* that regulated the Hindu life. All ceremonies and rites from birth to death of an individual were performed under the supervision and direction of the Brahmin Priest. Purity, both external and internal, was regarded as an important institution among all the sects of Hinduism. The institution of untouchability is the logical result of the Hindu caste system and has been in force in the Hindu society for centuries.

In *Ashram Dharma*, the life of an individual was divided into four stages, each of which prepares him for the discharge of certain fundamental duties. In the fourth stage of life, renunciation is practised to attain the mystical experience of the Ultimate Reality. It has divided

human concerns into two broad classes, one is primarily connected with the welfare of the soul and comes within the purview of religion, and the other which pertains to mundane or worldly affairs and therefore, falls outside the sphere of religion. Renunciation and spiritual austerities known as *tapas* became important in attaining the ultimate meaning and purpose of existence.

In the orient, the tradition has been to reject the world and its allurements. Renunciation has been held as a great spiritual ideal. All human endeavours are directed to shun the world and the recluse becomes the ideal figure, for he is a man who dismisses the world as *maya*.

Though the caste system enabled the Hindus to save themselves from being submerged under the surging waves of foreign invasions and their cultures and races within its own ambit. It also enabled the Hindus to resist the onslaught of Islam and save them from submerging into these religions. It gave them an organization that prevented wholesale conversion to Islam, but it did more harm to nation and society.

The Hindus turned towards conservatism to protect their religion from syncretism, for they were averse to change and prone to stick to tradition, particularly in the socio-religious matters. It has blocked the

way of progress for talented individuals. The extreme segmentation generated by it has stood in the way of the growth of the sentiments of the national unity. The economic activities and satisfaction of desires are divorced from the observance of the law of *Dharma*. The result was a highly pessimistic view of life marked by metaphysical fears and greater bondage to basal passion for which another name is slavery. Thus, the present weakness and fragmentation of the Hindu community is, to a great extent, due to this extreme rigidity and immobility of the caste system that had been in operation for centuries.

## VI

Another independent religion is Buddhism, which though born in India, became a major world religion due to its missionary activities. The phenomenal rise of Buddhism and the set back it gave to Hinduism are the natural results of the degeneration that had crept into the Hindu way of life. The Buddha in his first sermon at Sarnath spoke about the Four Noble Truths and the eight-fold Middle Path to seek *Nirvana*, liberation from pain. These principles form the basis of all Buddhist institutions.

It gave two new institutions – the monastic order of monks or *sangha* and the ideal of celibacy. The Buddhist monastic order, *sangha* became a source of the teaching of the masters and orally preserved its traditions. All people irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex, status, were admitted into it and it upholds the egalitarian ideal. Monks in saffron robe, with a begging bowl, would go from door to door, begging alms till their daily need was met and then return to their solitary retreat to meditate and pray. This order of monks has lived apart from laymen and remained cut off from the life-giving current of the world.

It also sought to popularise asceticism and celibacy. They accepted men and women into *sangha* without demanding that they should have previously lived the life of a householder. They also organised the groups of wandering ascetics in the *sangha*. The true disciple of Buddha is not a householder but the monk who neither superintends parishes nor holds congregations. Arnold Toynbee rightly remarks, "Buddhism is virtually an order of monks... who constitute the inner church and are almost completely withdrawn from the secular society<sup>13</sup>".

It also made *ahimsa* an integral part of its religion as it preached the doctrine of non-injury to sentient creatures. Due to its institutions,

Buddhism has become quite a significant force throughout India and later on spread gradually and steadily beyond the boundaries of India. But these institutions had socio-political effect. With the passage of time, these monks lost their missionary zeal, creativity of thought and consequently the missionary spirit gradually disappeared. Many people were attracted to it more by the ease and security it offered than by faith and devotion to the ideal which it stood for. They found it much easier to live on the doles of others than to join the battle of life and struggle for success. Moreover, Buddhism shuns social commitment and corporate amelioration. It has established no social and political goals. The practice of *ahimsa* gave a rude setback to the martial spirit.

## VII

Jainism aims at the conquering of desire in man. The world is constituted of two elements, the material part (*ajiva*) and the spiritual part (*jiva*). The basic doctrine propounded by Mahavira consists of four vows and twenty-two endurances. The doctrine of *Karma* occupies an important place in its metaphysic. It propounds the doctrine that the living and non-living, by coming into contact with each other, forge certain energies which bring birth and death and the endless cycle can be broken by a course of discipline and may lead to salvation. To

escape from the cycle of birth and death, the entry of new karmic matter in the soul must be stopped. This can be achieved by following the ethical path prescribed for the monastic order that stresses an austere life.

The community of monk (*sangha*) and of laymen form the chief disciplinary regulation in Jainism which prescribed moral and spiritual codes for its followers, irrespective of their caste or social rank. They were obliged to observe a set of ethical rules and the life of a recluse. Jainism draws a distinction between the ascetic who are called 'Yatis' and the layman or householder who are called 'Sravakas'.

The observance of *ahimsa* constitutes the core of this faith. It becomes of cardinal importance for them to know the diverse forms which life assumes. The path prescribed for the monks is more austere than that of the layman. He is enjoined to renounce everything and not to dwell under a roof. He is expected to endure hot and cold, hunger and thirst and curb passions that vibrate man's five-element frame.

The practice of the institution of *ahimsa* led to the exclusion of Jains from all industrial trades. Agriculture was, of course, completely excluded. As a result they adopted the profession of banking and money lending. Its major religious institutions have given birth to a distinct social order.



## VIII

The foregoing discussion is thus an attempt to demonstrate that every religion has its institutions which are essential to sustain its growth and for the spiritual guidance of its adherents. It also brings out how religions distinguish from one another due to their institutions. Judaism and Islam are whole-life religions, whereas other faiths divide human concerns into two broad classes. While one is primarily connected with the welfare of the soul, the other pertains to mundane or worldly concerns of man. The adage, "Render unto Ceaser the things that are Ceaser's and unto God the things that are God's" may be regarded as typical of this attitude. They draw a distinction between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the temporal.

Man has four levels of being: physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual. At each level, he is in need of an institution to guide his life and discipline his conduct. Basically, an animal, he has been blessed with reason, emotion and imagination and has evolved the institution of marriage to keep his sexual instinct under control. At the emotional level, he needs people to share his private pains and personal joys and this need is fulfilled by the institution of the family and the community. To express his feelings about the things around him, he develops

literary and aesthetic concepts, and to seek union with the infinite, he follows the principles and percepts of his religion. So to know and realize the divine in him, man relies on religious institutions which advocate a way, a path to seek the spiritual goal.

It is the business of religion to restore belief in the purpose of life and give zest and meaning to it. There is no human activity which lies outside the purifying and ennobling touch of religion. All activities of man social, political and economic, are to be spiritualized. Religious institutions should set principles to regulate the conduct of their members so that they can approximate to the ideal of their masters. A religious institution promises an ideal image of man towards which he should strive in order to rise from brute to man and from man to a God-like status. It is in this context that the next chapters form a modest attempt to understand the rise, growth and uniqueness of Sikh institutions.

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## Chapter-II

# GURU NANAK : MESSAGE AND MISSION

In the medieval Punjab, creeds and concepts grew with tropical exuberance. Caught in the trammels of metaphysical subtleties, expounded by the advocates of different religions and sects, the common man felt himself in a blind alley. Political instability, social and moral anarchy, ethical decay, debased religion and empty ceremonialism baffled the ordinary mind. It was during this spiritual turmoil and moral confusion that Guru Nanak saw the light of the day to lead the common man to a straight and simple path to God. Dr. Mohammad Iqbal rightly pays the glowing tribute to the advent of Guru Nanak on the spiritual scenario of the day, "A man of perfection woke Hind from a world of dreams<sup>1</sup>".

Guru Nanak founded a new religion which was revolutionary, unique and institutional. His approach and objectives were altogether different. He gave a new ideology, a dynamic philosophy and an egalitarian social order. For Guru Nanak, religion was an important factor to regulate the spiritual and social life of man. It was a whole-life and positive ideal that included the social, political and economic

development of man. His aim was both the social and spiritual regeneration of the common man. He visualized a socio-political order that could shape and guide the destiny of ordinary mortals and through his exhortations he revealed the secret of transformation of man into an angel - a God-like creatures, epitome of nobility and virtue.

Religion is the basic need of man, for it imparts significance and purpose to human existence. Guru Nanak's mission was to help the individual to transcend his creatureliness. He offered his adherents a metaphysic, a cosmology, a system of ethos and a concept of salvation or liberation from bondage to brute things. Guru Nanak realized that man has been sent to this earth for a specific purpose. He is expected to regulate, control and harmonize his natural impulses and instincts so that they may lead to a well rounded and integrated personality. Thus, the transformation of man and society. Guru Nanak says: "A hundred times each day am I sacrifice to my Master, who into God has turned mere men, without a moment's delay<sup>2</sup>". For a sane and healthy social order, the individual had to recreate himself to conform to moral and spiritual ideals. In this way alone he could discover the meaning and purpose of life.

Guru Nanak acquainted himself with the existing religions of his day and found nothing commendable in them. Hinduism, Jainism,

Buddhism, Islam and prevailing sects had lost their spirit and stressed mere formalism – a routine of empty rituals and meaningless ceremonies.

During this period, the major stress of Indian spirituality had been on the other-worldliness, for the prevailing Indian systems shunned the temporal and the phenomenal reality as mere *maya*, an illusion, an empty show. The Indian mind suffered from an obsession with eternity that could only be achieved through austerities, asceticism, fast, penance and ceremonial worship. The Indian psyche had drifted into the world of wishful dreams from which Guru Nanak roused it by a rude shock.

At the time of Guru Nanak, *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism* were the two main sects of the Hindu faith and they stressed devotion, meditation, inner purity and social equality and advocated *bhakti marga* to attain salvation from the bondage of existence. It is precisely for this reason, that most of the early studies placed Guru Nanak in an erroneous historico-religious perspective and consider him a part of the *bhakti* movement. Guru Nanak was hailed as a social and spiritual reformer who protested against the debased Hindu spirituality, whose fundamental teachings were similar to those of Ramananda, Kabir and Chaitanya. Historians like W.H.McLeod erroneously associated Guru

Nanak with the Sant tradition<sup>3</sup>, and his inheritance from the southern *bhakti* cult.

I.B.Banerjee concludes that there is “no satisfactory evidence to show that Guru intended to overturn the social order and his aim was to build an entirely novel structure on the ruins of the old<sup>4</sup>”. What greater evidence is required than the *Mul Mantra*, the rubric of the Sikh faith. In the *Mul Mantra*, Guru Nanak stressed the unicity of God and defines Him as unborn and fearless, without enmity, and He can be realized only through the grace of the Guru<sup>5</sup>. There is no place in his religious thought for the descent of God on earth in the form of any *Avtar*, i.e. Krishna and Rama, or as the Prophet of God, i.e. Mohammad or Jesus as the son of God. Guru Nanak rejects the Hindu belief in incarnation as enshrined in the *Bhagwad Gita*. “In every age I come back to deliver the holy to destroy the sin of the sinner and to establish righteousness<sup>6</sup>”. The Shaivites held Shiva and the Vaishnava held Vishnu, Krishna and Rama in great veneration as the incarnations of God.

Moreover, most of the *Bhaktas* were polytheists, whereas Guru Nanak asserts an uncompromising monotheism. In the *Mul Mantra*, Guru Nanak, by putting the numeral 1 before *Omkar*, clearly affirms strict monotheism. His emphasis on the oneness of God and rejection

of the cult of god's and goddesses constituted a daring and glaring departure from Hinduism<sup>7</sup>. He states, "In all worlds is operative God's sole ordinance; From the One has arisen all creations<sup>8</sup>". Worship Him alone who is the Creator, Timeless and Self existent.

Fearlessness is another attribute of God which the Sikh Gurus imbibed as a cardinal virtue. The Bhaktas on the other hand preached the ideal of Ahimsa and thus were the votaries of pacifism. The highest religion for the Hindus was "*Ahimsa Parmo Dharma*", the Hindu philosophy of other-worldliness and Jainism and Buddhism abstinence from violence. It was this attitude of non-violence that led to the subjugation of the people and suffer foreign invasion and plunder and devastation of the country. Guru Nanak was fully aware of the grave socio-religious challenges of his time, but had no means to fight the challenge. The revolutionary nature of challenge required a revolutionary response. He himself responded to the challenges, the existing social and spiritual orders and wanted to infuse both the spiritual and physical strength and courage to stand against tyranny.

Guru Nanak's sense of fearlessness is quite evident from *Babar-bani*<sup>9</sup> where he admonishes the Mughal conqueror for shedding the blood of innocent people. Guru Nanak even protested to God as the guardian of man for allowing the weak to be oppressed by the strong.



Guru also castigated the rulers and exposed their tyranny and oppression of the ruled.

He said that submission to or acceptance of an exploitative and repressive administrative system at any level tantamounts to active participation in the perpetuation of corruption and cruelty. He directs his tirade against the rulers "The kings are butchers and cruelty their knife, sense of duty and responsibility have taken wings and fled<sup>10</sup>". Again "Kings are like leopards and their revenue collectors behave like dogs, they go and awaken people at all odd times, their servants wound the people with their claws and lick their blood like curs<sup>11</sup>". It underlines the fact that many ruling classes had lost their legitimacy and potential and relevance. "They symbolize the process of disintegration of the sacred world, which indicates the disintegration of the real world on which it is constructed<sup>12</sup>". Thus he was aware of the grave political challenges of his times.

No other *bhakta* ventured to raise his voice against the tyranny and oppression of the invaders. It is against the will of God to coerce and exploit another man. Ruler should be compassionate and just and treat his subject as his children. Guru says: "Now is the gracious Lord's ordinance promulgated : None to another shall cause hurt. All mankind now in peace shall abide – Gentle shall the governance be<sup>13</sup>".

People should not accept the tyrannical rule of Mughals. The Guru's clarion call to his devotees was: "If you are keen to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm<sup>14</sup>". It is this dynamic ideology that imparts distinct identity to Sikhism. So Guru inspired the masses to shake off slavery, fear and submission to the forces of evil and fight against the tyranny and despotism. He gave a call to wage a battle for justice when the need arises. Guru says: "People of the world! revile not death, should one know how to die. Serve the Lord Almighty – thereby shall your path hence be made easy. As this easy path you tread, reward shall you receive, And exaltation in the hereafter<sup>15</sup>". Again: "Holy is the death of heroic man, whose dying is divinely approved. Such alone may be called heroes as at the divine portal obtain true honour<sup>16</sup>". It is this fearlessness that culminates in the ideal of saint-soldier created by the Tenth Master.

J.D.Cunningham rightly observed that the saints, "perfected forms of dissent rather than planted the germs of nations and their sects remain to this day as they left them<sup>17</sup>". Guru Nanak alone was among the saints of India who had the patriotic impulse and prophetic vision of reshaping history in the name of God. It was Guru Nanak alone who set up an ideal before him and thus he cannot be dismissed as a mere part of the sant tradition. Niharranjan Ray also pointed out,

“He (Guru Nanak) gave them after centuries a system of ideas, images and symbols and set a discipline all in precise and clear terms and in a very coherent and consistent manner<sup>18</sup>”.

Guru Nanak had had a divine mission. It was to set up a new social order based on revolutionary lines. He had a compassion for all and wanted to bring social equality among all sections of society. It shows his concern for ordinary man. The analysis of the theological imagery of Guru Nanak's *bani* indicates that he addressed himself largely to petty traders, artisans and bonded servants of the moneyed magnates<sup>19</sup>. He outrightly rejected the rigid caste system and its resultant inhuman institution of untouchability. Guru Nanak thus raised his voice against the then existing social order which was primarily based on the four-fold objects of life: *Kama, Artha, Dharma* and *Moksha*. Four-fold order of society: (*Varnas*): *Brahmins, Khattris, Vaish* and *Sudra*, four-fold stages of life (*Ashrams*): *Brahmcharya, Grahsatha, Vanprastha* and *Sanyasa*. His *bani* re-interprets the various social institutions in order to reconstruct a religious system anew. He had clear vision of a just society where all men be treated alike and where God bestows his grace and bounty on all without discrimination. Man's lower caste is not because of his birth, but because of his deeds. He says: “Know each being to be repository of Divine light – Ask not for

anyone's caste! In the hereafter are castes not considered<sup>20</sup>". Again he says: "God approves not the distinction of high caste and low caste. None has He made higher than other<sup>21</sup>". Guru thus sought to release his followers from the bondage of caste tyranny.

In his concept of community, high caste Brahmin could eat with the scums of society. A Hindu would not run away from a Muslim by dubbing him a *malesha* and a Muslim dare not look down upon Hindu as a *kafir*. He says: "Evil is conflict and acrimony – by such dispute comes ruin. To live without the name, in evil doing and illusion, is to meet destruction. One knowing both paths to be one shall alone find fulfilment: One that repudiates this faith, in hell fire must burn<sup>22</sup>". Guru laid emphasis on the unity of mankind.

To Guru Nanak, social redemption is far more important than individual salvation. Guru says "Man may perform sacrifices, make fire offerings, dispense charity, perform austerities and offer worship, and on his body inflict torture of penance – still without devotion to the Name Divine liberation he would not attain<sup>23</sup>". So he rejects withdrawal from socio-political activity and envisioned an ultimate transformation of man within society. He stood for the total orientation of life of the individual and society towards a creative, purposeful existence. The social group of the early Sikhs was the locus of the spirit to have a

natural affinity with its theological injunctions in *Kirat Karna, Wand Chhakna, Naam Japna*<sup>24</sup>. It is this idea of social responsibility that marks the tangential departure of the Sikh religion from other faiths. Attar Singh rightly says: "It is in this revolutionary configuration of protest, revolt and confrontations that the inner urges and aspirations the pure teachings of the Guru assumed a critical attitude towards the three cardinal pillars of Hinduism, the priesthood, the caste system and the Vedas<sup>25</sup>".

The mission of Guru Nanak was to develop an ideal man – A man morally and spiritually sound, aware of his responsibility to his society and God. He was opposed to evolutionary and dichotomic religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, where the ideal man is obliged to abandon house and worldly life, perform various austerities to attain salvation. Such men were known as *Yogis, Sanyasis* and *Siddhas*. He set himself apart from the crowd of quietistic *Sadhus, Bairagis* and *Udasis* who sought alienation from the world and its problems. The Guru says: "The *Yogi* practises *Yoga*; the householder enjoys things of the world. The ascetic practises austerities, bathing at sacred spots assiduously ... of no use is the body, wherein abides not the holy Name<sup>26</sup>". Guru rejects asceticism and monasticism and is opposed to renunciation in quest of the

Absolute. He says: "The Lord abides within, go not outside to seek Him. Why discarding *amrits dost* thou swallow poison of evil passions<sup>27</sup>"?

Guru Nanak advocates a whole-life religion like Judaism and Islam, it is life-affirming and optimistic in approach towards life. Guru insisted on a life of non-attachment. He says: "To abide undefiled amid maya – defilement, is the true way to attain success in *Yoga-praxis*<sup>28</sup>". He advocates, "To die while living – practise such *yoga*, As resounds the horn without blowing, Is attained the state of fearlessness<sup>29</sup>". He often quotes an example of the lotus that lives in water undetached and the duck that floats over the stream yet keeping the plumage dry, ready to take a flight away from the surface of water. He says, "Cursed be life devoted to gobbling food and adding bulk without devotion to holy Name, is man befriending his real foes<sup>30</sup>". The conception of salvation is a living reality and it can be achieved only when man is alive. It is this worldly achievement of an actual realism and can be had only through building up of *Naam* character, i.e. *Jiwan-Mukta*. "By lodging the Name in the mind is attained liberation while living<sup>31</sup>".

Guru Nanak rejects many tenets of then existing spiritual traditions. Guru Nanak recognizes not the concept of incarnation: For

Guru, God is both transcendent and immanent. He is the Creator and the world is His creation, which clearly implies that the religious man has to lead a life of creativity and activity. For Guru Nanak, there is only one true object of worship, only one God, that all other gods and goddesses are not just secondary but absolutely false. He says: "None is real, eternal; Neither deities nor demons nor humans; Neither *Yogis*, nor *Yoga* practitioner, nor earth itself. Thou Lord, alone art eternal; None but Thou<sup>32</sup>". Again he says, "All of us being, under the earth shall go – Holy men, divines, kings; All must go; God alone shall abide. Thou Lord, alone art eternal; none but Thou<sup>33</sup>".

Guru Nanak does not regard this world as *maya* or an illusion but as real and recognizes the importance of virtuous deeds. In traditional Indian philosophy, *maya* occupies an important place, without which the process of phenomenal creation cannot take place, but to Guru *maya* is the veil, the scam over the surface of the pure sheet of water, the dust obscuring the surface of the mirror of the soul. Guru says: "True and holy are Thy continents and universes; True and holy are Thy worlds or the forms created by Thee<sup>34</sup>". Again "Revile not the world for anything – by the Lord is it created<sup>35</sup>". This world is the abode of truth and the true one resideth in it. Man is not a born sinner, he has the divine in him. Human life is the rare boon to attain individual

salvation, to attain the status of what Guru Nanak calls '*sachiar*', a God-oriented person who does not live in the mystical bliss but maintains a state of *sahaj* or equipoise to bring about social transformation. It rejects the ideal of renunciation so fervently advocated by the Indian spiritual tradition.

Guru Nanak accords sanctity to the householder's life and recognizes the role of woman as a mother, consort and the mistress of the household, for Sikhism recognizes the householder's life as of prime importance. Woman is not given a secondary and inferior role as a temptress, an unholy vessel as is found in the Indian tradition. Indra seduces Ahilya, Gautama turns her into stone, Yudhishtira plays dice, Draupadi pays the price; Rama returns from exile to rule, Sita is forced to second exile. What justice to the mother of the human race? While *Bhaktas* shunned her as a temptress and Kabir believed her to be a cobra, Guru Nanak recognizes her creative and constructive role in effecting the social salvation which was the object of his divinely ordained mission. It was indeed a unique and revolutionary step on the stagnant spiritual scene.

It is difficult to accept Sikhism as a reformed version of Hinduism. The learned Jewish scholars have demonstrated that many or most of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the gospels are recorded



in Hebrew writings, as the saying of one or the other of the great rabbis, but this does not alter the fact that the structure of even primitive Christian thought is entirely distinct from that of Judaism. Whatever, Islam may have incorporated of earlier religious ideas, does not alter the fact that the religious attitudes expressed in and mediated by the *Koran* constituted a new and distinctive religious structure. Similarly, Sikhism may have been influenced by the existing traditions and religions, but the fact remains that it is an entirely a unique and revolutionary religion and “qualitatively different from Hinduism and other religions, philosophies and practices, both in metaphysical postulates and social dynamism<sup>36</sup>”.

*Guru Granth Sahib* strongly suggests that Sikhism should be regarded as a new and separate world religion<sup>37</sup> as it records the *bani* of the Gurus which is much more militant and sharp in social and political criticism. It also indicates the new process of reconstruction of religious thoughts stated by Guru Nanak which aimed at the spiritual rejuvenation, moral upliftment and social emancipation of people<sup>38</sup>. Guru Nanak wanted to root out all the impurities associated with worship and belief. Sikhism is a revealed religion and Guru Nanak meant to carry out the specific command of the Lord, Who is the Perfection Incarnate. Guru Nanak, the Prophet was the messenger of

God, who uttered what he received from this court. He tells Bhai Lalo: "O'Lalo, as I do receive the word of God so do I pass it on to you<sup>39</sup>". Again: "I say only that what you, my Lord, inspires me to say<sup>40</sup>". Thus, Guru Nanak, a minstrel of the Almighty, a bard of the Omnipotent God, came as His messenger to dispel the gloom of falsehood and show the path of inner purity and peace. Thus, he founded a new structure which was based on *Gurmat Advaita* supported by new socio-religious aspects, morality, thinking and *bhakti*.

From the very beginning, Guru Nanak exposes the religious hypocrisy and spiritual cant of both the Hindus and the Muslims, for they were quite alien to the spiritual ideal of their spiritual peers. Guru Nanak refused to wear the sacred thread and wanted to break away from the *Samskars* of the Hindu social order. He kept himself away from Brahminism, formalism and ritualism of the Hindu society. He even went out to preach his mission in Muslim countries, where he had to eat their food and drink their water, a practice which was strictly forbidden by the *Shashtras*. He exhibits a revolutionary trend of mind ignoring the petty differences of caste and creed and chose a muslim bard Mardana as one of his companions during this period.

Thus Guru Nanak received the divine mandate to propagate *naam* and create a new *panth*, which enjoys a unique status in the spiritual

history of the Indian subcontinent. Bhai Gurdas has categorically stated, "The Guru's Panth is distinct, and cannot be mixed with others<sup>41</sup>". It is fourth way of salvation, more instrumental and effective than any of the other three<sup>42</sup>. The *Panth* was a different religion and "an instrument or a vehicle for giving practical shape to Guru Nanak's prophetic, unitary view of life" and that the *Panth* was meant to pursue "the twin purpose of the transformation of man and transformation of society<sup>43</sup>".

Indian society was divided into two broad and significant compartments, the high and the low, the clean and the unclean, the godliness and the ghastliness. Guru Nanak wanted to replace this decadent self-destroying social order, with a social order which should be more vital in all spheres, one that fulfils the social, economic, intellectual and spiritual requirement. Guru Nanak had a clear social purpose in view and made a conscious effort and started his mission systematically. He suggested various ways and means in the form of institutions which were later organized by him during his life time. He realized, as Jagjit Singh says, that "A mere faith in any personal transcendental ethical God was not enough" and that "something more than that was needed<sup>44</sup>" to ameliorate the masses. His objective was

the attainment of the goal of an ideal personality through the cultivation of the essential attributes of God.

He wanted to bring the social and cultural transformations and provided guidance and help to produce a new society. Guru like any other Bhaktas and Sants of medieval India, was not content to express his opprobrium against the rigid caste ideology of the day. He designed to create a social order, where egalitarianism and justice could prevail. He came across people of different castes, creeds and denomination and his cross-cultural experience convinced him that for the transformation of man and society, there was a need to build a response of faith in his disciples, not by issuing commandments, but actually showing them the path of salvation. For this an organization in the form of institutions was required, because without the support and strength of the institutions, no ideology would assume a concrete and practical shape and permeate into the human psyche as a true reflect.

Guru Nanak reinterpreted religion as a new way of life in which asceticism, monasticism and escapism found no place. He looked to the whole of a person and of his society with no distinction between sacral and natural spheres, between a person's soul and his bodily life, between religious norms and social norms. He was of the view that religion must be capable of providing a harmonious life. He wanted to

bring overall change, a change from traditional society to a rational order. Guru Nanak felt that once rationality was established and innovation was accepted, all economic, social, spiritual, cultural, intellectual and political improvements would naturally follow. This was, in fact, the emancipation of mankind from a long and mostly irrational dark past. The rigid institutions were obstacles in the way. So he realized that to emancipate human mind, to open new path, to provide new opportunities, new institutions are to be set to help man to hasten the process. He gave new direction to man's life and brought together the spiritual and the empirical realms of human existence into a healthy and harmonious whole. In Teja Singh's words, "The religion Guru Nanak founded was not to remain content with the salvation of a few individuals. It had noble potentials in it which could help to organize itself as a world force and evolve as a living and energetic society for the upliftment of mankind<sup>45</sup>".

Guru Nanak laid down the foundation of the new religious and social institutions for the development and growth of his ideology. To implement the true cardinal principles, *kirat karo* (work), *naam japo* (worship) and *wand chhako* (sharing), he reorganized distinct socio-economic institutions. The most important feature of Sikh social life is dignity of labour, which was not much recognized in Hindu community

where honest labour was looked down upon with more or less contempt. It gave birth to begging which affected the lives of its inhabitants. For Guru Nanak, cult of the work was more important than even meditation. When he settled at Kartarpur and put aside all garments of renunciation, he "found time" says Macauliffe "to attend to agriculture<sup>46</sup>". Bhai Gurdas also writes: "Then Baba returns to Kartarpur where he put aside his attire of a recluse. He put on householder's dress and sat splendidly on a cot<sup>47</sup>" and executed his mission.

Guru Nanak refuted the existing three *margas* of salvation: *Gyan*, *Karma* and *Bhakti* and advocated *Naam marga*. He set aside the authority of the *Vedas*: "*Vedas* and the *Koran* His mystery have not unravelled<sup>48</sup>". Knowledge brings egoism or *haumai*, which is detrimental to spiritual evolution. *Karma* theory was also set aside by him as it promotes individualism. The notion of *Karma* teaches a Hindu that he is born in a particular sub-caste, because he deserves to be born there and is asked to accept his lot, while in Guru's philosophy, *Karma* becomes absolutely extinguishable by the grace of God. In *Japuji* he says that by man's action is acquired the vesture of human incarnation; by God's grace is attained the door of liberation<sup>49</sup>. Again, Guru says, "Approval or rejection by God comes from each one's

actions. Those who meditating on God have earned merit through hard endeavours – says Nanak – their faces are radiant with the divine light: many shall find release through them<sup>50</sup>” Again he says, “Liberation from the bondage of transmigration comes by His grace. None in this can intercede<sup>51</sup>”. Similarly for Guru Nanak, meditation alone could not help man attain higher life for the individual.

Guru Nanak thus emphasized *Naam marga*. His purpose was to make others perfect like Him. Guru says in *Japuji*, “Filth on hands, feet and body may with water be washed off; clothes fouled by dirt may with soap be washed; the mind, fouled by sin and evil, may only with devotion to God be cleansed<sup>52</sup>”. Again: “By devotion to the Name is annulled suffering of birth and death; And liberation attained<sup>53</sup>”. Guru also favoured sharing of the fruit of his labour with his neighbour and a Sikh should not accumulate wealth and exploit others for it. Guru took care that his creed should be well-defined and they should not be confused with beliefs and practices of other religions. To give practical shape to his vision, he established institutions so that a life-affirming, vital society could be organized in which people would live according to ideals laid by Nanak himself.

During his missionary travels wherever he went he suggested a methodology in the form of institutions through which man could raise

and enhance the quality of his life and could participate in the social life. He held regular congregations and asked his followers to form *Sangats*. It was a system in which each individual could work for his salvation along with like-minded individuals and this was indeed a call for unity on spiritual and social basis. *Sangat* was considered an embodiment of the Guru's spirit, where efforts were made by the seeker to learn to contemplate in the din of the work-a-day world. The neophyte was prepared for corporate life and communion with the essence of reality and to overcome desire for worldly temptations. It brought a structural change in social and mental set up of man and a real brotherhood, based on egalitarian principles was created.

Guru also established *Dharmsal* as centre of a new society as the untouchables were denied access to temples. *Dharmsal* literally means a place for practice of Dharma and righteousness. Guru Nanak regards this world as *Dharm sala*: "The world is, in its essence a spiritual and moral order, i.e. *Dharm sal*<sup>54</sup>". He gave a congregational mode of worship in the *Dharm sal* in place of individual worship of Hindus. Thus, Guru Nanak prevented the social conflict in society and promoted the feeling of friendliness and goodwill. It shows that Guru Nanak was bent upon creating a society of men who would rise above their



individual limited existence. Guru left behind him *Sangat* with a place for regular or periodical socio-religious meetings of his group.

Guru also laid the foundation of *Langar*, which was in itself revolutionary in his times, where all could sit together to eat. It swept the old caste barrier and the concept of pollution. Guru Nanak used the term '*Deg*' in *Guru Granth Sahib* to denote the infinite generosity of earth, that sustains and nourishes every creature living on it. Guru made these free kitchens open to all and became a succour of the destitute. It also provided an avenue for *sewa*, which is an essential institution. Bhai Gurdas says: "Guru Nanak put the prince and the pauper on the same footing and propagated the rule of humility in the world<sup>55</sup>". Thus Guru Nanak envisioned an egalitarian order with its distinct organization and institutions to bring equality among the masses and promised them a spiritual perspective where men could walk like angels on the earth with a distinct spiritual identity of their own.

Finally, Guru started the institution of succession, for he knew his ideals required to be nurtured, motivated and developed. Guru was essential as it provided the spiritual knowledge to an individual and dispel darkness from his mind. Being a teacher, he wanted his disciples to be guided. As the seeker required special efforts and training for the

practice of *Naam* and it was Guru who could indicate the path of supreme bliss. Guru could initiate him and recommend constant repetition of the divine *Naam*. Guru Nanak says: "None else His state and extent knows – without guidance of the Master comes not such realization<sup>56</sup>" Again: "By grace of the holy preceptor are discovered in the self, Treasure-houses of jewels, without the masters guidance none has these obtained<sup>57</sup>".

Guru Nanak, thus, identified the task and created institutions and entrusted his task to a successor so that a proper and functional organization could be developed. His successor was to devise practical responses according to the gravity of the challenges. Guru Nanak's twin mission of spreading *Naam* and establishing Panth was carried on by his successors till it culminated in the emergence of the Khalsa. It was a mission of setting a new social order, based on revolutionary lines, opposed to the existing religious systems and their otiose traditions. Guru Nanak set up institutions diametrically opposed to the existing ones and handed over his missionary obligations to his successor whom he christened 'Angad' a part of his ownself, and thus appointed his successor to carry on the activities and run institutions established by him. Thus, "the revolutionary factor of Sikhism is contained in its institutions<sup>58</sup>".

With these institutions Guru Nanak reconstructed the society and made men truthful, pure and co-operative. Institutions also provided new dimensions to the religion as it clearly defines that Sikh goal is not merely a mystical quest, but it “must fulfil its obligatory social function... It must uplift man both individually and socially and enable him to grapple with the practical issues of life<sup>59</sup>”. Thus, institutions cater to the individual and the corporate, for in Sikhism, individual salvation alone is not enough. Social emancipation is more important than personal liberation.

The religious institutions created by Guru Nanak have proved of lasting significance in the history of India. While other Bhakta sects ultimately lost their sway and their identity in Hinduism, Sikhism acquired a distinct identity as a religion because of its distinct and original institutions. Thus Guru Nanak “presented a religion totally unaffected by semitic or Christian influences. Based on the concept of the unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalism and adopted an independent ethical system, rituals and standards which were totally opposed to the theoretical beliefs of Guru Nanak’s age and country<sup>60</sup>”

In the context of Guru Nanak’s mission and message, Sikh institutions acquire prime significance for their originality and

revolutionary nature, and, therefore, form the purpose of the present study. These institutions, therefore, are the major thematic concerns of the next chapter.

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## Chapter-III

### ***SANGAT***

While the preceding chapter was devoted to the exposition of the mission of Guru Nanak, i.e. his aim of organizing a society and building a new social order based on justice and equality as an alternative to the caste-ridden social set up of the day, the chapter under study attempts to discuss how he preferred practice to precept and laid the foundation of the basic institutions to carry out his mission. These institutions evolved their own ethos on which was based the code of conduct which every Sikh was enjoined to accept in life. Gone were the superstitions, rituals, customs, notions of pollution and purity, which were so deeply engraved in the Indian psyche. Guru Nanak, established the authority of his doctrines and started a new religion devoid of any impurity, which was altogether a new way of life. Bhai Gurdas aptly says: "*Nanak nirmal panth chalaya or Panth nirala*<sup>1</sup>". Again he says: "He took birth in the iron age and rejected all the six philosophies and founded a spiritual kingdom in the citadel of truth with powerful foundation<sup>2</sup>". This chapter is focussed on the

important institution of *Sangat* which has played the stellar role in the transformation of Sikhism.

## I

Guru Nanak's apprehension of the Ultimate Reality brought great tidings to the common man who found it difficult to leave his hearth and home to practise austerities in some recondite hermitage in a dense forest far away from the din of the madding crowd. Man need not don the saffron robe and with a begging bowl in hand drift from door to door for food and sustenance. In the outlook of Guru Nanak, such a man was no more than a parasite who lived on the earnings of others. In his *Siddha Gosht*, he admonished the *yogis* who, on the one hand stressed renunciation, and on the other, went to the house holder to beg for alms. Guru Nanak says: "Neither in the patched quilt, nor the staff, nor in smearing with ashes the limbs, lies yoga. Nor lies it in ear rings, or cropping close the hair, or in blowing the horn; To live pure amid impurities of the world – thus is the yoga way attained<sup>3</sup>". About *Sanyasi* he says: "One renouncing desire is the true *Sanyasi*, From continence comes true joy of living in the body<sup>4</sup>". Similarly, *Bairagi* is defined as the "one who in the holy Name is dyed, that is, immersed<sup>5</sup>".

Guru Nanak, thus, favoured the life of a house holder. In his estimation, Bhai Lalo was far more worthy than a solitary recluse who is afraid of the world and its allurements and runs away from it, in search of some heaven where the passional propensities no longer tease him out of his meditative thoughts. Guru says: "True Siddhas, yoga practitioners, yogis and itinerant mendicants are those, that on the sole conferrer of attainments have meditated. Those getting realization, (the word) touch the Lord's feet and attain union<sup>6</sup>".

Guru Nanak's spiritual ideal was, therefore, of universal significance. He brought wisdom from cave and hermitage and scattered it in the streets for the common man to pick up to sanctify his day to day life. He wanted to see the presence of the divine in each heart, for he believed that all were children of the same father and rejected the concept of the chosen one and also the esoteric cults which felt shy of sharing their wisdom with the common rung of mankind. He wished to reform all the social patterns in accordance with demand set up by religion and to build revolutionary religious institutions. It shows that "his view of society emanates from the same integrated vision that constitutes his view of God, universal man and humanity<sup>7</sup>"..

Wherever the Guru went, he spoke in the spiritual idiom of the people he conversed with. In order to recognise the religious unity, the intervening period of Guru Nanak's *udasis* was a time when his hymns were memorized and recited by the Sikhs at some chosen place of the area. This gathering for the purpose of fulfilling the master's mandate gave birth to the institution of *Sangat*, where the process of transmission of his teachings took a specific turn. Guru established a religious group of responsible individuals who were common people and all were essentially equal in status. The responsibility was undertaken by the *Sangat* as a body, and all members were called on individually to support. Everyone ought to live his spiritual life entirely within its norms. In this way, a new community was built up.

To achieve the ideal of beautiful living, Guru Nanak's most coveted goal, there had to be, "a distinct orientation and education in creating a new attitude towards social life<sup>8</sup>". Guru's command was that they all should live harmoniously and worship together and also see that right and justice should prevail among all human beings. For that, he gave a total orientation to build a godly life, emphasized personal relationship within the group and wanted that there should be a cultural homogeneity within the groups. It shows that, "the Guru seems to be in favour of a system in which each individual is enabled

to work out his salvation in collaboration with the like-minded individuals, composing a society of sages (*Sadh Sangat*)<sup>9</sup>”.

## II

To establish an egalitarian order, based on the twin principles of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, it was essential to create a new society far from the existing social set up circumscribed by the *Varna Ashrama* constrictions. *Sangat* was the first step taken by Nanak for the fulfilment of his divine mission. Says Bhai Gurdas: “Guru Nanak laid the foundation of the abode of truth in the form of *Sangat*, where he preached to all the four Varnas<sup>10</sup>”. The individual psyche receives stimulus in a gathering of like-minded persons. Jagjit Singh rightly says: “An assembly of like-minded, pious and truthful people provides each one of us the right environment for spiritual growth<sup>11</sup>”. In the *Sangat*, there prevails a spiritual aura, the collective psychic consciousness, where the wayward, individual consciousness that wanders like a wayward elephant, gets purified and returns to the Guru’s feet and attains a kind of spiritual fixation.

In the Indian tradition, the *samitis* and *sabhas* are as old as the Vedic times. The *Rig Veda* as well as the *Atharva* spell their roles which were mainly of advisory nature so far as the *samities* were

concerned and *sabhas* also performed the adjudicatory roles in rural societies. But the concept of *Sangat* has spiritual ramifications. It had its origin in *sadh Sangat* – a holy assembly. Guru Nanak defines *sat Sangat* as: “The society, where the name of one God alone is mentioned<sup>12</sup>”. Again, “Those resorting to the holy congregation are of blessed birth; One devoted to the holy master is in truth an anchorite while keeping a household. Such live dyed in ecstasy of God’s love, Their hearts satiated with joy in the Lord<sup>13</sup>”. *Sadh Sangat* is the congregation where the name of God is repeated. Guru Arjan described *Sangat* as a place of shelter, he says: “In holy company fall under His shelter; your mind and body before Him place<sup>14</sup>” This *Sangat* is the coterie of individuals who share spiritual affinities and hail one another ‘*Bhai*’ which means ‘brother’ – one who shares the same belief. Bhai Gurdas said: “The Guru merged himself in the *Sangat* and made his disciples like himself<sup>15</sup>”. Again, “It is an abode of truth where the formless one resides in the form of word<sup>16</sup>”. The term ‘*sadh*’ acquires the profound meaning when it is associated with *Sangat*. Bhai Kahan Singh defines ‘*sadh*’ as a “person who has subdued desire, controlled the mind and is deeply absorbed in divine vision<sup>17</sup>”.

In the company of *Sangat*, devotion to the Guru is inculcated. Bhai Gurdas says: “Through loving devotion, they meet the Lord<sup>18</sup>”. It

became a medium of spiritual communication and proved of infinite social and cultural value in later times. Bhagat Singh rightly says that, apart from religious purposes, "matters of common interest were not excluded from its deliberations<sup>19</sup>".

*Sangat*, moreover, acted as a great leveller, for persons, irrespective of caste and creed, social rank and position, were received with love and joy as fellow questers on pilgrimage to the realm of truth. *Sangat* immensely contributed towards welding the Sikhs into a closely knit and united body. The institution of *Sangat* proved of immense value in evolving the Sikh community as a casteless society. The evaluation of this institution ultimately gave birth to concepts like *pangat* and *Langar* which led to the emergence of the Sikh community as a nation. Says Ganda Singh: "The subsequent history of the Sikh community stabilized into *Sangats* and prepared for its development into a distinct nationality under the succeeding Gurus<sup>20</sup>". For it led to the concept of *Panth* and later on to the creation of *Khalsa*. At another place, Ganda Singh goes a step further: "The organization of the *Dal Khalsa* and the republican nature of the Sikh *Misals* during the eighteenth century also had their birth in the *Sangat*<sup>21</sup>".

### III

To practise godliness, *Sangat* was the right assemblage and right environment. It was a form of mint where was forged the ideal human conduct that would lead to God-orientation. All falsehood of flesh and mind would burn away and truth alone would survive. Bhai Gurdas says: "Dirt of sins is cleansed here and he wins the grace of Lord<sup>22</sup>". *Haumai*, the greatest stumbling block on way to spiritual realization loses its hold and is replaced by meekness and humility greatly extolled by Guru Nanak as the cardinal virtues in man. Guru says: "Whoever seeks good repute to gather, In holy company his egoism must discard<sup>23</sup>". Again; "Pre-eminent among men is the person, whose egotism in holy company is effaced<sup>24</sup>".

Again: "one may indulge in a million feats of cleverness, And with millions make alliances: Without holy company comes not fulfilment; Without the *Name* goes not torment of suffering<sup>25</sup>".

Death of the ego would mean awakening of the somnolent soul. The slumbering self gets the rude shake when the hymns sung in *Sangat* reverberate in the human mind and their resonance and vibration stir the sleeping soul. Bhai Gurdas rightly says: "By becoming dead in life they meet the Guru in *Sangat* and become humble<sup>26</sup>". The Guru



says, "Join the company of the holy; in company of the holy, shall be obtained joy in the Lord<sup>27</sup>". Guru Arjan enumerates the advantages of *sadh Sangat*: "In the company of the saints, the soul attains happiness, man acquires all virtues, gets a glimpse of God, his mind gets peace, reaches the height of the spirit, enters the Lord's presence and is granted His Name<sup>28</sup>".

Wherever, Guru Nanak went, he established *Sangats* and appointed his nominees to spread his message. This organizational step strengthened the Sikh faith outside Punjab and led to the evolution of Sikh identity. Each *Sangat* was placed under the stewardship of a devout and dedicated Sikh. Teja Singh says: "Bhai Lalo was the first one to be appointed to preach in the North and Sheikh Sajjan in the South-West of Punjab<sup>29</sup>" and enumerates many other places where *Sangats* were established by Guru Nanak and his successors in and outside India. According to Teja Singh, most prominent among these *Sangats* were:

Gopal Das in Benares, Jhanda Badi in Bushair, Budhan Shah in Kiratpur, Mahi in Mahisar, Kaljug, a priest's son in Jagannath Puri, Devlut in Lushai (Tibet), Salis Rai in Patna and Raja Shivnabh in Ceylon<sup>30</sup>.

After his *udasis* when Guru Nanak took off the garb of a wandering minstrel of the Almighty Lord and donned the ordinary

raiment of a householder, he established a *Sangat* at Kartarpur<sup>31</sup>. Bhai Gurdas states the daily routine of the *Sangat* and the recitation of different hymns gave birth to Sikh ritualism and mode of worship<sup>32</sup>. Sewa Dass states: "The Sikhs met early morning and recited *Japji* and *Asa di Var*. In the evening, *Rahras* was read and at night *Kirtan Sohila* was read before going to sleep. Twice a day *Langar* was served. Later on this pattern was followed by all the *Sangats*<sup>33</sup>".

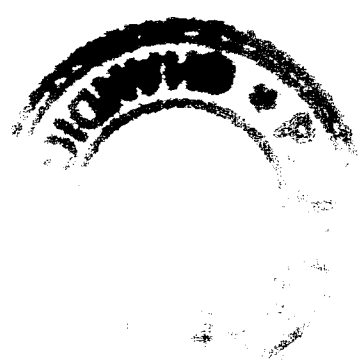
The membership of *Sangat* was open to one and all. It was truly egalitarian in spirit. It was like the house of God whose portals open in all four directions as Guru Nanak has already demonstrated at Mecca. Sir Charles Wilkinson, the author of *Sikhs and Their College at Patna* (1781) visited Patna Sahib and asked the sewadars if he could "ascend to the hall" They said, "it was the place of worship open to me and all men<sup>34</sup>".

Guru Angad improved upon his master's system and strengthened the institution of *Sangat* at Khadoor Sahib, where *Asa di Var* was recited to the accompaniment of the music of Satta and Balwand and, "instructions were imparted by the Guru<sup>35</sup>". The following of the Sikh gurus began to increase day by day and during Guru Amar Das's tenure, the society was further strengthened when Guru abolished the religious and social customs of Hindus. The number

swelled to such an extent even in far-flung areas that a need was felt to administer them in the spirit of Sikh Faith. To supervise the Sikh *Sangat* effectively, Guru Amar Das established twenty-two *manjis* and fifty-two *piris*. Each *manji* was under the charge of a devout and dependable disciple of the Guru and in Guru's absence was expected to discharge all obligations enjoined by the master. According to G.C.Narang, this arrangement went "a long way in strengthening the foundations of Sikh Church and in carrying on the propaganda in different parts of the country<sup>36</sup>".

To collect offerings from different *Sangats*, Guru Arjan introduced the *masand* system. The *masands* would collect tithes and other gifts offered by the devout to the Guru and render the account of these collections to the Guru in the month of *Baisakh* every year. Mohsin Fani gives us information about "the appointment of *masands* in every town and about collecting offerings from the Sikhs<sup>37</sup>". He often quotes that Sikhism was developing as a separate religion.

During Guru Arjun's tenure, the movement spread to the rural areas and number of *Jats* embraced the new faith. The Sikh *Sangat* on festival days – Baisakhi and Divali would come from far and near to have a holy glimpse of their master and precious offerings like carpets and horses of rare breed would come from Kabul and Qandhar.



Amritsar would vibrate with activities as *Sangat* of all hues and shades would lend lustre to the court of their Guru. Guru Hargobind undertook extensive missionary travels upto Kashmir in the North and established *Sangat* wherever he stayed. At his behest, *Akal Takht* was raised by the *Sangat* and it became a symbol of Sikh service and the whole-hearted dedication to the immortal Lord.

*Sewa* in Sikhism is of primary importance. The *Sangat* is expected to gladly perform all kinds of chores at the Guru's place. Hewing of wood, drawing of water from the well early in the morning for Sikhs to bathe and cooking of food in the *Langar*, cleaning of utensils, were considered the greatest forms of worship. Every Sikh in the *Sangat* was enjoined to take part in these manual activities. Greater importance was given to the dusting of the shoes of *Sangat*, for it generated a sense of humility – one of the greatest virtues extolled by Guru Nanak who called himself the lowliest of the low. *Sangats* also gladly participated in any construction work undertaken by the Guru. It was the loving support of the Sikh *Sangat* that enabled Guru Arjan to found towns like Sri Hargobindpur, Tarn Taran, Kartarpur and tanks and temples at Amritsar, Tarn Taran and *Bauli* in the Dabbi Bazar in Lahore. In Christianity the way of Martha is considered as efficacious as that of Mary to attain salvation. Similarly, in Sikhism the

way of works is no less important than the way of meditation. In this way "Guru's control over the entire Sikh organization of the *Sangat* through the *masands* ensured the solidarity of the Sikh community<sup>38</sup>". *Simran* and *sewa* cater to the enlightenment of one's soul as well as to the well-being of the community.

Guru Arjan's martyrdom at the hands of the bat-eyed Muslim orthodoxy raised the question of self-defence so far as the Sikh identity and its institutions were concerned. Though Sikhism, like Islam was essentially a missionary religion, it never evolved any coercion like the importance of *Jehad* in Islam, where the Prophet enjoins its followers to resort to *Jehad* to convert infidels into the Islamic fold. It is this concept that accounts for the rise of the crescent from Bengal to Spain. In the context of prevailing persecution, the Sikh *Sangats* were obliged to assume certain additional responsibilities. It was a question of self-preservation against the bigoted and tyrannous rule. For this purpose, "*Masands* were commanded to bring offerings of arms and horses instead of money<sup>39</sup>". The Sikh Gurus in their entire history never had had any political motive to wrest any territory as has been wrongly interpreted by some historians. If they rose in arms against the tyranny of the day, it was to protect their Dharma and its rising institutions.

Gradually, Sikh *Sangat* acquired enough power and could influence decisions concerning the matters of the faith. Kesar Singh Chhibber testifies how “The *Sangat* of Baba Bakala declares Guru Tegh Bahadur as the ninth Guru<sup>40</sup>”. Guru Tegh Bahadur took extensive tours in the East upto Dhaka and Assam. This is quite evident from the *hukamnamas* he wrote to *sangats*, especially the *sangat* of Patna to look after his infant son and the family<sup>41</sup>.

Moreover, the *sangat* gradually acquired an aura of sanctity. Bhai Gurdas had earlier said: “One disciple is a single Sikh. Two form a holy association, but where there are five present, there is God himself<sup>42</sup>”. Guru Ram Das has observed, “The Guru is a Sikh and the Sikh who practises the Guru’s word is at one with the Guru<sup>43</sup>”. Guru Gobind Singh baptised the five beloved ones and created the *Khalsa*. He set a unique example in the history of religions of mankind by praying to his disciples to initiate him into the *Khalsa* fold and bowing before his baptised five, he sought *Khande de Pahul* from them. The *Khalsa Panth* became the embodiment of the tenth master. Says Teja Singh: “Now after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the personality and the word were separated. The Panth was invested with the personality of the Guru and the incorporated word become the Gyan Guru<sup>44</sup>”. Bhagat Singh explains the point more explicitly:

On the one hand *Sangat* identifies the Guru with God and on the other he identifies the *Sangat* with the Guru. In this way, a divine character is attributed to the collective body of the *Sangat* which became sacrosanct and authoritative for the individual members of the congregation. The *Sangat* played a vital role in the integration of the community<sup>45</sup>”.

Thus Guru Nanak created response to challenges of Hindu *Varna Ashrama* that stressed rigid casteism and Muslim orthodoxy that believed in coercion and persecution and proved effective in the establishment of *Sangat* that grew from strength to strength and culminated in the creation of the *Khalsa* – a casteless order of saint-soldiers who represented the spirit of the Guru and worshipped Shabad-Guru as their eternal preceptor. As a sign that the Guru has placed himself eternally in his Sikhs, it was declared by him :

Let him that wishes to see me go to an assembly of Sikhs and approach them with faith and reverence; He will surely see me amongst them<sup>46</sup>.

## IV

*Kirtan* was an inseparable part of the *Sangat* established by Guru Nanak, wherever he went. Before he set out on his *udasis*, he asked Bhai Pharinda at Sultanpur to make a rebeck for him. This musical instrument he handed over to Bhai Mardana, his life long companion

during his travels over land and sea. Whenever the prophetic inspiration would inspire Guru Nanak, the minstrel of God, he would ask Bhai Mardana to touch the chord of his rebeck so that the Master might sing. His celestial strains melted the hearts of Kauda, the savage, and Sajjan, the hard-hearted *thug*, and they fell at the master's feet and converted their homes into *Dharmshals* to gather the devotees to sing the praises of the Lord. This music disarmed the charms of *Kamrup* woman; it melted many an obdurate heart to follow Baba Nanak's way.

In fact, music has been the soul of spirituality. It touches the dormant spiritual sensibility and awakens it to listen to the music of spheres – the *anhad nad*. The psalm singing of the Christians, the hymn singing of the Hindus, the mantra-intoning of the Buddhists and the frantic music of the Sufi saints – all have one thing in common - they rouse the spirit, they become one with the music and experience the state of bliss. Guru Nanak acknowledges that he is a bard of the Lord:

I was a minstrel out of work, the Lord gave me employment. The mighty one instructed me: night and day, sing my praise – the Lord did to summon this minstrel. To His Court High: On me he bestowed the robe of honour<sup>47</sup>. Again: Nanak utters what the Lord inspires<sup>48</sup>. Nanak utters the word of truth – truth he utters; truth



the time calls for<sup>49</sup>. Himself doing all, all to Him is known – thus is the bard Nanak's utterance<sup>50</sup>. To Bhai Lalo: O'Lalo, as I receive the word of the Lord, so do I utter<sup>51</sup>.

As Lord's poet, Nanak would sing spontaneously songs in praise of God and to that Bhai Mardana would provide celestial strains. *Sangat* would listen to Guru's hymns in rapt attention and many a sensitive, devoted soul would visit the realm of truth. So *Kirtan* acquires prominence in the Sikh *Sangat*. *Shabad Kirtan* enlightened and enraptured the *Sangat*. Bhai Gurdas testifies: "Gurbani is sung in congregation<sup>52</sup>". Guru said, "In the company of saints, all heard songs of rejoicing. In the company of saints, by our good fortune, we encounter the Lord<sup>53</sup>". Laudation of the Lord's merit is my treasure<sup>54</sup>. By laudation of the holy Eternal, Is attained joy in the Lord<sup>55</sup>.

*Kirtan* concretizes the concept of collectivism and, therefore, an expression of corporate worship. It was the principle of learning and reinforcing the Guru's teachings concerning the divine name. It was a nursery rhyme in the Guru's school to re-orient the minds towards God. Guru Arjan said: "In my mind, I cherish a keen desire that I may get up and make efforts every day: O'Nanak, friend bless me so that I may remain engaged in singing the Lord's praises<sup>56</sup>". Again, the Guru says, that the place where congregation was held and *Kirtan* recited

becomes pious and is linked to heaven, "Heaven is where is Thy laudation sung<sup>57</sup>".

*Kirtan* in *Sangat* produces a spiritual atmosphere which brings the participants in holy communion. It has become an integral part of the Sikh ritualism and takes place at the time of all Sikh social ceremonies concerning birth, initiation, marriage and death. In any function, where the *Guru Granth Sahib* is present, *Kirtan* becomes an essential part of the ceremony. The Guru has said: "In Kalyuga, the *Kirtan* is supreme". So the highest deed is the singing of the Lord's praises and in the company of *Sadh Sangat* and considered as the sole form of worship. It weans the weary self away from tinsel and tawdry of the material world and enables it to hold a communion with the divine and experiences *ananda* and *santi*, the *summum bonum* of light.

Thus, *Sangat* clearly connotes that salvation cannot be achieved without participation in the *sadh Sangat*. The true spiritual progress is promoted through *satsang*: "In the vast majority of the cases, spiritual awakening is brought about through *satsang* or the company of the holy" for "the touch of divine light is lit by contact with the spirit of flame" and the soul in bondage to brute things becomes free and soars "heavenwards from a liberated and highly evolved personality with magnetic attractions<sup>58</sup>". From this it follows that, "Sikhism regards a

co-operative society as the only truly religious society. It conceived the religious evolution of man as a necessary and integral pre-requisite and condition of its march towards the ideal society<sup>59</sup>".

The place where the *Sangat* was held came to be known as *dharmsal*. The erection of *dharmsal* became an object of supreme importance for the Sikh gurus, for wherever the *Sangat* was to be established a *dharmsal* was essential for the gathering, so the establishment of *Sangat* led to the institution of *dharmsal* which forms the subject of analysis in the next chapter.

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- <sup>1</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 1, Pauri 45, Var 1, Pauri 31.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., Var 1, Pauri 23.
- <sup>3</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 1, p. 730.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., Raga Asa, Mohalla 1, p. 356.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., Raga Majh, Mohalla 3, p. 112.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., Raga Ramkali, Mohalla 1, p. 878.
- <sup>7</sup>Dhillon, Gurdarshan Singh, Concept of social responsibility in *Guru Granth Sahib*. In the *Journal of Religious Studies*, 1997, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 56.
- <sup>8</sup>Daljit Singh, *Sikhism*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1994, p. 241.
- <sup>9</sup>Wazir Singh, *Humanism of Guru Nanak : A Philosophical Enquiry*, Ess Publications, Delhi, 1977, p. 169.
- <sup>10</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 24, Pauri 2.
- <sup>11</sup>Jasjit Singh, Importance of *Sadh Sangat*. In *The Sikh Review*, July 1999, Calcutta, p. 17.
- <sup>12</sup>S.G.G.S., Sri Raga, Mohalla 1, p. 72.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., Raga Majh, Mohalla 3, p. 127.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., Raga Gauri, Mohalla 5, p. 191.
- <sup>15</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 13, Pauri 2.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., Var 39, Pauri 13.
- <sup>17</sup>Kahn Singh, Bhai, *Mahan Kosh*, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, 1986, p. 126.

<sup>18</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 7, Pauri 20.

<sup>19</sup>Bhagat Singh, The role of *Sangat* in the development of Sikh community. In *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1968, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup>Ganda Singh, Editorial in *Sources on the Life and Teachings of Guru Nanak*, Quincentenary Volume, *The Punjab Past and Present*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup>Ganda Singh, Guru Nanak's Impact on History. In *Guru Nanak*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1969, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 2, Pauri 16.

<sup>23</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Gauri, Mohalla 5, p. 266.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Sri Raga, Mohalla 1, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 16, Pauri 19.

<sup>27</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Kanara, Mohalla 4, p. 1309.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Gauri Sukhmani, Mohalla 5, p. 371.

<sup>29</sup>Teja Singh, *Sikhism : Ideals and Institutions*, Khalsa Brothers, Amritsar, 1978, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 24, Pauri 1.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., Var 40, Pauri 11.

<sup>33</sup>Sewa Das, *Parchian*, Edited Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, 1962, pp. 51-52.

- <sup>34</sup>Ganda Singh, Ed. *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Today and Tomorrow's Printers & Publishers, New Delhi, 1974, p. 7.
- <sup>35</sup>Sudarshan Singh, *Sikh Religion : Democratic Ideals and Institutions*, Orient Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1979, p. 70.
- <sup>36</sup>Narang, G.C., *Transformation of Sikhism*, New Book Society of India, New Delhi, 1960, p. 33.
- <sup>37</sup>Fani, Mohsin, *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, English translation, Irfan Habib, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, Ed. J.S.Grewal and Irfan Habib, Tulika, Indian History Congress, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 66-67.
- <sup>38</sup>Bhagat Singh, *The Role of Sangat in the Development of Sikh Community*, Op. Cit., 138.
- <sup>39</sup>McLeod, W.H., *Sikhism*, Penguin Book Ltd., London, 1997, p. 34.
- <sup>40</sup>Nayyar, G.S., *Bansavalinama – An Historical Analysis*. In the Proceedings of Punjab History Conference, 1983, Op. Cit., p. 116.,
- <sup>41</sup>Fauja Singh, Ed. *Hukamnamas : Sri Tegh Bahadur*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1976, p. 35.
- <sup>42</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 3, Pauri 2.
- <sup>43</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Asa, Mohalla 4, p. 442.
- <sup>44</sup>Teja Singh, *Sikhism : Its Ideals and Institutions*, Op. Cit., p. 25.
- <sup>45</sup>Bhagat Singh, *The Role of Sangat in the Development of Sikh Community*, Op. Cit., p. 133.
- <sup>46</sup>Teja Singh, *Sikhism : Its Ideals and Institutions*, Op. Cit., p. 28.
- <sup>47</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Majh, Mohalla 1, p. 150.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., Raga Parbhati, Mohalla 1, p. 1331.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., Raga Telang, Mohalla 1, p. 723.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., Raga Asa, Mohalla 1, p. 434.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., Raga Telang, Mohalla 1, p. 722.

<sup>52</sup>Gurdas, Bhai, Var 28, Pauri 15.

<sup>53</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 4, p. 774.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., Raga Gauri, Mohalla 5, p. 213.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 5, p. 749.

<sup>58</sup>Gurmukh Nihal Singh, *Sikhism in the Age of Science and Socialism*,  
In the *Punjab Past and Present*, Op. Cit., 1977, p. 146.

<sup>59</sup>Kapur Singh, *Sikhism for Modern Man*, Ed. Madanjit Kaur and Piar  
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133-139.

## Chapter-IV

### ***DHARAMSAL***

The society which Guru Nanak had evolved needed to be shaped on separate ideological lines and to be moulded into a permanent community for its everlasting effect. The institution of *Sangat* is closely interlinked to that of *Dharmasal*, for a place was needed for the congregation, where they could learn Gurbani, repeat *Naam* and recite *Kirtan*. Wherever Guru went, he left clear instructions to his disciples to build institutions such as *Dharmasals*.

#### I

In the Sikh world-view, the human birth has been extolled as a rare boon of the Almighty Lord. Man is at the highest rung of the evolutionary ladder. Guru Arjan says: " For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births an insect, for several births a fish, animal... after ages have you the glory of being man<sup>1</sup>". Again "Among eighty-four lakhs of species, man is assigned the supreme position, whosoever misses the opportunity, suffers the pain of



transmigration<sup>2</sup>". The Guru exhorts man to make the best use of his human birth: "You have obtained the privilege of the human body, and now is your opportunity to meet God<sup>3</sup>". Human birth on this earth is like a pilgrimage and man's earthly sojourn a pilgrim's stay in an inn, a dharamsala, from where he is to continue his journey for the other shore. Human life is a state of probation to perform righteous deeds to seek liberation from the inexorable law of *Karma*. Dharamsal, therefore acquires a symbolic mode – a place not for mere rest and victuals but for the performance of noble actions in accordance with the ethical code evolved by the founder of the faith. In fact, in setting of *dharamsal*, the creative vision of Guru Nanak found concrete expression. It is a faith that teaches optimism and exhorts us not to leave the *dharmasal* as the penitents of the past but the pilgrims of the future.

Dharamsal thus plays a pivotal role in the regeneration of a neophyte Sikh, for it is closely associated with *sangat* which is Guru Nanak's school for moulding the personality of his Sikhs. During his *Udasis*, wherever Guru Nanak stayed, he asked his fervent followers to establish *sangats* to practise *Naam* and perform *Kirtan* after him. In fact, the concept of *sangat* was the first concrete step Guru Nanak took to break-away from the caste-ridden Hindu religion, for, to quote

Max Weber, Hinduism is exclusive in the sense that in no other way (except by being born to Hindu parents) can the individual enter its community<sup>4</sup>. It shows that Hindu religion has no congregation. In *sangat*, sat men of all shades and all were equal and *sangat* proved the most important factor in Sikh egalitarianism. The centre for the *sangat* – whatever may be the quality of its structure- became a dharamsal. Guru Nanak's spell transformed Kauda the savage who converted his mansion into a dharamsal and so did Sajjan, the thug.

With *Sangat* and *Pangat*, Dharamsal emerged an important medium of social and spiritual evolution ushered in by Guru Nanak. He liberated the common mind from the trammels of the *varna-ashrama-dharma* that enjoined upon the people a strict ceremonial and casteist code. Guru Nanak firmly believed that any amelioration at the empirical plane would surely lead to a spiritual revolution that denounced caste, empty ritualism, superstitious faith in gods and goddesses, spiritual hypocrisy of the priestly class and a false concept of purity and sanctity. Liberation from the tentacles of spiritual cant that had enmeshed the common mind for centuries was not an easy task. To remove the crust of custom from a servile mind a lot of persuasion, good-will, sense of equality and fraternity, selfless service of the poor and needy, interdining and singing hymns of praise of one

and only one Lord could transform “men into angels”. It was for this avowed aim that Guru Nanak established *sangats* because a *sangat* not only leads to the sharing of belief in a set of principles but also imparts the individual a sense of identity and a feeling that he belongs to a specific spiritual order.

Guru Nanak’s farsightedness, therefore, is quite evident from the concept of *sangat* that he established. After his enlightenment, Lord Buddha too travelled far and wide ;to spread his gospel but he could never conceive of *sangat* that later-on in Sikhism becomes the embodiment of the Guru. Wherever the *Sangat* gathered the place came to be known as *dharamsal*. At some places, the Guru’s affluent devotees donated buildings for the congregation and at other places the neophyte Sikhs by collecting donations, raised independent structures. About the significance of Dharamsals, Gurdarshan Singh rightly points out that “Dharamshals as centres of new society...not only came to serve as repositories of Sikh faith but also played a significant role in maintaining the corporate life of the community and re-inforcing the notion of religious collectivism<sup>5</sup>”.

Dharamsal literally means an abode of Dharma, a place to practise righteousness in accordance with the tenets of the Sikh faith. In fact, in the Sikh scripture, this world has been hailed as a

Dharamsal, a form of spiritual inn, where the pilgrim on his journey to *sachkhand* stays for a while to learn the way to the realm of truth. Says Guru Nanak "The world is in its essence, a spiritual and moral order, i.e. Dharamsal<sup>6</sup>. Guru Angad too says : "The world is God's house, in It is His abode, an ocean in which all beings move<sup>7</sup>". Guru Amar Das opines that "By His ordinance is created the earth, the place for righteous action<sup>8</sup>". Guru Ram Das regarded it as "a place where true *sangat* listens and sings God's glory<sup>9</sup>". Guru Nanak's revelation, according to the *Janamsakhi* traditions, enjoined upon him the twin mission of spreading *naam* and establishing *panth*. To create *panth* amidst the prevailing social and spiritual chaos, *Dharamsal* became the nodal point where the *sangat*, gathered with new spiritual orientation. The *Janamsakhi* thus states:

Guru Nanak, your *Panth* will flourish. I shall bless your *panth*. Inculcate devotion towards me and strengthen (men's obedience to their) *dharma*. As the *Vaishnava*, have their temple (ramsals), the *Yogis*, their seat (*asan*) and the Muslims their mosques, so your followers shall have their *dharamshala*<sup>10</sup>.

This surely indicates that the Dharamsal was a part of Guru Nanak's divinely-ordained mission. It was essential to impart a distinct identity to Panth – a place of social, moral and spiritual regeneration where the empirical and spiritual meet to concretise an

altogether new and revolutionary ideology. Bhai Gurdas, in his peculiar poetic mode describes it as “a mansarovar and the Sikhs flock their like swans<sup>11</sup>. Sunita Puri brings its organisational significance and its future ramifications in Sikhism when she says that this “organisational structure of the new community”, imparted ‘solidarity and cohesion to the Sikh ranks and’ fused the far-flung and diverse units into a single well-integrated social order<sup>12</sup>’.

The first *Dharmsal* was established by Guru Nanak, according to Shamsheer Singh Ashok at “the residence of Sajjan *Thug* at village Makhdumpur in Multan, which still exists in its original form<sup>13</sup>”. Macauliffe also endorses this view when he says that “the first Sikh temple was constructed on the spot where Guru met Sheikh Sajjan and converted him to his views<sup>14</sup>”. Guru, stayed at the house of Bhai Lalo which was converted into *Dharmsal* and to quote Parkash Singh, “even Malik Bhago converted his house into a *Dharamsala*<sup>15</sup>”..

Wherever Baba Nanak put his hallowed feet, the place was sanctified. Bhai Gurdas writes in his inimitable style: “Wherever Baba put his feet, a religious place was established. All the Siddha places now have been renamed on the name of Nanak<sup>16</sup>”. It acquired, therefore, great prominence as a Sikh institution and showed the radical departure of Nanakology from the prevailing spiritual traditions.

After his return from missionary travels, Guru Nanak took off his robe as a wandering minstrel on a divinely ordained mission and adopted the life of the householder in the newly established town of Kartarpur. According to G.C.Narang, Guru Nanak “founded the village of Kartarpur where he built the first *Dharmsal*<sup>17</sup>”. Bhai Gurdas says: “The true Guru Nanak Dev inspired people to remember the true name of the Lord, whose form is truth. Founding a place of Dharma, at Kartarpur it was inhabited by the holy congregation as the abode of truth where Waheguru was imparted to the people<sup>18</sup>”. In fact, it is Bhai Gurdas who suggested “Waheguru” as the Guru Mantra for *naam simran*.

The *Dharmsal* at Kartarpur says Ganda Singh “became a true demonstrative laboratory for the practical training of his followers” and was known as “Baba Nanak Di Dharamsala<sup>19</sup>”. In fact, it was at Kartarpur the system of Sikh worship and Maryada was established. People would throng in large numbers to listen to the exhortations of Baba Nanak. Japuji and *Asa di Var* would form important part of morning worship. In the evening, after spiritual discourse, *Sodar* would be recited and the worship closed after *Sohila*. Here was started the tradition of *Guru Ka Langar* which proved of far-reaching consequences, for the commensal dining exploded, like the formation

of *sangat*, the *varna-ashrama* concept, for here people would sit in *pangat*, irrespective of caste and creed, social rank or political status and take food reciting Lord's *Naam* all the time. Later on, other *Dharmshals* adopted the Kartarpur model and a distinct mode of worship and community kitchen became the inseparable part of the *Dharmshals*. Here was practised what the founder of the faith preached.

To carry out the mission of their master with rare fervence Guru Nanak's successors consolidated and extended the institution of *Dharmshal*. Guru Angad established a *Dharmshal* at Khadoor Sahib, while Guru Amar Das's presence lent lustre to Goindwal by the banks of fetterless Beas. Guru Angad introduced Gurmukhi script and teachings of the new faith were imparted in the language of the people. It gave a rude set back to Sanskrit and break with Hindu tradition became all the more wide. Guru Amar Das set the tradition of *Langar* on firm footing. Satta and Balwand sing praises of the *Langar* at Goindwal where under the loving care of Mata Khiwi, dainty dishes like *kheer* were served to the *Sangat*.

Morning bath or *Ishnan* forms an integral part of Sikh ablutions. In the ambrosial hour of morning the devout Sikh is expected to take a bath before joining the *Sangat* for morning worship. Guru Amar Das,

with the help of the *sewa* of the *Sangat* got a *baoli* dug at Goindwal for the Sikhs to have a bath and later on tanks and *baolis* became an integral part of the *Dharmshals* which later on came to be known as the *Gurdwaras*.

Guru Amar Das expressed a desire to establish a new *Dharmshal* for the propagation of Sikhism in the *Majha* region and enjoined upon his devout follower, Bhai Jetha, later on Guru Ram Das, to make efforts in this direction with the help of the *sangat*. Akbar, as the tradition goes, visited Guru Amar Das at Goindwal, partook Guru Ka *Langar* and donated 500 bighas of land to Bibi Bhani and it was on this land that Guru Ram Das founded Chak Ramdaspura which was later on known as Amritsar. A temple was raised and a *sarovar* dug up and filled with ambrosial water and a dip in the sacred tank was regarded as the most auspicious to purify the soul of its sins. Guru Arjan further developed the *Dharmshal* and lent it sanctity, for it became the centre of the Sikh pilgrimage. The *sanctum sanctorum* was built within the pool and came to be known as *Harmandir*, the house of God. The Guru said "*Harmandir* is a place where from you get to recognise God as He resides in *Harmandir*<sup>20</sup>".

The Guru disclosed his purpose to build this *Dharmshal*, "Nanak has erected his home at the spot, where death, birth and decline



torment not”, and further says: “Lovely and holy is the spot where God’s devotees assemble<sup>21</sup>”. It was built as an abode of truth, where Guru’s Sikhs gathered. The name of *Harmandir* was deliberately chosen to signify ‘everybody’s temple<sup>22</sup>’. Madanjit Kaur rightly highlights the architectural and symbolic significance of *Harmandir*:

“The message of the four door architectural structure of the Golden Temple to mankind is unmistakable – ‘open your mind to the flood of divine light and see for yourself that inspite of hundreds of seeming differences, man is essentially the same everywhere and deserved to be allowed to live a free, peaceful and honourable life”.

*Harmandir*, with its impressive and imposing structure, standing in the midst of the sacred pool, whose ambrosial waters had the miraculous power to “transform even crows into swans”, to use the poetic metaphor, acquired primacy as a centre of Sikh pilgrimage and dearest to the heart of every Sikh. “In this way, Guru Arjan Dev gave the town an institution which was to ensure its primacy along all the places of Sikh pilgrimage<sup>24</sup>” The Guru prevailed upon his Sikhs to settle around the temple to pursue their temporal tasks and raise their households and in due course Amritsar became a centre of trade and commerce, the gateway to India for the traders from central Asia. Guru Arjan also founded Tarn Taran by constructing a *Dharmsal* and a big

and wide tank and then founded Kartarpur and Sri Hargobindpur as centres of Sikh faith.

Guru Hargobind established a network of *Dharamsals* in the places that he visited during his travels in Punjab and outside the state. His son Baba Gurditta appointed *Almast*, Phul and Balu Hasan as head preachers who travelled far and wide and set up *dharamsals*. *Almast* re-established *dharamsal* at Nanakmata which was captured by the *yogis*. Baba Phul established a *dharamsal* at Hoshiarpur and his disciples established *dharamsals* at Berar, in Deccan and Sind. Balu Hasan established them in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa<sup>25</sup>. Guru Teg Bahadur during his missionary travels in the north-east regions not only revived the *dharamsals* set up by Guru Nanak's followers<sup>26</sup>, but also established them at Patna and Dacca.

*Dharamsal* thus stood at the centre of the corporate life of the Panth. It fostered a feeling of consciousness and self identity in a new order that stressed monotheism and egalitarianism and welcomed whosoever willed to worship and pray with the *sangat*. Bhai Gurdas says: "*Dharamsal* is established on its four feet and all the four castes were converted into one caste of humanity<sup>27</sup>". Again: "As in betel leaf all colours mix and become one red colour, likewise by mixing all the *Varnas* one Sikh has been created<sup>28</sup>". The stress was on the truthful

living and the Sikhs were to inculcate the fear of God and love for mankind. Thus, the *dharamsal* became a medium of communication of the gospel of the Gurus.

## II

The organization of *sangat* and the consequent establishment of *dharmsals* considerably contributed towards the development of the Sikh religion and the evolution of the Panth. Guru Amar Das, finding it difficult to supervise *Sangats* at far flung places, divided the spiritual domain into twenty-two provinces called *manjis*. Each *manji* was under a devout Sikh, the Guru's ecclesiastical representative, whose chief duty was to preach the mission of Guru Nanak and look after the *dharmsals* under his area. These *manjis* were further divided into *piris* to establish a sound organizational base to the emergent religion; these centres served as meeting grounds for the Sikhs to discuss matters of common human welfare.

Moreover, the maintenance of *dharmsals* and the smooth running of the *Langar* brought in their wake many socio-economic obligations. Balwant Singh Dhillon rightly points out: "Historical experience of the Sikh community suggests that to raise, maintain and run the *dharamsala* complex had always been the obligation of the Sikh

*sangat*” and that “to seek state patronage has never been the policy of Sikh Gurus<sup>29</sup>”. The Sikh Gurus were to see to it that at every *dharamsal*, *Guru ka langar* functioned smoothly and that it never suffered for want of provisions. For this, money was essential. To collect money from *sangats* spread all over the sub-continent, Guru Arjan organized the *masand* system.

The *masand* was the representative of the Guru. Devout and devoted to the house of Nanak, his chief obligation was to spread Guru Nanak’s mission to bring people into the Sikh fold, to collect offerings at the *dharamsals* and render an account to the Guru once or twice a year. The author of *Dabistan* traces the origin of the *masand*:

It should be known that in the reign of the Afghan kings, the nobles were addressed in writing as *Masand-I-Ali* or the High seat... The Indians have reduced the word to *masand*. And as the Sikhs consider the Guru *Sacha Padshah*, the true king, they call their agents *masand*<sup>30</sup>.

At the earlier stage voluntary offerings were the major fiscal source of the *dharamsals*. Guru Arjan, however, made it obligatory to a Sikh to give one-tenth of his earnings (*daswandh*) to the Guru and its collection was the duty of the *masands*. The *masands* would collect the money and render the account to the Guru at his court at Amritsar on the eve of the Baisakhi day every year. “Guru’s control over the

entire Sikh organization of the *Sangat* through the *masands* ensured the solidarity of the Sikh community<sup>31</sup>".

The system went very well for some time. Through the support of the Sikh *Sangats*, Guru Arjan founded towns like Sri Hargobindpura, Tarn Taran and Kartarpur and could complete tanks at Amritsar and Tarn Taran and a *baoli* in Lahore. However, with the passage of time the lure of silver and the intoxication of power and pelf made many *masands* wilful and corrupt. It is evident from their treatment to Guru Tegh Bahadur at Amritsar. The tenth master dealt the *masands* with an iron hand and by creating the Khalsa abolished for ever the institution of *masands* in Sikhism.

Dharamsals thus played a stellar role in shaping the Sikh destiny. They were not mere hospices for the stay of wandering pilgrims, but centres of great importance where not only spiritual discourses were held but also the problems of the community discussed. "The great message of the emancipation from invidious distinctions and caste prejudices was instilled into the the hearts of the people, through these institutions of *Sangat* and *pangat*, originally established at these centres<sup>32</sup>".

Guru Arjan with judicious care and utmost reverence with the help of his most devoted scribe, Bhai Gurdas, compiled the *Adi Granth*,

the sacred Sikh scripture that contributed to the emergence of the Sikh identity. Written in Gurmukhi script, the sacred text became “the nucleus of the Sikh way of life and of all religious observances of the Sikhs<sup>33</sup>”. On August 16, 1604, Guru Arjan ceremoniously installed the *Adi Granth* in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the newly constructed *Harmandir* and appointed Baba Budha as the first high priest of the *Harmandir Sahib*. So great was his reverence that Guru Arjan would sleep on the floor, while *Adi Granth* would adorn a bedecked bed. Copies of *Adi Granth* were made and installed in *dharamsals*. Thus with the installation of the scripture, *dharamsal* became a Gurdwara.

“With the installation of *Guru Granth Sahib* in a Dharamsala, it became a gurdwara (abode of the Guru)” and the gurdwara “emerged as a new edifice on the Indian religious scene” and “this indestructible symbol of the Sikh faith has aroused intense and indefinable feelings of Sikhs everywhere<sup>34</sup>” and a great part of the Sikh history revolves around the gurdwaras. G.S. Dhillon too highlights the significance of *dharamsals* and gurdwaras: “Sikh shrines called gurdwaras or *dharamsals* have played a very significant role in shaping and governing the life of the Sikhs and the course of their institutions, ethos and tradition<sup>35</sup>”.

The *Gurdwara* became the heart of the Sikh community. To it they would repair in weal and woe. The *Sangat* elevated the drooping human spirits and the *sewa* engendered humility that would balance an overjoyous heart, for the idea of Gurmukh was to maintain *sahaj* or a state of equipoise under all circumstances. Guru Amar Das struck at the roots of many customs of popular Hinduism. He introduced the Sikh marriage custom known as *Anand Karaj* when he celebrated the marriage of his daughter Bibi Bhani with Bhai Jetha, later on known as Guru Ram Das. His own composition *Anand Sabad* was sung while the bride and the groom circumambulated four times around the Guru. The new marriage ceremony brought simplicity in marriage. "The composition of a new nuptial song which replaced the traditional scriptural texts in connection with the most important ceremony in a householder's life was a significant event reflecting the new and separate identity of the Sikh Panth<sup>36</sup>". Similarly, regarding obsequies, Guru Amar Das bade his son to perform his last rites in a way different from the prevailing Hindu customs and asked him not to perform any traditional rituals and to immerse his immortal remains in the Ganga – instead sing God's praises. Call God instead of a Pandit and for the *Garar Purana* read God's words.

These ceremonies thus liberated the Sikh faith from cultural and ritualistic ramifications of Hinduism. Guru says: 'After I am gone, sing the Lord's praise holy; call the learned, versed in the Divine scripture, to recite the Lord's teaching, holy like *Puranas*<sup>37</sup>'. Bhai Gurdas too highlights the separate social identity of the Sikhs. "Thus the Guru Panth is distinct and cannot be mixed with others<sup>38</sup>". Again, "Auspicious days, seasons, astrology, predicting the future with long spells be ignored by Sikhs<sup>39</sup>". "Birth rituals, shaving the tuft of hairs (*mundan*), using cow's urine, betrothal and death ceremonies are meaningless<sup>40</sup>" and "pilgrimages and auspicious days are forbidden for the Sikhs who should celebrate *gurpurbs* instead<sup>41</sup>". Bhai Gurdas thus explicates the dynamics of the Sikh faith by rejecting the prevailing Hindu customs. Thus the establishment of *gurdwara* was a practical step for carrying the society forward towards collective enlightenment, which fostered a feeling of conscious self-identity in new social order.

*Gurdwara* became the centre of all Sikh activities – spiritual and temporal. Sikh rites and ceremonies were performed in the presence of *Granth Sahib*. The rupture with Hindu traditions was complete and inviolable. It brought an internal change in the community and provided a spirit of coherence and unity. The Sikhs established cordial and closure relationships and welded into an independent community bound



together by their faith. The *sangat* took a unanimous decision on individual and corporate issues. *Gurmatta* passed in the presence of the *Guru Granth* was binding on all irrespective of their rank and position. Specific *rehat maryada* for Sikhs was evolved and also to run the *gurdwaras* effectively. Infrastructure was created to fulfil the Guru's mandate.

Today, *Gurdwara* enjoys supreme position in Sikhism. To protect its integrity and sanctity is the primary duty of every Sikh. With the creation of the Khalsa, the saffron ensign became the symbol of the Sikh spirituality and love for freedom and duty to protect the *dharma* and oppose unrighteousness at all costs. With white marble domes and the *Nishan Sahib* fluttering in its compound, a Gurdwara thrills every Sikh's heart, for it is a succour of the destitute, helpless and meek and *wahiguru* ultimately comes out of the mouth to see its resplendent glory in the break of dawn when hymns are recited and it throbs with every kind of activity – *sewa* by the devotees. The Sikhs bow their heads in gratitude to Guru Nanak who had blessed them with this august institution.

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## Chapter-V

### ***LANGAR AND SEWA***

Guru Nanak's revelatory experience, his prophetic utterances and vehement condemnation of the prevailing political and social evils and concern for the welfare of the downtrodden are indications of a radical and revolutionary movement for social and spiritual emancipation. He had a well-thought out plan for the development of a well-defined and systematized way of life for his followers. To reduce his compositions to mere ontology or theology would be to do injustice to his revolutionary social vision which gives equal perhaps more preference to temporal life. Sikhism, in this way, is a unique blend of the spiritual and corporate life and social emancipation is deemed a pre-requisite for human salvation. Keeping before him the ideals of fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, he envisaged an ideal society, based on ethical, conduct and social responsibility. *Varna Ashrama* and *Karam Kand* were the citadels of Brahmin orthodoxy and the false concepts of casteism and cults, purity and pollution, could be shaken only by establishing new and healthy institutions that would ultimately lead to an egalitarian social order. *Sangat* was the first step to give a rude

setback to Hindu casteism, the bane of the social order of the day. He debunked the idea of impurity attached to God's creation and denounced untouchability. If the same divine spark informed every human heart, where was the justification for casteism and social inequality. The Guru says: "He that has created all, looks after it also; To Him is all known. To whom, says Nanak, shall we carry our complaint? All within the self is lodged<sup>1</sup>".

## I

To concertise this ideal, to demolish caste distinctions and dismiss the concept of pollution. Guru Nanak called for unity on spiritual basis, where there should be no individualism and reverence for the dignity of Brahmin but rather an allegiance to a single community or its creed. Guru Nanak established the institutions of *sangat* and *pangat* and these institutions had "a wholesome and revolutionary effect upon the lives of people" for in *Sangat* and *pangat* "equality and fraternity were learnt in practice and all divisions and distinctions discarded<sup>2</sup>". The Guru concretized their ideals into the institutions of *Sangat* and *pangat* to "Inculcate into their disciples the ideals of corporate life, humility and equality they cherished" and that these institutions went a long way in "removing the rust of the ages

and initiated a new era<sup>3</sup>". Like the Christian concept of inherent sin, the *sudras* were impure by birth and destined to suffer from the casteist persecution. "The *sudras* were considered impure by their very birth and their impurity could not be shaken off by any means" and this "notion of inherent pollution or impurity was mainly responsible for their sufferings and making permanent the social exclusiveness against the *sudras*<sup>4</sup>".

Rabindra Nath Tagore debunks this concept of inherent pollution that made Brahminism superior and enabled it to wield social and religious authority. Says Tagore: "The caste idea is not creative. It is merely institutional... It hurts the complete truth in man<sup>5</sup>". So, if caste is a mere institution as Tagore asserts, then the outmoded institutions could be replaced by *dynamic* institutions that could bring winds of change to sweep away the old, otiose and decadent to usher in a state of society that would maintain at all costs the unity of man. Guru Nanak's introduction of the institution of *Langar* was thus the need of the time, for to quote Max Weber, "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<sup>6</sup>". Even the mere shadow of *sudras* on the food or even the cooking pot of a Brahmin would oblige the latter to throw it away for having been

defiled. Hutton rightly concludes that the commensal taboos are the corner stone of the caste organization<sup>7</sup>".

Guru Nanak's establishment of *Langar* with *Sangat* thus proved revolutionary in those times when spiritual cant and religious hypocrisy of the Brahmins tarnished the spiritual image of the Indian culture. Max Weber opines, "There were only two alternatives before the anti-caste movements; either to abolish the caste system or to be engulfed by it<sup>8</sup>". As it was difficult for Guru Nanak to abolish it in his life time, he formed a society outside the caste system. Thus he realized that there could be no social revolution in India without a frontal attack on the caste system which crippled human dignity and formed a dyke against spiritual regeneration through direct approach to God<sup>9</sup>". Guru Nanak made this frontal attack by creating the institution of *Langar* that led to the spiritual regeneration of the common man. The institution of *Guru Ka Langar* was started by Guru Nanak, "for the purpose of teaching service, spreading equality and removing untouchability and other prejudices born of the caste system<sup>10</sup>". So great was the spirit of this institution that every Sikh's house is deemed as *Guru Ka Langar*, for he is enjoined to share his food with whosoever graces his household, and thus a kind of *Dharmasal* for the weary to stretch his limbs. The tradition goes how later on the *masands* would visit devout Sikh



households and demand, on the basis of authority vested by the Guru, sometimes even the things beyond the humble Sikh's pale.

The main objective of the *Langar* was thus to introduce equality among the people who were torn apart by invidious man-made distinctions. "Men were not ... in principle equal, but for ever unequal<sup>11</sup>". Guru Nanak upheld the theory of complete equality in society. He says: "Know all human beings to be repositories of divine light, stop not to enquire about their caste, in the hereafter there are no castes<sup>12</sup>". Faith in the unity of God was of prime social value. He listens to every one and is directly approachable. Guru Nanak declared: "All before Him are alike, none high or low<sup>13</sup>". The tenth master endorses the same view when he exhorts his Sikhs to treat all mankind as one. Guru Nanak employs the simile of the potter and the clay to emphasize equality in diversity: "The whole universe from the same clay has appeared. The potter, however, in numerous forms makes the vessels<sup>14</sup>".

To Guru Nanak, the purity of heart and the cult of task were of prime importance. "Forgetting the Lord" tantamounted to deserve the lowest rung on the social ladder. Bringing home the significance of the introduction of *Langar* as a great leveller, Bhai Gurdas said: "Thus Guru adopted the system of *langar* to eradicate caste prejudice and

untouchability<sup>15</sup>". The gursikhs of all the four *varnas* recite jointly and listen to the unstruck melody... Gursikh going beyond all *varnas* follows the philosophy of *naam*<sup>16</sup>. According to Fauja Singh, the institution of *langar* started by Guru Nanak served a four-fold function:

First, it imparted a secular dimension to *sangat*. Secondly, it added to the functional efficiency of the Sikh organization. Thirdly, it translated the principle of equality into practice, making it obligatory for all people, whatever their status in life, to sit on the ground and eat together. Fourthly, it served as a cementing force among the followers of Sikhism<sup>17</sup>.

## II

*Dan* and *sewa* comprise the cardinal principles in the Sikh ethos. A *gurmukh* is enjoined to willingly contribute a mite of his honest toil for the *Langar* and should visit it to perform *sewa* like drawing the water out of the well, hewing the wood for the hearth, cleaning the utensils and extending help to the organizers in all other chores associated with cooking and serving the meals to the *sangat*." It offers an opportunity to social service and gives a practical lesson to the Sikhs to see that every one should be provided with food and no one should starve. "From the very outset", the institution of *Sangat* was integrally associated with that of *pangat* or common mess<sup>18</sup>".

Voluntary contributions of *Sangat* by way of grains, pulses and money enabled the organizers to run the *Langar* smoothly. Thus Guru channelized the charity for the common good of man. In many of her *hukamnamas*, Mata Sundri wrote to the *Sangats* for contribution so that she could smoothly run the *Langar* for the people who come to pay obeisances at the place of worship<sup>19</sup>”.

The underlying notion of *Langar* is the belief that God’s bounty belongs to all. Its purpose was also to remove professional restriction on low castes, for the Hindu caste system insisted on the economic apartheid and a member belonging to one caste was not allowed to adopt the profession of another caste. This restriction led to the unequal distribution of wealth. The *sudras* were obliged to subsist on the left overs of the other castes, for they could not even earn their own bread by honest toil. Guru Nanak said, “those that eat the bread of their labour and give away something in charity, truly recognize the way<sup>20</sup>”. Since Sikhism repudiated caste system and reorganized all men as equal, everyone had the right to eat in the *Langar* and contribute his mite towards its provisions out of his honest toil. *Sewa* brought humility: Guru Nanak asserted that, “only through devoted service in this world may one find a resting place at the divine portals<sup>21</sup>”. Bhai Gurdas also says: “Guru’s Sikhs should serve the others, only by

“serving, one can attain happiness” and “one should cultivate humility and share one’s food with others<sup>22</sup>”. The institution of *Langar* strengthened the development of a new social structure in which dignity of labour was promoted and the individual’s responsibility to contribute to social welfare was emphasized. The institution of *Langar* provided an opportunity to earn one’s livelihood with honest means: “first deserve, then desire and to produce community interest and to create a sense of social obligation<sup>23</sup>”.

*Sewa* is one of the basic institutions of Sikhism and considered a cardinal virtue. Here stress was laid on the need of man’s duty towards man in order to achieve an associated, harmonious living of all men, and man’s duty towards the Guru and God to fulfil his desires, aspirations and to bring the feeling of humility and to efface ego. Thus *sewa* brings completion and fulfilment to the spiritual life. Guru says: “Without service are no objectives fulfilled; In service lies the purest action<sup>24</sup>”. It is an established fact that all the people irrespective of social distinction or status perform service and humble manual labour. So *sewa* is necessary to attain a state of humility – a pre-requisite to spiritual realization.

The welfare of mankind, temporal and spiritual, seems to be the primary concern of Sikh gurus. Here religion consists in realizing God

mainly through service done within the world, where man has constantly to deal with man to promote each other's good. If a section of society becomes poor, it is the duty of the ruler and other members of the society to see that none remains naked and hungry<sup>25</sup>. Guru says: "One should serve mankind in this world for a better life in the next<sup>26</sup>". Again: "Service of the people is supreme<sup>27</sup>". Again: "One should go on serving till the last breath, only then one can meet the Lord<sup>28</sup>". So the aim of religion is to serve mankind and imbibe the spirit of love and compassion. Guru established *dharamsals* which served as laboratories for teaching the practice to service for which the real field is the world.

The Sikhs were asked to share their earnings to provide food and clothing to the needy and also to nurse the sick and the wounded. Guru says: "Those that eat the bread of their labour and give away something in charity truly recognize the way<sup>29</sup>". Bhai Gurdas says: "Gursikh should serve another, only by serving one can attain happiness. One should cultivate humility and share one's food with others<sup>30</sup>". It was considered the highest virtue to provide money for charity. By doing this, a Sikh will be fulfilling social obligations. To give donation for the relief work and to support the efforts of humanitarian institutions and pursuits man could balance the economic activity. The

contribution given by Sikhs should be used for altruistic purposes for the benefit of community. Guru Gobind Singh says: "He who serves my people, pleases me. Nothing else is pleasing to my mind. Offer gifts to them if you may, for no one else is worthy to receive them<sup>31</sup>". Guru again says: "God's bounty belongs to all but men grab it<sup>32</sup>". So Guru was against the money to be accumulated. He says: "Those who hoard it – vast multitudes of wealth are lost; many for it are dishonoured; without sin is it not accumulated; in death it accompanies not man<sup>33</sup>". Thus money should liberally be distributed among the needy, handicapped, destitute and people who were affected by natural calamities. This is considered one of the important aspect of *sewa*.

The service should be selfless, as only with the spirit and practice of selfless service, one cleanses one's mind of *haumai*, lust, vanity, ego, anger and pride. Thus a Sikh achieves success and becomes useful member of society working for its good and advancement. Guru says: "Service under compulsion is of no avail, one should serve others ungrudgingly and with pleasure<sup>34</sup>". Again: "One can get happiness only with the selfless service<sup>35</sup>". It is the matter of history that the Gurus – Angad Dev, Amar Das and Ram Das became gurus only through selfless service to their masters. The Gurus

themselves have solicited God to grant them the gift of the humblest service, such as waving the fan over God's creation to keep it cool, to draw water and such other tasks. In devotion prays the fourth Guru, "May I wave the fan and draw water; And eat of whatever thou dost grant<sup>36</sup>". Again, Guru Arjan says: "I pray to God, bless me with the company of the Gursikhs, so that I may serve them by fanning, fetching water for them, serving food for them<sup>37</sup>". So service is necessary ingredient to control the ego and other passions and to relieve the suffering humanity through charity.

The service of the Guru is equally essential in Sikhism. In attaining true salvation and merging of his soul in the Supreme Being, a devotee must put himself in the service of the true Guru. Guru's service consists of two aspects: physical and spiritual. Guru says: "With devotion and singleness of mind serve I the holy preceptor – service of the holy preceptor find treasure of devotion<sup>38</sup>". Again he says: "Serve the Lord in whose service no dearth shall thou feel; And consuming and spending of this wealth, in joy and bliss shall life be passed<sup>39</sup>".

The true service of the Guru is also to obey the dictates of the Guru, which guides us to follow the path shown by Him, to destroy one's ego and to meditate on the Name. Guru says: "The holy

preceptors injunction shall I accept in spirit of egolessness; True devotion and service lie in Name being lodged in heart<sup>40</sup>". So the Sikh should obey the orders of the Guru and abide by His Will. The Guru says: "The holy action of a *yogi* in service of the master, contemplating of the word and subduing egoism is life<sup>41</sup>". Again: "I have learnt by the light given by the Master, perfectly – endowed; Recluse, hero, celibate or *sanyasi* – None may expect to earn merit without devoted service – service in which lies the essence of purity<sup>42</sup>".

The will of God must also be accepted. The Guru says: "The holy preceptor's service lies in obeying His will. By discarding the ego with the holy preceptor one finds union. And in poise remains absorbed<sup>43</sup>". The duty of the Sikh is to go on repeating and remembering the teachings of the Guru and follow his advice. Only then he can attain peace of mind and vanish ego and the name of God will come to reside within ones mind.

*Sewa* is also necessary to fulfil the objectives and desires. The Guru says: "All created beings are Thine own, without service is no one's life fruitful<sup>44</sup>. Thus *sewa* is a beneficial action through which Guru prepared men for participation in a life of service and contemplation.



The first Red Cross service was also introduced by Guru Gobind Singh. There is an example of Bhai Kanahiya who was entrusted with the duty of giving water to the fighters in the battlefield, who served water to all without making any distinction between friend and enemy. In practice he followed the command of the Guru. "*Bisar gai sabh tatt parai, jan te sadh sangat mahe pai*"<sup>45</sup>, and "*Manas ki jaat sabhe ek pehchanbo*"<sup>46</sup>. Later on, Guru also asked him to provide medicines to the wounded soldiers. So *sewa* is not limited to cleanliness of premises, serving in *langar* or upkeep of custody of shoes but cover wider aspects of life.



*Langar* in fact is the concretization of the Sikh ideal of *kirat karo, naam japo, wand chhako*. Earning one's livelihood by humble and honest means is the true commerce of life. The day the young Nanak spent money to feed the hungry *sadhus*, the foundation of this great institution was laid. This incident, is known as "*sacha sauda*" in Sikh history. The whole-hearted generosity is the hallmark of this institution. *Janam Sakhis* are full of accounts, especially Guru Nanak's dealings with people when he looked after *Modikhana* at Sultanpur. Man does not live to eat and with simple and coarse fare he can save enough for

others. So great became this institution in the due course of time that today it invariably formed a part of every Gurdwara where the hungry can satiate their hunger and can seek repose to overcome their weariness. It is said that "almost all the *Dharmshalas* found located on or near the highways also set up *Langars* and *caravan serais*. Both the *Langar* and *caravan serais*... formed an essential feature where hospitality and food were freely available to the visitors<sup>47</sup>".

Though *Langar* was not an altogether novel idea, yet Guru Nanak's adoption of it was unique, for it had metaphysical, ethical and social implications. In *Vedic* texts it is known as *pakshala*. In *Atharva Veda* we find a reference to common kitchen and the injunction according to Kapoor Singh, is "Identical shall be your drink; in common shall be your share of food<sup>48</sup>". Monastic orders in Buddhism and Jainism had a common kitchen. Similarly, in Christian fraternities, monasteries and convents the inmates shared a common kitchen. In *Sufism*, the open kitchen became a part of the *Khanqah*. Some of the Hindu Shaivite saints also started the practice of a common kitchen.

But the *Langar* introduced by Guru Nanak was unique in all respects. It was not a ceremonial meal to be observed on festival days. It was a regular affair. Moreover, it was open to one and all, irrespective of caste and creed, birth and breed. Doors of Nanak's

House remain open to whosoever seeks succour and none shall return disappointed. It was not an occasional 'love feast', but was a regular feature of congregational activity of the Sikhs. This single step alone was determinative in cutting the proselytes away from the caste order because the violation of commensal barriers was not a breach of an ordinary principle of caste, but as noted by Weber, "a constitutive part of it". *Langar* has provided avenues for service (*sewa*) and has also given a practical demonstration of equality, hospitality and love for fellow beings and that is why it still remains a distinctive feature of the Sikh way of life. Since everything belongs to God who showers His bounties on one and all, according to their past actions, it is the religious duty of a Sikh to share his wealth and provisions with others. Malcolm rightly says that: "A Sikh was told that whatever he received from God, it was his duty to share it with others because the provisions belonged to the Guru<sup>49</sup>".

## IV

The institution of *Langar* introduced by Guru Nanak was zealously guarded by his successors and saw to it that its smooth running would cement the bonds of kinship of the kindered souls. Guru Angad took keen interest in *Langar* and enlarged and extended it at

Khadoor Sahib. He had had first hand experience of running it under the stewardship of its pioneer at Kartarpur where he used to bring provisions for *Langar* and also helped Guru Nanak in tilling the land. He followed the same pattern at Khadoor Sahib. "At nine in the morning all visitors sat in a line without distinction. The food was served to them<sup>50</sup>". Of course, it was incumbent upon every Sikh to contribute in cash or kind towards the *Langar* and by participating in its preparation and distribution among the *Sangat*. Guru Angad's consort took keen interest in the preparation of food in the *Langar* and "supplied delicious dishes like rice prepared in milk (*kheer*) and *ghee*<sup>51</sup>". The Guru, however, lived on coarse food earned by him by twisting the strings of *munj* for weaving the cots. Satta and Balwand, the bards in the Guru's court, sang praises of Mata Khivi for the preparation of delicious dishes in the *Langar*: "Mata Khivi, a noble soul, was like a tree with shades of thick leaves. In her kitchen was distributed rich fare, *kheer* enriched with *ghee*, tasting like *amrit*<sup>52</sup>".

Guru Amar Das consolidated it further, for he knew its importance as an instrument of social cohesion and solidarity. It was a useful vehicle of reforms to enthuse the resurgent community to devote towards the welfare of others. The basic principle behind this institution was the keen endeavour to foster a spirit of egalitarianism

since all were obliged to sit in *pangat* to partake food in the *Langar*. The third Nanak's mandate was: first *pangat* and then *sangat*. The institution of *Langar* became an integrated and regular feature of Sikhism during Guru Amar Das. In this way, one has to accept his hospitality by eating with his disciples. The Guru would grant audience to the visitor, however, august he may be only after he had taken food in *Guru ka Langar*. Akbar was so impressed that he expressed his desire to grant land to the *Langar* for its smooth functioning. Even Raja of Haripur had to sit in the *Langar* and eat with others before he could be admitted to the presence of the Guru. These examples show that in the *Langar* all were treated at the same footing. "It serves to show the universal application of the principle of commensality and proved a right step towards egalitarianism<sup>53</sup>".

Guru Ram Das took up this noble task with rare devotion. Like his master, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das also earned his bread by selling boiled lentils and gave away one-fourth of his earnings in charity. He appointed *masands* in far-flung areas to spread Guru Nanak's message and collect offerings to meet the ever-increasing demands of *Langar*. He reviewed the dwindling *Langars* at Kartarpur and Khadoor and well maintained at Amritsar. According to M.A.Macauliffe, "The Sikh devotees rendered enthusiastic help by

providing both money and free labour and that helped the Guru to make a big success of the *Langar* at Amritsar<sup>54</sup>".

Guru Arjan whose editorial skill and organizational ability are legendary, consolidated the *masand* system to ensure proper and regular supply of provisions to *Langars* under his supervision in the newly established *Dharmshals* at Tarn Taran, Kartarpur and Hargobindpur. Moreover, since Amritsar had acquired the status of the central Sikh place of pilgrimage, *Sangats* would come from far and near to see the Guru and Harmandir and the *Langar* became demanding. Guru Arjan not only strengthened the organization of the *masands*, he also made *daswandh* obligatory on all Sikhs. Every Sikh was enjoined to contribute one-tenth (*daswandh*) of his earnings towards the Guru's coffer. The obligatory contributions to the common pool to run *Langar* became the responsibility of the Sikh community. "The institution of *Langar* towards the end of the sixteenth century became a well developed religious institution of the Sikhs based on the ethical code... and its maintenance became the responsibility of the entire Sikh community<sup>55</sup>".

This sense of belonging and commitment to a noble cause forged the Sikhs into a well-integrated community under the loving care of their Gurus who had set up high standards of ethical conduct to create

an ideal man. Guru Nanak and his successors stressed honest toil. He says: "He alone, O'Nanak, knoweth the way who earneth with the sweat of his brow and then shareth with others<sup>56</sup>". Guru Arjan too dilates on the significance of *Langar*: "Making an earnest effort leave thou whole earning, abide thou in joy. Contemplating the Lord, meet thou Him, and thy anxiety is dispelled<sup>57</sup>". Bhai Gurdas echoes his Master: "The Sikhs should serve one another. Only by serving others, one can attain happiness. One should cultivate selfless devotion and share one's food with others<sup>58</sup>". Guru and his wife Mata Ganga set personal examples by serving in the *Langar* and also by sitting with people to take food. Bhai Gurdas refers to the rising popularity of Guru Arjan and the significance of *Langar*: "Arjan conquered all the four directions and the Sikh devotees came to him in large number. The free kitchen runs unabated where the word of Guru is served. This is the perfect creation of the perfect Guru<sup>59</sup>".

Guru Hargobind maintained an army and established *Langars* at Hargobindpur and Kartarpur to meet the needs of his retinue and the *Sangat*. He also sent Sikhs to other places to establish *Langar*. Bhai Gonda was sent to Kabul by Guru Har Rai, where the Sikh Gurus had a sizable following, to set up a *Langar* and look after its maintenance<sup>60</sup>. Guru Harkishan is known in the Sikh annals for his selfless *sewa* of the

people smitten with small pox at Delhi. He established the *Langar* to feed the destitute and a dispensary to heal the Sikhs.

Guru Teg Bahadur, during his itineraries wherever he stayed, he set up *langars*. In numerous *hukamnamas* written to *Sangats* he exhorted them to set up *langars*<sup>61</sup>. His son, the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh established *langars* at Paonta Sahib and Anandpur, the seat of Sikh authority. He not only asked his chosen disciples to establish *Langars*, but would also visit the place *in cognito* to see their working. The Sikh annals state how once he visited all *langars* in disguise and ultimately declared that the *langar* run by Bhai Nand Lal was the best. Moreover, the *langar* now was given a different connotation according to the exigencies of times. It was known as *degh* which formed association with *tegh*, just as *sangat* went with *pangat*.

## V

*Degh*, a Persian word, is often employed in Sikh theology and had material and metaphysical implications. Literally speaking, it is a large pot, a kind of cauldron to cook food in large quantity. Symbolically, it stands for social cohesion and fraternal commitment, for the food cooked in it is shared by like-minded members of a community. Guru Nanak uses the term to denote the infinite generosity



of the Benevolent Lord who created the earth that “sustains and nourishes” all creatures living on it. Guru says: “The earth is the cauldron from which a portion to each is assigned once for all; Destiny is Thy dispenser of largesse<sup>62</sup>”.

J.D.Cunningham also brings out its metaphorical significance: “Vessel for food, and thence, metaphorically abundance on earth, and grace on the part of God<sup>63</sup>”. Though it is often employed for *krah-parsad* which is distributed to the *Sangat* after *ardas* in any function where the *Guru Granth Sahib* is present, the term was employed for *Langar* because it had martial association during the period of the Tenth Master. Harbans Singh rightly says: “During the days of the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, the term was commonly used for *langar*<sup>64</sup>”. The Sikh slogan of the Khalsa was “*Degh Tegh Fateh*” and this kept the Panth in invincible optimism called *Charh-di-Kala*.

Sikhism gives a due recognition to the human body. Opposed to asceticism, it recognizes its claims, for in it dwells the Lord. An empty belly can ill-afford to meditate or engage in any manual task. The Guru says: “Some live on herbs and root vegetables, and in forests take their abode. Some in ochre robes in a state of renunciation go about: yet within have they excessive desire, seeking to get from others clothing and food<sup>65</sup>”. Though man lives not to eat, the maintenance of

this five element frame is man's primary duty, for it is a great boon of the Almighty. Moreover, saint-soldiers who were ever-ready to be in the saddle to wield the *tegh* to protect *Dharma* were expected to be healthy and strong. It was for this purpose that the Tenth Master took special care that the *Langars* run by Sikhs at Anandpur remained in perfect order. Guru Gobind Singh often remarked that if any Sikh refused food to any needy person, it would tantamount refusal of food to the Guru. According to Macauliffe, the Tenth Master would say that "Whosoever uttered ill remarks against the value of *Langar* would invite curse on himself, and no one should object on the ground of caste prejudice<sup>66</sup>". At the same time, contribution to the *langar* should not lead to pride, for it was an institution based on the principles of humility and service or *sewa*. Professor Puran Singh called it 'temple of bread' as complimentary to 'temple of worship'. He says: "The bread and water were ready for all at all hours of the day, and crowds came and freely partook of the Gurus gifts. All comes were filled from the Guru's treasury of thought and love and power; the diseased and distressed were healed by him<sup>67</sup>".

Guru Gobind Singh before his departure for the heavenly abode directed his nearest Sikh, Bhai Santokh Singh "Not to erect any monument in his memory... but to continue the tradition of *Degh* and

accept offerings from his devotees for that purpose<sup>68</sup>". After Guru Gobind Singh his consort Mata Sahib Kaur used to issue *hukamnamas* to *Sangats* for the collection of *daswandh* for *Guru Ka Langar*<sup>69</sup>.

Since the temporal and the transcendental meet in Sikhism, the stress is on honest living and sharing the fruit with others. Guru Nanak rejected the Brahmins, *Naths*, and *Siddhas* as parasites of society, for they lived on the earnings of others. Sikhism recognizes the dignity of labour and regards no profession mean or low. *Kirat, Naam* and *Wand Chhakna* form its principle ethical postulates. A.C.Banerjee rightly says: "The system (*langar*) represented two important points in Guru Nanak's teachings: The denunciation of asceticism and the importance of *daan*, the charitable sharing of money or goods<sup>70</sup>". In the context of the social conditions, prevailing in his age, Guru Nanak's stress on honest labour and social salvation was a revolutionary concept of the duties of man" and led to the development of a society dedicated to work, fully conscious of personal and social responsibilities and anxious to reconcile service to man with service to God. Guru's house became a centre not only for providing food to the Sikhs but a feeding centre of Master's word. Whatever was donated by the Sikhs was consumed and distributed in charity among the disciples and there never was any dearth of provisions. So, charity became the basic

principle of Sikhism as Guru Gobind Singh also said, "There is nothing equal to the bestowal of food, Blest is the man who giveth to the really hungry... Charity is of all gifts the greatest, for it saveth life<sup>71</sup>". Radha Kamal Mukherjee recognizes the intrinsic value of *Langar* which has fostered "a spirit of charity on a large scale and also became a powerful binding force<sup>72</sup>". All the four castes were converted into one caste of humanity, where prince was equal to poor man, says Bhai Gurdas<sup>73</sup>. It did away with the caste system and false concept of purity and pollution. Moreover, it engenders the spirit of humility and *sewa*. Guru Nanak upholds the principle that the service of God lies in the service of humanity.

The institution of *langar* had grown into an essential accomplishment of the Sikh gurdwaras by the eighteenth century. It became a well-developed religious institution of the Sikhs based on their ethics. Its maintenance became the responsibility of the entire Sikh community. It was open to all and every one was expected to take part in it. It broke the barriers of casteism; and brought the feeling of unity and fraternization among the Sikhs. As Bhai Gurdas says: "The four castes were made one and castes and outcastes were regarded as noble<sup>74</sup>". It cut at the root of the evil of caste, class and religious distinction and "shook the very foundation of Hindu caste system and

Muslim social arrogance<sup>75</sup>". Thus demolished the idea of pollution of food by the mere presence of an untouchable.

It brought an egalitarian principle which helps them to separate themselves from the caste ideology and caste society. It lays down the secure foundation on which tradition of liberal democracy may be reared and a superstructure of an egalitarian society may be raised. "If this institution of *langar* had been extended to all the Hindu temples and mosques in India, on the pattern of Sikh *langar*, there would not have been any *Harijan* problem<sup>76</sup>".

It strengthened the trend towards a development of new social structure, in which spirit of social welfare was developed and thus destroyed the narrow selfishness among men. The institution of *daswandh* became an essential and permanent feature, which prepared people to promote the welfare of others by sharing their income. This society later on imparted vitality to political life and civic consciousness in India. Puran Singh says, the idea of *langar* inevitably brings in mind the concept of democracy and socialism associated with the Guru<sup>77</sup>.

The institution of *langar* thus proved a revolutionary step in effacing caste distinction and advocating the adoption of any profession to earn honest living and sharing it with others and perform

*sewa* in the *langar* meant the service of the Lord. The *Langar* became an inseparable part of the Sikh's corporate life and forms an important part of every place of Sikh worship. Thus, the principle of universal brotherhood, collective effort and concern for the needy, was given a practical shape through *langar*.

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## Chapter-VI

# GURU AND GURUSHIP

The Guru is essentially an enlightened person who is competent to show the path towards self-realization which he has trodden after arduous devotion. After the revelation, his task is to establish a single community which could claim human allegiance guarding the revealed standards of moral and spiritual life. He also encourages the social mingling of the like-minded individuals and attempts to bring a social change in conformity with his ideals. It was with this coveted aim that Guru Nanak set on his *udasis* to preach what he received from the Almighty and directed his tirade against the caste system, the bane of Indian society for centuries, and succeeded in creating an egalitarian brotherhood, altogether different from the prevailing Hindu society. Guru Nanak himself showed the way to liberation: 'In all creation shines Thy effulgence – Thou who art light. In Thy light shines all that exists. By the master's Word is this light made manifest. Submission to His will is the highest prayer offering<sup>1</sup>'.

Guru realized that his mission was to pass on or transit the experience of spiritual union and the attendant blissfulness to

neophytes. Thus did he emphasize the role of the Guru who could help his disciples achieve salvation, free them from the superstitions, beliefs and nescience that cloud man's vision. These were to be replaced by the growing awareness and enlightenment with knowledge. But Guru Nanak was not a mere seeker of knowledge. His purpose was not the individual salvation, but the salvation of the entire social set up. The Guru exhorted individuals to seek self emancipation from egoism and its concomitant evils to attain the spiritual goal. The Master says: "This city with lust and wrath to overflowing was filled; Contact with the man of God these has removed. By pre-recorded Divine writ is the preceptor met; thereby is devotion to God in the mind fixed<sup>2</sup>".

Guru Nanak knew that time was required to carry out his ideals to a satisfactory evolution and conclusion, for nothing could be achieved in a short span. So he started the institution of succession, so that the presence of the Guru should act as a leavening to his adherents and the institutions started by him may attain strong foothold.

## I

In the *Mul Mantra* Guru Nanak postulates his ineffable revelation of the divine in ordinary human language for the benefit of the

common man. In this cradle statement, he not only attempts to define God but also dwells on the role of the Guru and his *nadar* or grace which alone can take a devotee to the portals of the Divine. His later *bani*, in fact, is the exposition of this cradle statement. Guru Nanak acknowledges: "The transcendent Supreme Being, Supreme Lord, has Nanak's preceptor become<sup>3</sup>". Guru Nanak's aim was not mere individual salvation, but social emancipation. Teja Singh explain the role of the Guru in Sikhism in his inimitable way: "The Guru stands for two things: revelation of truth through the word, and the interpretation and practice of the truth through personal guidance<sup>4</sup>". The function of the Guru is thus two-fold. He is to play a central role in human affairs around him. He is to bring intimation of the divine to the ordinary mind and exhort him to follow an ethical path to attain a status that the Guru himself has attained. The Guru in Sikhism is the spiritual guide to lead the disciple on the path of God and godliness and the Guru does not "claim for himself any special position in relation to the Sikh beyond that of a teacher<sup>5</sup>". The Guru retains his status as a man with the only difference that he is an enlightened one and in turn can play the role of the enlightener to rouse the slumbering souls to divine effluence: "Guru is a raft by means of which one reaches God<sup>6</sup>".

The Guru thus enjoys a central position in Sikh theology. Guru was chosen by God to serve and guide His creation. Here the place of the Guru is next to God. He is essential for enlightenment. Guru Nanak says: "Absorbing the Master's precept enriches the seeker's mind, with qualities invaluable as pearls and rubies. My master thus has enlightened me<sup>7</sup>". The head of the movement, the Guru, was assigned a pivotal position in the entire scheme of reform, and Guru Nanak undertook and established basic institutions out of which the Guru's role came first as "one who made angels of men... An indispensable ladder, a boat, a raft to attain the vision of God<sup>8</sup>".

In *Japuji*, Guru Nanak raises the question at the very outset of the composition: How to attain truth? How to dispel the pall of falsehood that envelopes existence, and the answer is to learn to live in the Will Divine. In fact, Guru Nanak stressed truthful living more than even truth. "At God's accounting-house the self only through truthful living finds liberation<sup>9</sup>". Bhai Gurdas in his *Vars* clearly mentioned the need of the Guru and gives reason why Guru Nanak came into this world. He says: "No mystery could be understood without Guru<sup>10</sup>" and "the sins of *Kaliyuga* on earth could only be delivered by the true Guru<sup>11</sup>" and "the darkness could be dispelled with the help of the Guru who rose like a sun<sup>12</sup>". Guru shows the path of

truth. Without him nothing is known. He tells you of the divine word<sup>13</sup>". The Guru in Sikhism is a perfect prophet or a messenger of God, in whom Light of God shines fully, visibly and completely. Tirlochan Singh traces the etymology of the word 'Guru' saying: "Gu: darkness, ru: light or revelation: Guru: is dispeller of darkness, revealer of light<sup>14</sup>". Guru Nanak says: "In the true Guru, He has installed His own spirit, through Him God reveals himself<sup>15</sup>". Again the third Nanak says: "The true Guru reveals the truth, it is a wealth which is priceless<sup>16</sup>".

Guru Nanak, of course, accepts the law of *Karma* and transmigration, but *maya* in the strict Hindu sense he vociferously rejects. The world is not an illusion: It is the true creation of the Lord. In *Japuji*, he emphasized this point: "Countless Thy names, Countless Thy places, O Lord, Countless the spheres, beyond all thought<sup>17</sup>". The world as Guru Angad Dev says, "Is the holy Lord's chamber; in it is his abode<sup>18</sup>". It becomes *maya* only when man inordinately identifies himself with it and forgets that with truthful living he can transcend it, with Guru's grace. His finitude constantly haunts him. The spirit is indeed the candle of the Lord: "In the body resideth He Himself, the transcendent Divine Being, but the gross-headed man of the world knoweth it not, and seeketh Him outside<sup>19</sup>". Again: "As fragrance in



the rose, and reflection in the mirror, Does the Lord in the self abide:  
There seek Him, brother<sup>20</sup>".

The indispensibility of the Guru is again and again emphasized to seek the union with the Lord. "By the grace of the Guru do thou behold that within, thyself is the temple of God<sup>21</sup>". This would be attained only by purifying the heart of all sins that bedim the sublime vision. Human life is indeed a boon, a rare gift conferred by the Almighty to man to practise *naam simran*, to seek liberation from the endless concatenation of births and deaths. Hence liberation depended not only on ones own efforts to attain the status of *sachiara*, but on the grace of the Guru: "Lest any in the world be lost in doubt; None without the Master's guidance liberation finds<sup>22</sup>". Again, saith Nanak: Thus by the Lord am I instructed: Brother! none without the Master's guidance liberation attains<sup>23</sup>. Without a gracious Guru, none can find the Lord, even if one were to perform millions of actions<sup>24</sup>.

While the Sikh Gurus hailed the Eternal Lord as their Guru, the Sikhs regard the ten Gurus as the messengers of the Lord who came to redeem mankind. "A true Guru is one who has in his spiritual transport realized the Ultimate Reality, and who can enable others to attain that Reality<sup>25</sup>". Guru Nanak, in his usual aphoristic way, sums up the entire Indian spiritual wisdom in just two lines: "By man's actions is acquired

the vesture of human incarnation, by God's grace is attained the door of liberation<sup>35</sup>". Man's existence is a probation for the soul to perform good deeds to seek liberation from the endless cycles of births and deaths. Salvation does not mean the assurance of a place in any celestial realm where nymphs dance to every passional tune and rivers of milk and honey flow as we have in the Islamic conception of a Hereafter.

In Sikhism, salvation means the attainment of the spirit to attune itself to the Will Divine. It is to attain the status of a *Gurmukh* that is promised in the Sikh perspective. A God-oriented person returns not to seclusion but enters into the fray to help his struggling fellow mortals to attain the same status. He attains to a state of non-attachment. Non-attachment to world's joys and sorrows; non-attachment to the fruit of one's actions. Engaged in *nishkam Karma* or *sewa*, in the state of perfect poise, equanimity and peace is indeed the *Gurmukh*, the Sikh ideal of human personality. Such a man indeed acquires the status of a sage - a *Gurmukh* is the ideal Sikh. The Ninth Nanak has rightly described this ideal image of a Sikh in his *bani*. The Ninth Master says: "He alone has known the Essence, who meets indifferently pleasure and suffering, wordly honour and neglect, And has risen beyond joy and sorrow - such a one has realized the Essence in this world; who

indifferently receives praise and calumny, And seeks alone the state sublime of transcendence<sup>27</sup>". Such is the perspective that Sikhism promises to a would-be neophyte, the unregenerate man.

## II

Sikhism recognizes God both as transcendent and immanent. The logical contradiction seems apparent only at the rational plane. To a mystic who transcends syllogistic truth, God appears as one – both Unmanifest or Absolute and Manifest-immanent in everything that He has created out of His Will. Guru Amar Das perceives this concept of God in three modes: "The Guru is God; The Guru is the voice of God; The Guru is the word, the truth of God<sup>28</sup>". He gave an injunction that there shall be one Guru, one word and only one interpretation, which became a guiding principle later on for the *Panth*. Bhai Nand Lal, Guru Gobind Singh's court poet, a poet with rare, fervid imagination, wholly devoted to the house of Nanak, pious beyond praise, who conforms strictly to the most orthodox Sikh theosophical thoughts attempted to portray, "The spiritual power and personality of Guru Nanak under three heads: Guru, *Shabad* and God<sup>29</sup>". Guru Nanak conceives of God as the word: "The holy word is the preceptor: by devoted meditation on it am I its disciple<sup>30</sup>". Again, he says: "The Guru is God, ineffable,

unsearchable, He who follows the Guru, comprehends the nature of universe<sup>31</sup>". Guru Gobind Singh in *Jap Sahib* says: "I bow before You, You Who are formless and shapeless, Who are matchless<sup>32</sup>". Bhai Gurdas too finds no distinction between God and Guru when he says: "The supreme God, the perfect God, primal being is the true Guru<sup>33</sup>". Again, "Guru is the replica of the perfect Brahm who is unmanifest and indestructible<sup>34</sup>".

The Guru, thus, occupies, next to God, the most exalted status in Sikh theology. The Sikh Gurus did not accept the Hindu belief in incarnation – the appearance of God on earth in human shape whenever evil and unrighteousness prevail. They, however, advocated the blending of one spirit with the next. Tradition states how Guru Nanak hailed Bhai Lehna, his successor, Angad - a part of his own self. This institution of unity of Guruship from one to the tenth proved of far reaching consequences in the consolidation of the Sikh religion. Gurbux Singh rightly comments: "In the absence of an organization like the institution of Guruship, the Kabir-*panthis* disintegrated and the Sikh nation too might not have made its appearance as a compact entity<sup>35</sup>".

Guru Nanak and his successor were holy persons – intermediaries between man and God – to convey the import of *Shabad* to ordinary mortals. In *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh

rejects the incarnation doctrine in most uncompromising terms: "He who calleth me God will burn in the fires of hell, I am only the servant of the Supreme Being, came to witness his play<sup>36</sup>". Earlier, Guru Arjan had said: "Burnt be the mouth that asserts, the Lord takes birth. He is neither born, nor dies; neither enters birth, nor departs<sup>37</sup>". Guru is used to denote a divine institution of his eternal spark of the divine light which continuously and eternally shows in the form of divine Word through the chosen man to inspire and guide mankind. In this way, the Sikh Gurus gave the divine light a new lustre and shape.

Guru Nanak did not make Guruship a hereditary principle and conferred Guruship on Bhai Lehna, for he knew he alone could carry out his mission. Satta and Balwand rightly sang: "Over Lehna's head, the umbrella he spread. And his canopy upon the sky was lifted<sup>38</sup>". Similarly, Bhai Gurdas wrote: "During his life time, Guru Nanak waved the canopy of Guru's seat on the head of Lehna and merged his light into him. Guru transformed himself and converted his body into new form<sup>39</sup>". Guru Gobind Singh says in *Bachitra Natak*: "The generality of men take them as different from one another; very few recognize them as one in spirit. But only those realize perfection who do recognize them as one<sup>40</sup>". Bhai Nand Lal expresses similar sentiments in *Jot Bikas*. Bhai Gurdas too wrote: "Guru Angad made Amar Das his

successor who was followed by Ram Das on Guru's seat. Similarly, Guruship entered into the house of Arjan<sup>41</sup>". Mohsin Fani, a contemporary of Guru Hargobind, said about Sikhs that their belief is that "All their Gurus are Nanak<sup>42</sup>". J.D.Cunningham described Guru Gobind as "inheritor of the spirit of Nanak transmitted to him as one lamp imparts its flame to another<sup>43</sup>".

When the Tenth Master felt that his earthly sojourn was near its close, he did away with the office of physical Guruship and vested the authority of the Guru in the word of the masters as embodied in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Bible of the Sikhs. This imparts a sense of permanent succession and continuity to the office of the Guru, for now Guru was the word. The Sikhs, after the *ardas*, often recite two couplets of Giani Gian Singh: "Command came from the Timeless God, and then was established the *Panth*. All the Sikhs are commanded to recognize the *Granth* as the Guru. Recognize the *Granth* as the Guru - it is the visible body of the Masters. Those who wish to meet the Lord, may seek Him therein (in the *Granth*)<sup>44</sup>".

The concept of Guru in Sikhism attains a unique status when we drift from the physical presence of the Master to his revelatory Word or *Shabad* as permanently enshrined in *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru, as a messenger has completed the ordained task and left his Word which is

eternal. The Sikhs are, therefore, enjoined to accept *Shabad-guru* and none else: "The *Bani* is Guru, the Guru in *Bani* manifested; in the *Bani* lie all immortal boons, the Guru in *Bani* expresses himself to which the disciple brings faith: Thus, does the Guru manifestly save the disciple<sup>45</sup>". Bhai Gurdas adorns this scriptural truth: "True Guru is revealed through the Word. Concentrate on the Guru and Word<sup>46</sup>". Guru Arjan acknowledges the veracity of this statement: "The holy Guru is His Word, the Word, the Holy Guru; this shall show the way to liberation<sup>47</sup>". This *Shabad-guru* is indeed something fair and rare in Sikh religion. Guruship does not end with the death of the Tenth Master, but continues till this day as *Shabad-guru* to inspire the Sikhs to attain, *param pad* or the Supreme status by learning to abide by the injunctions of *Shabad-guru*.

### III

*Shabad* in Sikh theology enjoys an uncontestable position, for, in a way, it is the key to Sikh mysticism and the Sikh way of life: "The Guru's *Shabad* is like a gem which reveals Thee by its light. One understands one's ownself and through the Guru's instructions merges in the truth<sup>48</sup>". The *Shabad* is the Guru's Word, the revelation of God in the depths of soul. "The function of the Word is that it provides the

means whereby man can know both God and the path which leads to Him, the means whereby the individual may secure release from his bonds and so attain union with God<sup>49</sup>". The Word becomes "the essential means of salvation<sup>50</sup>". By contemplating the Word, the individual rises above his self-centredness, *haumai*, attains union with the Lord, transcends death and the cycle of transmigration: "He has neither form, nor material sign, but He is revealed through the true Word<sup>51</sup>". Without the *Shabad* one is condemned to wander. Worldly affections cause many to sink. O man, apply your understanding to the Word and cross over. He who has not followed the Guru and has not understood the divine name, continues to transmigrate<sup>52</sup>".

With Guru Nanak, Guru is *Shabad*. He says: "The Word is Guru<sup>53</sup>" Again: "The Lord is bestower of merit and by the holy Word burns away evil qualities<sup>54</sup>". Shobharani Basu compares the Sikh concept of *Shabad* with other religions and finds certain similarities with the Logos of the Greeks and Christians, *Om* in Hinduism, *Kun* in Islam. All these words are in fact symbolic of the creative aspect of God. When He willed to create, He just uttered one word and everyone came into existence. He accomplished this divine fiat by just saying, "Let there be light and there was light". Shobarani says: "The Word in



Sikhism carries the meaning of what God says. God through the Guru imparts the Word<sup>55</sup>”.

*Shabad* is thus the Guru, and in the Guru, the divine light is *Shabad*. To quote Trilochan Singh: “The doctrine of the *Shabad* is the single basic thought, the governing idea, and the essential doctrine which gives life to the great structure called Sikhism<sup>56</sup>”. It is the intermediary between God and creation, between Guru and disciple. *Shabad* has been hailed as nectar (*amrita*) of life. It is concentration on *Word* or meditation on *naam* that can help the soul transcend its temporal limitations to see truth in its full effluence. The devotion to the *Word* or *naam simran* demands total surrender of the mind and body so that man’s entire self is imbued in its love and devotion.

Countless sins of the past life are washed away by the illumination of the Word<sup>57</sup>. Says Bhai Gurdas: “When the mind dives deeper and deeper into the *Word*, all mental impurities depart, the wisdom of the Guru dawns on the soul, man attains equipoise, the Divine Light blazes in his soul, and fearlessness is attained in profound contemplation of the Divine<sup>58</sup>”. Death loses its sting: “But the King of death is the friend and servant of those who have attained enlightenment through the *Word*<sup>59</sup>”.

*Shabad-guru* thus emerges as a unique postulate in Sikhism. In no other religion of the world, God, the Guru, and the Word are spiritually linked as in Sikhism. The prophet remains above his followers and never becomes one with them. It is indeed a rare example in human history that a preceptor – the Tenth Master – supplicates before his disciples to initiate him into the *Khalsa* and says that wherever the five Sikhs would assemble, they would feel his presence amidst them and their decision would be the mandate of the Guru to his followers. This decision led to the *Gurmatta* tradition which in turn contributed towards the consolidation of the *Panth*. Guru Gobind Singh also felt that the mission of Nanak had developed an inherent structure and force of its own for its survival and spread in the times to come. He decided to put an end to the institution of personal Guruship and invested the Guruship to the *Granth Sahib* or *Shabad* or Word as contained therein. *Granth Sahib* later came to be known as *Guru Granth Sahib*, which provides right guidance to the neophyte, who himself has to tread the path and can attain the ultimate goal of life. In Nanak's system, the Godhead, Name and Guru are in essence one, though operationally distinct. Godhead is transcendental, unknowable, formless; *Name* is the Godhead as actually communicated, as presented, and the Guru is the mediator

who brings the Name to the devotee. There is a mystic unity involved in this triad – Godhead is abstract, Name concrete and Guru human. In the great liberation, the three are resolved into one<sup>60</sup>”.

*Shabad-guru* as Jagjit Singh says, “placed principle above personality and diverted the religious devotion to serve social and political ends”<sup>61</sup>. As the spirit of Gurus dwells in *Guru Granth Sahib*, it is to be accepted as the institution of the living Guru. “The unity as well as the end of personal Guruship which today is the fundamental belief of the majority of the followers of Guru Nanak, may be regarded as their most creative response to the greatness of the founder of Sikhism”<sup>62</sup>.

The institution of Guruship has played a dynamic role in the evolution of Sikh religion and society. Constant personal guidance of the Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh congealed the Sikhs into a perfect unity. The Sikh community acquired its distinct, separate identity totally different from the prevailing social Hindu order. The Sikhs are not Hindus because the Sikh gurus had imparted distinct teachings to them. Sikhism recognizes no incarnation of the divine in human form, forbids the worship of stocks and stones, shuns casteism and regard all men as equal and rejects superstitious beliefs like

pollution and purity and has evolved its own rituals and customs regarding birth, initiation, marriage and death.

Guru undertook the most important task of converting the ordinary man into *Gurmukh* or God-oriented. There were two concepts, one was *manmukh* and the other was *gurmukh*. The disciple who obeyed the commands of the Guru was called *gurmukh*. The *gurmukh* was a perfect man who lived a godly life. Bhai Gurdas says: "The God-oriented move upon the simple and straightway and mind-oriented (*manmukh*) go astray. The *gurmukh* get across whereas the *manmukh* gets drowned in the world of ocean. The *gurmukh* forsakes ego, whereas *manmukh* burns himself constantly in the fire of egotism"<sup>63</sup>.

Ego and selfishness are the two obstacles in the spiritual evolution of man and lead to unnecessary psychological conflicts. Moreover, man is ignorant of the causes of his separation from the Ultimate Truth. From the Guru, "man obtained the word and merged himself in it which could help him meet the Lord"<sup>64</sup>. *Shabad* (Guru) helps the seeker in gaining knowledge in contemplation and in following the way of religion with the help of Guru, *gurmukh* knows the fact that, 'God permeates among all'<sup>65</sup>, 'pervades all round'<sup>66</sup>, 'responds to the caller'<sup>67</sup>, 'operates according to the needs of the creatures'<sup>68</sup>, and Lord alone makes the *gurmukhs* liberated<sup>69</sup>.

With the help of the Guru the *gurmukh* attains the sense of discipline and service<sup>70</sup>, effaceth the ego<sup>71</sup>, filled himself with love for others. *Gurmukhs* are liberated from selfhood and I-ness, and serve the *Sangat* by brining water and grinding corn, etc<sup>72</sup>. Guru has repeatedly tried to educate men to avail themselves of this opportunity of becoming God-oriented beings – *sachiara* – the ultimate ideal of Sikhism. To attain this status altruistic deeds and *sewa* alone would help man. The *Guru* laid down the message of hope, right efforts and progress. Guru Arjan said: “With the gift of human incarnation granted to thee, now is thy opportunity to have union with the Lord. Nothing else shall avail thee. In the holy company on the *Name* immaculate mediate”<sup>73</sup>. Similarly, Guru Amar Das said: “At God’s accounting house the self only through truthful living finds liberation”<sup>74</sup>. So by living a truthful life, man attains the spiritual goal.

Guru is the communicator of the word through which deliverance can be attained. As Nanak said: “Laud ye the Name; thereby shall your mind and body be joyful; and in walking, sitting, sleeping shall ye be in bliss<sup>75</sup>”. Bhai Gurdas also writes that Guru by giving the technique of knowledge, meditation and remembrance to the Sikh, liberated him for ever”<sup>76</sup>. Guru provided the human mind with peace and eternal bliss and the holy Word. Guru Amardas says: “Daily I am robbed by five

evils, how could I save my house?"<sup>77</sup> and then he answers himself that through the power of holy Word, these evils can be destroyed. Guru is also the enlightener, the instructor, who shows the way and puts us in direct contact with the Supreme Being. 'He is the ship which graciously ferries us across the sea of the world'<sup>78</sup>. Similarly, in *Asa di Var*, Guru says: "Should a hundred moons rise and thousands suns, - with all this illumination, without the Guru's guidance, all remains pitch darkness"<sup>79</sup>. By reading books, reciting prayers, worshipping stones, wearing rosaries, putting on sacrificing marks we could not find the way. They are all futile. As Guru Nanak says: "None has reached God without the true Guru, without the True Guru, none so far"<sup>80</sup>. With the Guru's instructions man could be emancipated as Guru Nanak said: "The holy preceptor is the ship – this rare ones alone have realized: By his grace the seekers he takes across"<sup>81</sup>. Guru shows the way to the seeker of the path to righteousness.

Guru also lifts the veil of ignorance and shows the light. The creator is known through the Guru. The seed of divine light is there in every heart. It remained hidden, but God reveals it to man through the magnetic touch of the Guru. In *Japuji*, Guru Nanak emphasized that there is only one benefactor of all creation who should not be forgotten. It is Guru who reveals the mysteries of the unknown and

unsearchable. Guru Amar Das says: "May I be a sacrifice, time and again to any, who lodges God's *Name* in the self"<sup>82</sup> and again says: 'By the preceptor's teachings is the heart centred in God, and in joy in the Eternal dyed'<sup>83</sup>. So the presence of Guru as the functioning force in the Sikh links him to an inexhaustible source of power and virility.

Guru brought discipline among his disciples. Macauliffe gives us information of Guru Nanak's daily routine at Kartarpur. 'The Guru has divided the day into four *pahar* and *bani* was recited in each *pahar* and breakfast and dinner was served"<sup>84</sup>. Thus, routine life was given to the Sikhs. Similarly, Guru Ram Das also codified the daily code of conduct. He said that his disciples must rise early, take bath, meditate on *naam* and inspire others in this direction and then only Sikh could win the Master's pleasures<sup>85</sup>. Later on, *Rahit maryada* was also provided by Guru Gobind Singh. In this way the solidarity and integrity of the Sikhs remained intact and they suffered no distraction. Thus it provided the base for the Sikh society which was in the process of evolution.

The Guru inculcates a profound sense of devotion among his Sikhs. The Sikhs must cherish devotion, faith and love for the Gurus. The Guru said, "Inside the self is placed the jewel of devotion: through the preceptor's teaching is its worth known"<sup>86</sup>. The Sikh should endeavour to attain the likeness of his master by obeying him and

carrying out his command. The Guru says: "Devotion to Thee is real only if it pleases Thee, Thou dost alone confer it, Never regretting afterwards the gift"<sup>87</sup>. Even Bhai Gurdas says: 'only by becoming dead in life, one can become true disciple. He should be just like a slave, who is ever busy in the service of the master'<sup>88</sup>. So one should completely surrender oneself to God. With master's grace, man gets absorbed in devotion and gets sanctified.

Guru also performs the role of a caretaker of his disciples and looked after their needs and desires. As Bhai Gurdas said, "The Sikh who has comes to the shelter of Guru, his lust, anger, resistance were eradicated, his greed, infatuation and ego erased. He helped him to practise *dharma*, truth, charity and *naam*<sup>89</sup>". Guru is a perfect physician who cures all the five chronic ailments<sup>90</sup>. Guru catches hold of his disciple from the arm and helps him cross the world ocean. Thus Guru is in a position to prescribe virtue and duties for leading a life of truthfulness and also to impart instructions to competent seekers and disciples so that they may regulate their efforts to discover the truth<sup>91</sup>. The Guru is the true instrument of His Will and is commissioned by God to reveal His truth to humanity.

For the Sikhs, the Divine Guru was a companion, a dispeller of spiritual ignorance, Guru was a giver and teacher of God's *name*, and



provided peace, truth and wisdom. He was a philosopher who guided man. He was the creator, the remover of all sins and purifier of the impure. The institution of Guru was a great source of unity and cohesion among the Sikhs. The Sikh Gurus believed in the brotherhood of man the fatherhood of God and imbued mankind with a sense of equality and provided a base for democratic ideals. They provided moral strength to their disciples by inspiring them to lead an honest and truthful life. They preached dignity of labour and hardwork and built their characters. They were the source of inspiration to their disciples and brought discipline among them. They shaped their personality and provided them a sense of direction in life. Now *Guru Granth Sahib* is accepted as the institution of the living Guru. This fact has been established by the recent decision of the full bench of the Supreme Court of India, which has proclaimed the Sikh Scripture as Juristic Person. Thus institution of Guruship provided permanence and continuity to Sikhism.

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<sup>90</sup>S.G.G.S., Raga Asa, Mohalla 1, p. 414.

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Ess Publications, Delhi, 1977, p. 35.

## Chapter-VII

# MARTYRDOM : THE SIKH WAY

The term 'Martyr' is derived from the Greek word 'martyr' which means witness. It signifies a person who stakes his life as a supreme sacrifice for his faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to his passionate commitment to his ideals. So "a martyr is one who lays his life in the cause of religion or faith<sup>1</sup>". A martyr is the crown and glory of the human race who affirms by his death that to man his values are far more important than his muddy vesture of clay. Human history is dotted by such martyrs who laid an aura of sanctity to their dispensation. His death also rudely shakes the complacency of his ordinary fellow mortals who are over-awed by the cool and calm of the martyr.

A martyr, according to Tirlochan Singh is, "one who suffers torments, tortures and death to uphold his ideals, conviction and faith which awakens the sleeping minds of the oppressed and frightened humanity<sup>2</sup>". Emerson, the leader of the nineteenth century



transcendental movement in America too stresses this role of the martyr.

The martyr cannot be dishonoured. Every lash inflicted is a tongue of flame; every prison a more illustrious abode... every suppressed or expunged word reverbrates through the earth from side to side. Hours of sanity or consideration are always arriving to communities as to individuals when the truth is seen and the martyrs are justified<sup>3</sup>.

Socrates set the supreme example when he drank the cup of hemlock with a rare cheerfulness and calm of mind to show his surrounding followers that man's values are dearer to him than even his life. God sent his own son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ to suffer martyrdom to redeem the sins of fallen mankind. Without any rancour towards his persecutors, Jesus went to the cross forgiving his foes for their ignorance and false beliefs: "Forgive them O'Lord, for they know not what they do<sup>4</sup>". G.S.Talib regards the 'Christ figure' as "the archetype of the martyr" and his "crown of thorns and the 'stigmata' on this holy frame" as "truly the brand of martyr". From Christ's martyrdom, Talib draws a general definition of the martyr: "The steadfast, innocent sufferer for truth at the hands of ignorant or immortal wielders of authority is the ideal martyr, whose example not only inspires others to similar feats of self-sacrifice, but confirms the

ideals defended by the original martyr in the minds of the vast numbers of people, so that his message spreads and becomes what has been called the seeds of the Church<sup>5</sup>”.

In fact, persecution is as old as religion itself. Every form of dissent from the tribe has been seen with the bitter eye of disapproval and the attempts had been made to stifle it with every mode of coercion. The Christians suffered martyrdom in thousands during the Roman empire and then suffered those who resisted the wrongs of the powerful Papacy that could not brook any form of non-conformity to its establishment. The ecclesiastical law, which opposed enlightened thinking, came heavily upon the protagonists of new thought. The papacy did not spare even scientific thinkers like Galileo and Bruno. Though Galileo managed to save his life, Bruno met the tragic fate. Internecine warfare between protestants and Catholics produced a string of martyrs, each denomination claiming its martyr a status of unenviable supremacy. The Jews suffered at the hands of the Christians and their sufferings that started from the day of Exodus to the present day form a dark line of blemish on the face of humanity. Persecution is “the genesis of course, of the situation in which heroic and dedicated spirits enact the great and noble drama of martyrdom<sup>6</sup>”.

The unflinching courage and fortitude with which hundreds and thousands of martyrs like Lollards in England, Huguenots in France and hosts of them in Spain and other parts of Europe bear testimony to the fact that no fear of inquisition or stake could deflect them from their faith. Socrates at seventy, Joan of Arc at seventeen were imbued with the same zeal and commitment to their conviction.

## I

Moral and spiritual experience of martyrdom was something unique in the Sikh annals. Tirlochan Singh says that "there was no concept of martyrdom in Hindu Buddhist history<sup>7</sup>". The Hindu philosophy of immanence and pantheism generated a spirit of tolerance and accommodation and there was not much hostility among its various denominations. Moreover, the doctrine of *ahimsa* and renunciation as a spiritual ideal left not much scope for theological wranglings that lead to opaque minds blinded by orthodoxy and fanaticism. The influence of great monarchs like Ashoka and Harshvardhana led to catholicity of faith and persecution that leads to martyrdom, seemed alien to these. However, the Jains and the Buddhists were sometimes subjected to persecution by the followers of the Vedic faith. After overthrowing the Mauryan empire, a Brahmin

Commander-in-Chief Pushapamitra in his zeal to revive Brahminism, collected the heads of Buddhist monks. And at the time of Brahminical revival of the post-Buddhist era, there is a mention again of persecution of the Buddhists.

The advent of Islam into India brought altogether a new culture – a composite of the Jewish, Hellenistic and Arabic elements. This composite culture expressed itself through the Persian language, the basis of which was the Arabic, conditioned to be the vehicle of philosophical thought. Islam brought a rich history of martyrs. Its clash with the pacifist Indian culture and its incorrigible zeal to spread Islam led to the rise of the institution of martyrdom in this land.

In the Muslim tradition, the parallel term for martyr is *shahid*, which literally signifies the same, that is witness. The Arabic word for martyr in *Quran*, and in Muslim theology is *Shahid* which means “present as a witness”. The Mohammedan law, however, extends the scope of definition, for it includes not only those who die in defence of faith but also those whose deaths are supposed to excite the compassion of their followers. Says the Holy *Quran*: Who so obeys God and Apostles, these are with those whom God has been well-pleased - with prophets and confessors and martyrs and the righteous, a fair company are they<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, in Islam, martyrdom is closely associated with *Jihad* which enjoys religious sanction. T.P.Hughes defines *Jihad* as “a religious war with those who are unbelievers in the mission of Mohammed. It is an incumbent religious duty established in *Quran* and in the traditions as a divine institution, and enjoined specially for the purpose of advancing repelling evil from Muslims<sup>9</sup>”. Says the *Quran*: Count not those who are killed in the War of God as dead, but living with their Lord<sup>10</sup>.

The Muslim law, however, includes some more categories of death in the martyr tradition. For instance, persons slain unjustly, persons who die in such a manner to excite public sympathy such as by sudden death, or from some malignant disease or in child birth or in the acquirement of knowledge or in a strange land or dying on Thursday night. These unnatural deaths gave birth to concepts like *bir*, *baital*, *bhut*, *churel*, etc., the malignant spirits which were to be appeased by worship to ward off their evil influence on human beings. This form of worship permeated into the Indian folkloristic culture, especially the pre-Singh Sabha Sanatan Dharma in Sikhism and with great assertion the illiterate Sikhs were weaned away from these superstitions and the definition of *Shahid* borrowed from the Persian and Arabic vocabulary was marginalised.

The Muslim tradition of martyrdom goes back to the prophet's times when Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet, fell on the battlefield of Karbala with the members of his family and tribe. Then the term was also applied to those who died on the side of the Prophet in the battle of Badr. Mansur-al-Hallaj enjoys great reverence in the popular Muslim imagination. This famous mystic was impaled in Baghdad in the ninth century, for uttering *Anal Haq* (I am God) by the Muslim orthodoxy which branded the utterance as blasphemous. Shams-I-Tabriz, the perceptor of greater philosopher of Sufism Jalaluddin Rumi, was flayed alive, for the Muslim orthodoxy have never been lenient to Sufism. According to popular Islamic tradition, the *Shahid* receives the highest ranks in paradise occupying the place nearest the throne of God. The objective of struggle for righteousness or carrying out the will of God results in martyrdom which inspires the future generation to maintain righteousness and claims of conscience against bat-eyed orthodoxy that brooks no opposition or dissent. As *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* adds: "There is fairly unanimous tradition in Iran that the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra himself ended his life for the cause of his religion and faith along with eighty of his priests<sup>11</sup>". A martyr is the supreme archetype of the human race for he becomes a beacon of light to guide the spiritual destiny of others.

Toynbee rightly says: "If God's love has gone into action in this world in the redemption of mankind by Christ, then man's efforts to make himself like of God must include efforts to follow Christ's examples in sacrificing himself for the redemption of his fellowmen<sup>12</sup>".

## II

The Sikh adoption of the word *Shahid* is neither a concession to the Islamic faith or the acknowledgement of its exclusiveness, nor, as some contemporary Sikh scholars aver, to chalk out a different course in order to break away from the Brahminical orthodoxy, but as a term that had become a part of the cultural taxonomy of India. Guru Nanak, the founder of The Sikh faith, was primarily a poet who expressed his revelatory experience, a universal message, through the poetic medium that could be easily communicated to all irrespective of caste and creed, birth and breed. We find numerous Muslim names for God and spirituality in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Similarly, words like *Shahidi* or *Shahadat* acquired popular currency and *Shahid* became a part of the cultural taxonomy of India.

Martyrdom in Sikhism enjoys a unique place as an institution and was emphatically laid down by Guru Nanak and followed by Sikhs after him. About this institution Kharak Singh says: "In the Sikh form the

institution is a complete departure from the Indian tradition, and for that matter radically distinguishes it, from the whole-life character of Sikhism from the earlier dichotomous or pacific Indian religious traditions<sup>13</sup>". In the very beginning of the *Japuji*, Guru Nanak raises the question: How to attain the status of *sachhara* (truthful) and to sunder the wall of nescience? His answer is: By acquiescing in the Divine Will<sup>14</sup>. This Will is the matrix of all virtues and it is the highest form of love. Life is a game of love that demands total self-surrender. He says: "Shouldst thou seek to engage in the game of love, step into my street with thy head placed on thy palm: While on to this stepping, ungrudgingly sacrifice your head<sup>15</sup>". Thus, Guru Nanak defined the institution of martyrdom, "an essential ingredient of the path he was laying down for man<sup>16</sup>". It was "a path sharper than the edge of a double-edged sword<sup>17</sup>".

Guru Nanak's conception of love is reiterated by the Fifth Master when he says that if love could be purchased with gold, then Ravana had not to offer his head to Lord Shiva. The word *Shahid* thus occurs not only in Sri *Guru Granth Sahib*<sup>18</sup>, Bhai Gurdas also uses it four times in his *Vars*<sup>19</sup>. Guru Amar Das uses the words *khannion tikkhi*, *valon nikki*, sharper than dagger point and thinner than a hair<sup>20</sup> for the faith of Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh's verse endorses Guru



Nanak's faith, "*Jin prem kio tin hi prabh payo* (I utter nothing but truth, that he alone attaineth God, who loveth)"<sup>21</sup>". Bhai Gurdas tells us that only by becoming dead in life (totally detached) one can become a true disciple and that a true and sincere Sikh must have three basic qualities *sabr* (patience), *sidq* (deep faith) and *shahid* (the spirit of a martyr)<sup>22</sup>. Bhai Jodh Singh regards Sikh martyrdom as grounded firmly in Sikh ideology and extols the Sikh conception of love as the willing acceptance of Lord's will. Jagjit Singh rightly observes: "Sikh history is a tale of sacrifices, persecutions and martyrdoms invited by the Sikhs in the service of their mission. It is for the mission that the Gurus had inspired, prepared and led them"<sup>23</sup>".

Bhai Kahan Singh in his *Mahan Kosh* makes four entries regarding the definition of a martyr in Sikhism: "A martyr is one who is a witness to his faith; whose martyrdom sets an example for others as the defender of faith; one who has staked his life in *Dharam-Yudh*; and for the *Shahidan Misl* named after the celebrated Sikh martyr Baba Deep Singh Ji"<sup>24</sup>. In Sikhism, sacrifice, therefore carries a special spiritual and metaphysical connotation. Bravery, courage, fearlessness and fortitude are the notable characteristics of a Sikh martyr. Guru Nanak speaks of a kind of dying which gives permanent life devoid of pain. Guru says: People of the world! revile not death, should one

know how to die<sup>25</sup>. Again: "Those who fight against tyranny for a noble cause, without forgetting the Lord, the death cannot have any terror for them and their death is approved by God<sup>26</sup>" Even Bhagat Kabir endorses this view when he hails a hero as one who fights for his faith and may be hacked limb by limb, yet shall not recant his faith<sup>27</sup>. Thus the Sikh tradition of martyrdom moves on from Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur to the Sikhs of the succeeding generations who bore every kind of torture and yet remained firm and steadfast in faith and are remembered by the Sikhs at the time of *ardas*. A martyr in Sikhism is "not only a saint but also a saint-soldier. He fights and dies for a holy cause" and "patience in the face of sufferings and total submission to Divine Will are the main features of a Sikh martyr<sup>28</sup>".

In Sikhism, emphasis is also laid on living martyrs. Guru Nanak says: "By sacrifice of self comes liberation: Thereby are mind and body purified<sup>29</sup>". Similarly, Guru Arjan Dev says: "Accept first death as inevitable, and attachment to life discard; Turn dust of feet of all – therefore to us come<sup>30</sup>". Then again: "Those dead to the world regard living; those living for the world know to be dead<sup>31</sup>". Even Kabir says: "Rare is such a one as dies to the world while living<sup>32</sup>".

### III

Martyrdom, says G.W.Bowersock, remains “a powerful force at the intersection of religion and politics<sup>33</sup>”. Since in Sikhism the spiritual and the temporal, the religion and the politics coalesce, for Sikhism is a whole-life religion, martyrdom acquires a specific tradition. The Sikh *Shahids*, says Louis E. Fenech, “give their lives to uphold righteousness (*dharam*) under the most painful and chilling circumstances, providing testimony (*shahadat*) to their faith with their blood<sup>34</sup>”. The Sikh seeks martyrdom in the battlefield for the cause of righteousness. In his spectacular death the martyr shows to the world his distinct identity. It is this aspect of martyrdom that forms an essential component in Sikhism, where a Sikh is released from the fear of death, fear of oppression and injustice and fear of want.

Moreover, Guru Nanak’s *Babar vani* has been hailed by historians and theologians as an expression of courage. The way he admonished invading Mughals and the rulers of the day – the Lodhis - who failed in their duty to protect the people, amply demonstrate his anguish at the wanton destruction wrought by the invading hordes. Hymns reveal that Guru Nanak had all the characteristics that a martyr possesses – defiance, resistance, courage and fearlessness. With the rise of Guru

Nanak there arises "a galaxy of saints who are also warriors" dedicated to the service of others and that men grew "not only in the soul but became more broad of limb, more full of defiance against earthly odds and fighting not for the self... but for values and against tyranny, whether political or social, from whatever quarter it comes<sup>35</sup>". Guru Nanak was thus truly heroic who brought the idea of martyrdom which was more or less alien to Indian thought. It is on the basis of these observations that Fenech concludes: "Despite the fact that the Guru was not a martyr, he possessed all the characteristics of one" and thus hails him as "a potential martyr" and further says that the "martyr tradition provides a framework to interpret the *Adi Granth*" which in turn "provides the material for the martyr tradition<sup>36</sup>".

Thus, Nanak's theology of liberation is the matrix of Sikh martyr tradition as says G.S.Talib "... in Guru Nanak's own life a situation demanding his entering into active conflict with organized tyranny did not happen to arise ... if he escaped martyrdom, it was perhaps because the rulers of the day did not awake to his full meaning, under the impression that he was, after all, a *sadhu*<sup>37</sup>.

The ideal Sikh, the *gurmukh*, is an instrument of God's will. He is not supposed to shut his eyes to oppression or quail before the forces of tyranny but battle against them to achieve martyrdom. He must cultivate qualities like selfless service, truth, patience, courage, self-

surrender, humility and self-respect to become a potential martyr to achieve martyrdom whenever the situation so demands. Louis E. Fenech rightly states: Where in other religious traditions martyrdom is an act which redeems ... in Sikhism only the redeemed are capable of martyrdom. And thus, the realization of *sachkhand* is not the end of spiritual journey according to the Sikh tradition of martyrdom<sup>38</sup>.

*Haumai* is the greatest impediment to attain the status of a *gurmukh* and *haumai* is not only centred in the individual but in the social and political institutions as well. To seek liberation from every form of *haumai* is, therefore, the ideal of Sikhism. "Manifestation of *haumai* in the form of social and political aggrandizement<sup>39</sup>" must be eradicated. Fearlessness, therefore, becomes the cardinal principle of the Sikh faith. It is not only defined as one of the attributes of God but also the basis of Sikh heroism. "Nanak was not only describing an attribute of divine being, but also inculcating in the minds of his followers the spirit of fearlessness towards established political authority<sup>40</sup>". It was this fearlessness that was practised and advocated by the succeeding Gurus and culminated in the creation of the *Khalsa*.

## IV

Although historical sources are not unanimous with regard to the political and personal machinations with regard to Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom, he is hailed as the first and the prince of martyrs, an epitome of fearlessness, forbearance and fortitude in the annals of the Sikh faith. Since Guru Arjan Dev's persecution was held in camera and his death lacked the public spectacle, many conjectures have been made with regard to the actual cause of his martyrdom. Chandu Shah, an influential Hindu official's personal enmity, ill-will of Pirthi Chand, Guru Ram Das's eldest son, hostility of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, the fanatic head of the Naqshbandi order and the Guru's alleged blessings and help to the rebel prince Khusro, are cited as the important factors that instigated and prompted the emperor to the execution of Guru Arjan. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* is regarded as the best and the most reliable authority on the martyrdom of the Guru.

In *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, the emperor states that there lived at Goindwal "a Hindu named Arjan in the garb of a *Pir* and *Shaikh*" who captivated "the hearts of many simple minded Hindus" and "of foolish and stupid Muslims and had noised himself about as a religious and worldly leader" and that when Khusro passed along this road, he

“conveyed pre-conceived things to him and made on his forehead a finger mark in saffron... called *Qashqa (Tika)*”. The emperor finally states that he ordered that the Guru “should be put to death with torture<sup>41</sup>”.

Thus the two charges trumped against the Guru that he had a following amongst the Hindus and Muslims and wielded a considerable influence and that he supported the rebel prince are said to be major causes of his martyrdom. Besides there was a conflict of ideologies between them. Muslim assertion over indigenous spiritual values and cultural traditions was objected by the Guru. The Arabic socio-political system was alien to Indian system. Sikhs wanted to preserve their culture and heritage as well as their independence regarding their faith and their right to live with dignity and grace for which Jahangir attacked the Sikh society.

It is true that Guru Arjan held a court and was hailed by his followers as *Sachcha Padshah* and his court reflected the pomp and splendour of royalty. *Masands* from far-flung places brought precious gifts and money, given by the devout, and the business of the Sikhs in Amritsar flourished and Sikhism looked like a ‘separate state within the Mughal state<sup>42</sup>’. No emperor can afford to see the erosion of his

authority and the decline of his power and influence in his province. This seems to be the basic cause of Guru Arjan's martyrdom.

As regards the Khusro affair, historians do not regard it as a cogent reason. No doubt, the rebel prince visited the Guru at Tarn Taran and like all visitors he was welcome to the house of Nanak. Ganda Singh dismisses the *Tika* affair as "a pure and simple concoction of some conspirators' fertile imagination to exploit the emperor's emotions against the Guru<sup>43</sup>". Says Ganda Singh: "Never in the whole history of the Sikh Gurus, there had been any occasion for any Guru to anoint anyone... The *Teeka* or *Tilak* ceremony of the succeeding Guru was always performed by a leading Sikh. In the case of Guru Angad to Guru Arjan, the ceremony was performed by Bhai Budha... and the same practice was followed upto ... the last Guru<sup>44</sup>".

It is a historical fact that the emperor was not a fanatic votary of Islam. But at the time of his accession of the throne, he needed the support of the orthodox section of the influential Muslim clergy. As a political expediency, he placated the fanatical Muslims, the Naqshbandi revivalists, that he would play a pivotal role as the defender of faith. Sikh religion was becoming popular and it was not only a challenge to Islam, but also a challenge to the state. It was precisely for this reason that after passing the orders of Guru's execution, he was handed over



to Shaikh Farid Bukhari who was honoured with the title of Murtaza Khan for his loyalty to the throne by repressing the prince's rebellion. It was not Guru Arjan's martyrdom which gave "a political turn to the Sikh movement, rather it was a political overtone of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom<sup>45</sup>". The author of *Dabistan* provides us useful evidence on the change in the attitude of Mughal Emperor towards the Guru<sup>46</sup>.

The Guru was subjected to tortures by seating him in a cauldron of boiling water and pouring burning sand on his naked person and the most painful torture could be to dip a blistered body in cold water. The historians like Rattan Singh Bhangu in the *Prachin Panth Parkash* and Sohan Lal Suri in *Umadat-ut-Twarikh* and Kesar Singh in his *Bansavali Nama* confirm this punishment. Sohan Lal Suri writes: "Having subjected him to a number of tortures they threw the saint (Guru Arjan) into the river *Ravi*<sup>47</sup>". Thus, Guru Arjan became the first martyr at the altar of the Sikh faith.

There may be some truth in the dynastic conspiracy and the vendetta of Chandu Shah, the fact remains that Jahangir regarded the Guru as a challenge to his state as there was a fear that Sikhs might expand their activities and influence under the guidance of Guru Arjan. Thus, Jahangir ordered that he should be put to death with torture.

The Guru, despite all the horrible tortures, bore the pain with fortitude accepting it as the will of the Lord: "Whatsoever your will ordains is sweetness to me. All I require is the wealth of God's *name*<sup>48</sup>". Again "under the protection of *Parbraham* not even a hot wind will blow by me. Brother, with in his protective ring suffering assails me not... the divine protector has protected us all and removed all disease. Says Nanak, through his own grace the Lord is our helper<sup>49</sup>". Guru Arjan Dev was a true martyr who sacrificed his life boldly, and met his fate with fortitude.

## V

As regards Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom, the accounts are more detailed than about Guru Arjan's. This greater attention to his sacrifice for *Dharma* is due to the fact that, to quote Fenech, his "martyrdom is interpreted as one of the major events which led to the creation of the *Khalsa* in 1699, believed to be a watershed in the Sikh history<sup>50</sup>". The pious but bigoted emperor Aurangzeb, who eked out his own living by sacribing copies of the *Quran*, over-zealous and puritan to the core, had determined to convert this land of infidals into *Dar-ul-Islam* and directed his provincial governors to stop all forms of song and dance and use every form of coercion to convert Hindus into the

Islamic fold and did not spare even his own co-religionists the *Shias* and *Sufis* for their deviation from orthodoxy. The Guru's extensive tours, his growing popularity and following incensed the emperor especially when he received reports that the Guru extracted money from rural folks. According to William Irvine, the Guru's crimes in the emperor's eyes may have been the style of address adopted by his disciples "who had begun to call their leader *Sachcha Padshah* or the true king<sup>51</sup>".

J.D.Cunningham also states that the "Sikh Gurus came to talk of themselves and to be regarded by their followers as *Sachcha Padshahs*" or as 'veritable kings'<sup>52</sup> and this invited the ire of the ruling class. Mohammad Qasim in his *Ibratnama* also refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur having come under the wrath of Aurangzeb to be condemned to death... as he lives in great splendour and his followers claimed sovereignty for him<sup>53</sup>. Even Bhimsen refers that Guru Tegh Bahadur spent his life in splendour and took to the path of rebellion. Guru called himself *Padshah* and large number of people gathered around him. When Aurangzeb came to know of his activities, he summoned the Guru to the court and he was executed<sup>54</sup>.

The overzealous Iftikhar Khan, the Governor of Kashmir vigorously followed the emperor's anti-Hindu policies and he

“tyrannized over the Brahmins to such an extent that they approached Guru Tegh Bahadur... and solicited his personal intervention with the emperor. This ultimately led to the Guru’s martyrdom<sup>55</sup>”. This account is also supported by *Bhatt Vahi* Multani Sindhi, Sarup Singh’s *Guru Kian Sakhian* (No. 25) and Sewa Singh’s *Shahid Bilas*. The policy of repression was also carried out against Sikhs to curb their religious and political activities, as it was a threat to Islamization policy of Aurangzeb. The Guru was arrested near Ropar and then handed over to Dilawar Khan, Faujdar of Sirhind who detained the Guru for three and half months and sent him to Delhi on November 5, 1675.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was coerced by the *Qazi* to embrace Islam and was subjected to torture to shake his faith. To instil terror into him, his three companions were killed in the most inhuman way. Bhai Mati Dass was sawn alive; Bhai Dyal Das was boiled alive and Bhai Sati Das was wrapped in cotton and roasted alive. Steadfast and serene, the Guru witnessed the spectacle of his Sikhs courting martyrdom for the sake of their faith. But fear was alien to the Guru who said: “He who fears none nor frighteneth, saith Nanak, he alone is the wise one who knows!<sup>56</sup>”. When he refused to abjure his faith or display any miracle, the Guru was publically executed in the Chandni Chowk at Delhi. Says Ganda Singh: “The picture of Guru Tegh Bahadur

that emerges out in the objective historical setting... is of a true martyr in the cause of *Dharma* and freedom of conscience and conviction<sup>57</sup>".

Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and his martyrdom clearly indicate that the spirit of man is indeed invincible and it also "highlights that external forces may imprison the body but cannot assail the soul of a man who is anchored in God and devoted to the cause of righteousness and freedom<sup>58</sup>". It was indeed a unique event to sacrifice one's life for others. Guru made a supreme sacrifice for the faith and tenets in which he did not believe and "fought for the right of the people for their freedom of worship<sup>59</sup>".

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan brought a change and the concept of *Miri* and *Piri* was adopted along with the concept of *Sachcha Padshah, raj, takhat, darbar*. It also brought structural changes in Sikh movement and Guru Hargobind wore two swords which represents spiritual-cum-secular authority. This transformed Sikhism into a more militant faith. Guru Teg Bahadur's sacrifice led to creation of *Khalsa*. It left a profound impact on the people. "The whole Punjab began to burn with indignation<sup>60</sup>". Fauja Singh and G.S.Talib rightly aver that for Guru Tegh Bahadur "the question was not merely of saving the Hindu religion... but of defending *Dharma* in the largest Indian connotation"

for "tyranny in any form was considered as an attack on *Dharma*" and the Guru sacrificed his life "in the name and defence of *Dharma*<sup>61</sup>".

Guru Tegh Bahadur's supreme sacrifice roused the dormant revolutionary spirit of the Sikhs and the Tenth Master produced saint-soldiers who "with one hand on the hilt of the sword and the other on the *mala* (rosary)<sup>62</sup>" ultimately shook the foundations of the Mughal empire. About the Sikh martyrs Bhagat Lakshman Singh states: The Sikh martyr, by a magic wand, as it were completely metamorphosed the society and the country that gave them birth. They completely changed the course of events in the times in which they lived, falsifying, the much talked of and much commented upon theory that great men are mere products of their times<sup>63</sup>.

Thus Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was the culmination of the ideology of Guru Nanak. Says Louis Fenech, "It is Guru Tegh Bahadur's strong insistence on the conquest of fear that is often noted as a loud echo of that same concern in the *bani* of Guru Nanak<sup>64</sup>". It was primarily for this reason that Bhagat Lakshman Singh hails Guru Tegh Bahadur as "prince of martyrs, whose example it was that permanently inspired most of the *Khalsa* to seek the crown of martyrdom". The Tenth Master in *Bachitra Natak* hails his father's noble and heroic deed: "The Lord protected their paste-mark and

sacred thread, and in *Kaliyuga* performed a mighty deed. To defend the righteous, he spared no sacrifice. Gave away his head, but uttered not a groan. For defending righteousness, he enacted this great deed<sup>65</sup>". Thus the Guru gave a practical demonstration by making sacrifice in order to realize their socio-political and religious aims and set an example for the Sikhs to follow. Noel A King says that never before in Indian history has pure love of death manifested itself so gloriously as in the Sikh history ... Guru Arjan and Tegh Bahadur and their followers made supreme sacrifices for the sake of justice and truth<sup>66</sup>.

## VI

Guru Gobind Singh created the *Khalsa* to protect *Dharma* and ensure freedom to every one the way he likes to worship this earth's water and wind. The Tenth Master played a "providential role to fulfil ... the mission of Nanak... to defend the claims of conscience against external interference<sup>67</sup>". In his *Zafarnama*, the epistle of victory, Guru Gobind Singh tells Aurangzeb "when all alternatives have failed, it is lawful to draw the sword from its scabbard<sup>68</sup>. Consequently, all the battles that Guru Gobind Singh fought were *Dharma Yudh* and all the Sikhs who fell, earned martyrdom.

In *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh recounting the scene of the battle of Bhangani described the valorous deeds of the warriors of both sides and talks of his own men especially his cousin Sango Shah who attained martyrdom<sup>69</sup>. Tradition includes Udai Singh and his brother Bachittar Singh who fought against the Mughal patrol parties. After the evacuation of Anandpur, while crossing the Sirsa in haste, Guru's forces and family split into two groups. His mother and the two younger sons were taken by his deceitful cook to his village Saheri and later on handed over to the Mughal authorities by the covetous Brahmin and were incarcerated at Sirhind and later on two princes attained martyrdom when they refused to accept Islam and were bricked alive. The other Singhs, forty in number led by the Master reached Chamkaur where they occupied a muddy adobe and fought against the Mughal hordes. Here Guru's two elder sons Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh and three of the five Beloved Ones laid down their lives for the protection of faith.

In *Zafarnama*, Guru describes the martyrdom of the elderly princes. He says: "Both of my sons, Ajit and Jujhar gallantly fought and made several fierce onslaughts on the enemy, inflicting deadly gashing wounds, ultimately attained martyrdom at the hands of their slayers, who in turn fell dead in the gory battlefield<sup>70</sup>". The Guru was



exhorted to escape and fought the battle at Muktsar where the forty immortals sought forgiveness for their early desertion by shedding their blood and became martyrs. Guru Gobind Singh, his sons and Sikhs, laid down their lives to uphold truth and righteousness and set a unique example for the coming generations to suffer and sacrifice for one's convictions and rights.

Banda Bahadur baptised and blessed by the Tenth Master and accepting the mandate came to Punjab to wreak vengeance on Wazir Khan, the Subedar of Sirhind, responsible for the unjust cruelties perpetrated on the Guru's family. So furious was the attack and so severe the blow that not even a single brick in Sirhind remained in its place. He established his rule over Punjab and the Khalsa ensign fluttered over its forts and fortresses. Ultimately vanquished and made a prisoner and paraded through the streets of Delhi with his seven hundred and forty-five companions, he courted martyrdom. Chief among them were Baz Singh, Bhai Tara Singh, Bota Singh, Garza Singh, Mehtab Singh, Sukha Singh and the famous Gurbaksh Singh Nihang. Even the young Haqiqat Rai in the train of Banda Bahadur refused to recant on the insistence of his anxious mother and gladly courted martyrdom. Later on, Bhai Taru Singh, Mani Singh, Subeg Singh and Shahbaz Singh showed the same fearlessness, patience and

fortitude of the fifth and ninth Gurus and thus proved true to their faith and always preferred defiance to submission and death to slavery.

In two infamous holocausts known in Sikh annals as *Chhota Ghalughara* and *Vadda Ghalughara* thousands of Sikhs courted martyrdom for the Sikh cause. Baba Deep Singh enjoys a place of great veneration in the annals of Sikh faith for his invincible courage, determination and strength. A true saint-soldier who is venerated by every Sikh for upholding the Sikh ideals. Thus the institution of martyrdom welded the Sikhs with a unity of ideals, ethos and practices entirely different from the surrounding society.

In fact, the eighteenth century has been regarded as the most splendid period in Sikh annals. The Sikhs displayed their valour and sacrifice, suffered pain and privation, and yet lost not their faith and mettle. In the post-eighteenth century we have *Namdhari* martyrs who were blown up by the British guns at Malerkotla in 1870 and then the *Kama-gata-maru* episode of 1914. The Sikhs had always sacrificed themselves to protect liberty, equality and human rights. They always fought for individual right to speech, freedom of thought and action. They always considered their pious duty to protect the rights of downtrodden, helpless and needy and sacrificed and battled against oppression. The Sikhs revere and remember their martyrs in their daily

prayers. In Sikh religion, martyrdom is not to promote the religion as we have *Jehad* in Islam but to allow every one the right to worship. It gave the Sikhs a new dynamism and vitality, not found in other communities. Thus martyrdom enjoys a unique status as an institution in Sikh religion.

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## Chapter-VIII

### ***MIRI-PIRI AND AKAL TAKHT***

The genesis of *Miri-Piri* goes back to the basic concepts evolved by the First Master, the founder of the faith, whose revelatory experience brought glad tidings to the suffering mankind. The Sikh world-view, based on the spiritual experience of Guru Nanak, encompasses the entire human activity - both sacred and profane. As opposed to the evolutionary system of Indian belief, Sikhism hails this world not as *mithasa*, *maya* or illusion, but a creation of the Almighty and therefore, real, wondrous and sublime. In fact, the *Mool Mantra* defines God as the Creator and His creation, therefore, is not only real but deserve loving care: "True is He; True is His creation"; "True are Thy continents and True Thy universes. True are Thy worlds and the forms created by Thee<sup>1</sup>".

Moreover, Guru Nanak's intimations of the divine are of a benevolent and loving God. The Master says: "He is all love and the rest He is ineffable<sup>2</sup>". He is mightily pleased to contemplate His creation says Guru Nanak in *Japuji*. He is the Master, the Emperor Who

directs the world with His Will. It is His *Hukam* that prevails and nothing stirs without His will and nothing walks with aimless feet. This clearly indicates that the world we live in is indeed wonderful, for it is the manifestation of the will of the wondrous Lord. Guru says: "This poison-laden world that you behold is the Divine image – In it is beheld the Lord's image<sup>3</sup>". The universe is not a mere conglomeration of atoms, nor has this world any fortuitous origin. It has a meaning and a purpose. The human birth is a rare boon, a gift of the Lord, to learn to love Him and live in accordance with the Divine Will.

## I

Sikhism is an original, distinctive and revealed religion with its own scripture, doctrine and institutions. Like Judaism and Islam, it is a whole-life religion and is different from the dichotomous Indian religions. It makes no invidious distinction between man and man, for all are moulded of the same clay and the same spirit throbs in every human heart. The purpose of existence is to recognize this divine life. Says the Master: "*Man toon jot sarup hain, apna mool pachhan*".

In the Sikh metaphysic, God is both transcendent and immanent. This seemingly logical contradiction resolves into a harmonious whole when the god-oriented Sikh attains to the status of *sachiar*, the truthful

person. It happens only through Lord's *nadir* through the Guru, the enlightened preceptor. The wall of nescience crumbles and man is face to face with divine effulgence. Then as a truthful person he returns to the world to help others ferry across the ocean of samsaric existence. He becomes the *jivan mukta* who turns to *nishkam sewa* of others. Thus he does not merely seek after his spiritual emancipation but turns to the turmoils of existence to practise what he has experienced. To him the temporal and the spiritual are the two sides of the same coin.

The human body is as significant as the soul. Flesh and spirit are one entity. It is the disciplining of the body that stirs the soul from its somnambulance. Human body is not an unholy vessel of sin, but having emanated from a pure source remains pure in essence. So says the Master: "O'mind, thou has emanated from the light of the Lord; know thy essence<sup>4</sup>". Again, says Guru Amar Das: "My body! the Lord in you placed His light; then did you into the world arrive<sup>5</sup>". And, therefore, "Man ought to honour himself and deem himself worthy of the highest<sup>6</sup>". Claims of the body are, therefore, not sacrificed at the altar of monasticism, quietism or asceticism. The Sikh way of life, therefore, enunciates the virtue of leading a householder's life. This accounts for man's involvement in the temporal obligations of life. Since all human actions – spiritual and temporal - are under the loving

eye of the Creator, He is the true king having power over man's spiritual and temporal domains and, therefore, is the Lord of *Miri Piri*.

The concept of *Miri-Piri* was indeed a radical departure from the prevailing Indian religions and played a revolutionary role in creating a community of soldier-saints who wielded the sword to oppose tyranny and the sword replaced the rosary which symbolizes retreat from the worldly affairs and stress on individual salvation. Concepts like *moksha*, *mukti* and *nirvana* are emblems of a quietistic approach towards life. Since God as the Emperor and Master of the world, guides both the *Piri* and *Miri* aspects of the universe, the Guru, His messenger on earth, is the master of *Miri-Piri*. He is to look after the spiritual and material welfare of his folks. The *miri piri* concept is "fundamental to Sikhism<sup>7</sup>" and has been a part of the Sikh tradition and "a product of the Guru's response and reaction to contemporary political authority" and there is no doubt that "the Gurus operated in both the spheres, temporal and spiritual<sup>8</sup>".

Sikhism is a religion of total commitment and complete surrender to the Guru and his ideals. It involves every kind of sacrifice. The Guru's call to his followers was: "If you want to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm<sup>9</sup>". His dynamic ideology became evident from his rejection of contemporary Indian values and concepts.

He directed his tirade against the religious hypocrisy and spiritual cant of the priestly class which caught the ordinary mind in the trammels of superstitious beliefs, empty ritualism and futile ceremonialism. The common man suffered dual slavery: slavery to superstition and servility to the ruthless Muslim rulers. As a strict monotheist, Guru Nanak rejected belief in the gods and the goddesses, incarnation of God in the human form, the ideal of renunciation and monasticism and asserted his fearless, whole-life doctrine.

## II

Sikhism is a way of life sharper than the razor's edge and demands unflinching allegiance from neophytes. This is quite evident from the message the Fifth Guru gave to Bhai Manjh when he asked him if he should follow *Sakhi Sarvar* or be a Sikh of the Guru. The Guru replied that he better continue to follow *Sakhi Sarvar*, because as a Sikh his wealth and life would be at stake<sup>10</sup>. Guru Nanak was not a mere reformer and cannot be regarded as a *bhakta* of the *Sant* tradition as MacLeod accepts it. The *bhaktas* were the votaries of *ahimsa*, renunciation, celibacy and individual salvation. Though some of them did raise their voice against the prevalent casteism, they never thought of breaking away from the Hindu society. Alama Iqbal paid the most

glowing tribute to Guru Nanak's dynamic ideology and revolutionary social and spiritual ideas: "A man of perfection woke Hind from its world of dreams<sup>11</sup>". To call Guru Nanak a mere reformer is to "underestimate the dynamism of his creative vision – a vision in which the timeless and the temporal blend beautifully and evolve a new and saner path for humanity<sup>12</sup>".

This rare amalgam of the spiritual with the empirical was the matrix out of which emerged the *miri piri* doctrine. Though Guru Hargobind at the time of his accession to the throne of Guru Nanak donned the two swords symbolizing *Miri Piri*, the doctrine has been the basic driving force of the Sikh way of life since the time of the First Master. Guru Nanak's doctrine of *miri piri* enjoins upon the Sikh a keen sense of social responsibility, egalitarianism based on the concept of fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, the need for productive work and social emancipation. He built institutions for the concretization of his ideals. His *udasis* took him to distant and hostile terrains to convey his message to mortals struggling in the coils of superstitious beliefs. Wherever he went, he established *Sangat* and *Dharmshals* for the regular meeting of his followers. He established institutions so that his ideals could survive to enlighten the fumbling mankind. Guru Nanak's ideology was entirely different and radical in

nature and it challenged millennial old concepts, values, ideals and ethos of Hindu culture and various other creeds like Buddhism, Jainism and the Vedanta, and the cults like *Siddhas, Yogis, Naths*. It was indeed a revolution, spiritual and moral, that gave the clarion call of 'game of love' and rejected in most vociferous terms the caste-ridden, superstitious society.

For Guru Nanak, deeds were more important than mere precepts. "All his life he has to follow the path of deeds and that is the methodology prescribed by the Gurus, i.e. both the goal and the methodology are different from those indicated in the earlier Indian religions<sup>13</sup>". In this way, Guru Nanak put the seal of his approval on temporal pursuits as well. "At one stroke.... he (Guru Nanak) unmistakably accepted and implemented the elements of a whole-life or *miri-piri* system and rejected all the essentials of the earlier over 2500-year old dichotomous tradition<sup>14</sup>".

It is a historical fact that when Guru Nanak visited his successor Guru Angad at Khadoor Sahib, he found him leading a somewhat secluded life and reminded him of the mission for which he was anointed his successor. Obeying the mandate of his preceptor, the Second Guru took concrete steps to establish Guru Nanak's ideals on firm and permanent footing. He strengthened the institution of *Langar*

that gave a rude setback to caste-ridden, pollution-conscious, social order of the day. A great leveller, the *Langar* proved of far-reaching consequence to create an egalitarian Sikh society. He entrusted the task of running the *Langar* to his spouse Mata Khivi who looked after it with great devotion. Satta and Balwand sang poems of praise for Mata Khivi in whose *Langar* were available dainty dishes like *kheer*. The Second Nanak also made it clear that the *udasis* or the recluses had no place in the emerging Sikh society. For the physical well being of young Sikhs, he organized wrestling bouts. A *gurdwara* named *Mal Akhara* is a witness to this revolutionary step.

Guru Amar Das settled at Goindwal by the bank of the boisterous Beas. He further strengthened the institution of *Langar*, for he issued instructions that only those could appear in his court, who had first taken food in the Guru's kitchen. Another significant step to organize the Sikh society was his establishment of twenty-two districts for preaching the Sikh religion. To wean the Sikhs away from the Hindu places of pilgrimage, Guru Amar Das got a *bauli* dug at Goindwal and ordained his Sikhs to take a dip in its holy water on all festive occasions. Guru Ram Das founded the new city Chak Ramdaspura, later known as Amritsar, the veritable Vatican of the Sikh community.



It became a nucleus of all Sikh activities and has been the heart of the Sikhs all over the globe.

Guru Arjan played a stellar role in the consolidation of the Sikh community. With his deft editorial skill, he edited the *bani* of the Gurus and the *Bhaktas* and prepared the sacred Sikh text, which was installed in the *Harmandir Sahib* in 1604. Moreover, under his spiritual patronage, *Harmandir Sahib* became the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sikhs who would come from far and near on the festive occasion, especially *Diwali* and *Baisakhi*, to pay their homage to the Fifth Master. He introduced the *daswandh* system where every Sikh was enjoined to contribute one-tenth of his earnings to Guru's treasury. For proper collection, he re-organized the system of *manjis* and *masands*.

The Amritsar tank was widened and another dug at Santokhsar. A *bauli* was constructed at Lahore. He founded the city of Tarn Taran and a *gurdwara* with a tank was established for worship. Hari Ram Gupta highlights the spiritual and temporal pre-occupation of the Fifth Master: "The Guru erected lofty buildings at Amritsar, wore rich clothes, procured horses from Central Asia, kept elephants and engaged retainers for them<sup>15</sup>". Cunningham thus wrote, Nanak had sanctioned or enjoined secular occupation, Arjan carried the injunction

into practice, and the impulse thus given speedily extended and became general<sup>16</sup>.

With the accession of Guru Hargobind to the *gur-gadi*, the concept of *Miri-Piri* took an explicit and tangible shape when he wore two swords and sent signals to the rulers of the day that he was the true king in whom vested, both spiritual and temporal authority. It was meant to carry out Guru Nanak's mission who hailed God as "The Destroyer of evil<sup>17</sup>". "The saviour of saints<sup>18</sup>" and "the destroyer of demons<sup>19</sup>". Following this dictum of God, the Guru adopted the policy through which he could protect the fundamental rights and freedom of the people, inculcate a spirit to resist evil and tyranny and to improve the lot of the depressed and the downtrodden, to bring equality.

The construction of *Akal Takht* was another landmark in the history of the Sikhs. The two flags that flutter in front of it are profound symbols of *Miri-Piri* system – a fusion of the spiritual and the temporal authority and the Sikhs took great pride in hailing their Guru as *Sachcha Padshah*. The ideal of *Sachcha Padshah* came to be associated with the Gurus. Bhai Gurdas wrote, "The true Guru is the carefree emperor, unfathomable and full of all qualities of a master<sup>20</sup>".

The Sikh concept of *Miri-Piri* has also been defined as *Raj-jog* in Sikhism. Jagjit Singh says: "Another concept, indicative of the

blending of the worldly power and spirituality, and which has also its roots in the earliest Sikh tradition is that of '*Raj-jog*'<sup>21</sup>". McLeod also draws this inference from the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* and *Janam Sakhis*<sup>22</sup>. Guru Nanak is said to have enlightened Raja Shivnabh: "*Jog* (spirituality) is attainable with *Raj*. Meditate and serve God. I have made you *Mukat* within *raj*"<sup>23</sup>". Bhai Gurdas described Guru Nanak as *Sachcha Padshah*, "Who achieved complete control over *Raj-jog*"<sup>24</sup>". Guru Nanak has disciplined alliance as well as separation. Again, according to Bhai Gurdas, Guru Ram Das lived a life of *Raj-jog*<sup>25</sup>. He is bestower (unattached), enjoyer, and he has created holy congregation which is equal to the abode of God.

### III

The concept of an ideal life in Sikhism is the blending of the spiritual and the temporal and thus enjoins upon the Sikh a great religious responsibility to protect the weak, to oppose all forms of tyranny and oppression. Consequently stress on virtuous deeds becomes its categorical imperative. To fight evil becomes the moral obligation and a Sikh is expected to attain to a state of fearlessness. Guru Nanak's mission was to liberate the common man from spiritual and social evils. Social emancipation was naturally linked with the

ruling authority of the day. *Babar Bani* is a sure proof of Guru Nanak's exemplary courage and fearlessness which were carried on by his successors. No other *Bhakta* could have the courage to admonish the invading Mughal emperor as Guru Nanak did.

In *Asa Di Var*, he deprecates the priestly class – both Brahmin and Muslim – as man-eaters and butchers: "Look at the mockery of religion, those who gorge on human beings perform *namaz*. Those wielding the butcher's knife wear the sacred thread round their neck<sup>26</sup>". Again, Guru Nanak says: "Rulers are turned beasts of prey, their officers hounds; None do they allow in peace to rest. The subordinates wound the people with their claws: You dogs! lick on the blood and marrow of the poor<sup>27</sup>". He admonishes the rule of ruling Lodi for his failure to protect his subjects from the invading Mughal adventurer's cruelty: "If a powerful person were to attack another powerful person, there shall be no ground for anger. But if a ferocious lion were to fall upon a herd of cattle, the master of the herd has to answer for it<sup>28</sup>".

*Babar Bani* is in fact a corollary of Guru Nanak's *Miri Piri* system that is based on the principle "of game of love" which requires total commitment, even self-sacrifice for the cause of love. It is this whole-life attitude that embraces in its fold all human action, especially

supreme sacrifice for a noble cause. Kharak Singh rightly says that “an important corollary of the whole-life religion is the institution of martyrdom<sup>29</sup>”.

The presence of the Sikh Gurus all over the Indian sub-continent shows that the Sikh identity is as old as the founder of its faith. Guru Nanak was imprisoned by Babar with other *sadhus* only to be freed with repentance. Hamayun, after his defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Suri, came to seek Guru Angad’s blessings. Haunted by his lost sovereignty and impotent rage, he unsheathed his sword and received the Guru’s admonition. Unperturbed, the Guru coolly said, “When it was the occasion to wield the sword you took to your heels like a coward. Why unsheath the sword here?” The author of *Mehma Prakash* narrates thus: “Hamayun spoke with humility, I am guilty of a great lapse O divine Lord, pardon me<sup>30</sup>”, The Guru exhorted his disciples: If you have to join the battle field, face the enemy. Turn not your back on him. Wield your weapons fearlessly and win fame. The warrior who faces the enemy in the battlefield is sure to go to heaven<sup>31</sup>.

The emperor Akbar visited Goindwal and was impressed to see the Guru and his organization. He partook the *Langar* and granted a piece of land to Bibi Bhani where the Fourth Master found Chak

Ramdaspora which later came to be known as Amritsar. Here the three cardinal principles of Sikh faith: *Naam Japo*, *Kirat Karo* and *Vand Chhako* were put into practice. Guru Amar Das would engage himself in manual task to earn his living. Parasitism has no place in the Sikh way of life.

The role of Guru Arjan is of profound significance as a leader of *Miri Piri* society. It was during his period that the Sikh society was taken by his contemporaries as H.R.Gupta points out to a "separate state within a state"<sup>32</sup>. The Guru was hailed by the Sikhs as *Sachcha Padshah* of *Miri-Piri*. He enjoined upon the Sikhs to pursue worldly as well as spiritual pursuits with equal zeal. The Guru's exhorted his Sikhs to enter the horse trade and he himself took to horse trading. This interest in the procurement of horses and training in horse riding had great future implications. Kharak Singh rightly says: "This distinct turn to a new profession given by the Guru himself is meaningfully suggestive of the coming confrontation with the empire of the day"<sup>33</sup>.

Guru Arjan used to hold assemblies which, according to W.L.McGregor, "gave them the look of royal darbar (court)"<sup>34</sup>. Syed Mohammad Latif also states that "the Guru was looked upon by his followers as a worldly Lord and ruling sovereign"<sup>35</sup>. One of the reasons of Guru's martyrdom was Jahangir's charge that the Guru "noised

himself as a worldly leader<sup>36</sup>". It shows that Guru Arjan's was the political execution. It is also evident that Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi, the head of the *Naqshabandi* order and a keen revivalist of Islamic orthodoxy, sensing the growing influence of the Sikh society, urged the emperor to curb the development of the Sikh society in the area. On the basis of the evidence of *Dabistan*, G.C.Narang arrives at the conclusion that a state, peaceful and unobtrusive, had been slowly evolved, and with Guru Arjan at its head as *Sachcha Padshah*, the Sikhs "had already become accustomed to a form of self-government within the empire<sup>37</sup>". Toynbee too endorses the view that the predecessor of Guru Hargobind had already transformed the Sikh community "from an embryonic Church into an embryonic state<sup>38</sup>". Thus Guru Arjan clearly laid the foundation of a political state in his life time and gave direction to his son to create and carve out an independent state.

With the martyrdom of Guru Arjan and later on the incarceration of Guru Hargobind at the Gwalior Fort, the Sikhs came into direct confrontation with the empire. Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi was overjoyed to hear the news of Guru Arjan's martyrdom and wrote to the Governor of Lahore: "The execution at this time of the accursed *Kafir* of Goindwal... is an act of the highest grace for the followers of

Islam<sup>39</sup>". This clearly indicates that the Muslim theologian was afraid of the serious spiritual and temporal consequences of *Miri-Piri* system of the Sikhs. Jagjit Singh rightly interprets Guru Arjan's martyrdom: "It was not Guru Arjan's martyrdom which gave a political turn to the Sikh movement; rather it was the political overtone of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom<sup>40</sup>". Guru Arjan's martyrdom convinced the Sikhs and Guru Hargobind that to protect their faith and folks, they were to prepare for an open conflict with the tyrannous state. Islam, like Sikhism, being a whole-life religion, made the *Ulama* and the emperor apprehensive of the Sikhs growing strength and power. They felt a threat to *Shariat* as well as administrative control over their subjects, for the Sikhs alone were committed to a world-view that defined God and the Guru as the master of both spiritual and temporal power.

In 1609, Guru Hargobind built *Akal Takhat*, the living embodiment of the sovereign temporal power of the Sikhs. The Sikhs under the challenging situation had to be prepared to face the unjust and unrighteous rulers. A regular daily programme was introduced at Akal Takht. Besides worship and *kirtan*, heroic deeds of the warriors began to be recited and services of *dhadis* and *rababis* were acquired for this purpose. He recruited warriors and raised an army to oppose



the aggression and tyranny of the Mughals. The Sixth Master kept up the spirits of his warriors by taking them out on hunting expeditions, by arranging games and wrestling bouts, and by holding the symposium of martial music. The Guru proclaimed, says H.R.Gupta, that "fighting against the wrongs was not against the spirit of any religion, but it was an essential ingredient of a practical religion<sup>41</sup>".

*Akal Takht* was built close to *Harmandir Sahib*, the seat of spiritual authority. Two flags were hoisted in front of the edifice and these ensigns symbolized *Miri* and *Piri* as the two aspects of the Sikh religion. The Guru received visitors and offerings here and delivered sermons to his followers, issued *Hukamnamas* to various Sikh *sangats*, scattered all over India and administered justice. Subsequently, it became the highest seat of spiritual and secular power of the Sikhs. It is from this place that the affairs of the Sikh community began to be administered. Even Rattan Singh Bhangu describes it a centre of organizational and military activities. Guru took full decisions with the help and advice of the Sikhs. Even justice was given to the Sikhs who submitted their petitions here as they have staunch faith that his justice was fair, impartial and speedy<sup>42</sup>. Moreover, the *Akal Takht* became a symbol of the rising Sikh identity. In the words of G.C.Narang, "The Sikhs had already become accustomed to a form of

self-government within the empire. Their power and prestige had increased and they were fast becoming a factor in the political life of the province<sup>43</sup>".

At the time of his installation as the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind not only wore two swords symbolizing spiritual and temporal power – *Miri-Piri*, but also told his followers "that my rosary shall be my sword belt and on my turban I shall wear the emblem of royalty". The Guru meant that temporal pursuits were as significant as spiritual concern and it was justified to wear arms in defence of righteousness. "Such steps amounted to the declaration of a parallel government and marked an open change in the external character of the movement<sup>44</sup>". Giani Gian Singh writes, "*Akal Takht* was looked upon as a seat of political power where functions relating to state were performed. Programmes for the welfare of people, international relations, principle of governance and diplomacy were chalked out here<sup>45</sup>".

Some historians fail to appreciate the doctrine of *Miri Piri* in the right perspective and regard it as a departure from the policy of the first five Gurus. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon rightly says that such historians fail to have "a clear perception of the integrated spiritual thesis of Guru Nanak" and regards this *Miri Piri* system as "natural and inevitable outcome of the doctrine of the combination of the spiritual

and the empirical, laid down and founded by the first Guru<sup>46</sup>". The Guru exhorted his Sikhs that it was their religious responsibility to rise against tyranny and oppose unrighteousness according to the spirit of the times. Along with *Naam Simran*, the Sikhs were given practical lesson of *Dharam Yudha*. Says Latif: "Guru organized a military system, and, arming his followers, made them buckle on the sword and prepared them action in the field<sup>47</sup>", actually fought battles and thus in reality Guru Hargobind rendered a unique service to this country in showing the true path of deliverance from political bondage. The Guru created a revolution in the life of the Sikhs. Revolution implies a doctrine and originates in the realm of ideas. Jagjit Singh rightly avers that "The Sikh revolution originated in the concept of *Miri Piri* which has its roots... in the earliest Sikh tradition, beginning with Guru Nanak<sup>48</sup>" and, therefore, the raising of *Akal Takht* was a natural corollary of the doctrine of the First Master.

While hymns of peace and praise were chanted at *Harmandir Sahib*, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military adventures at *Akal Takht*. Teja Singh explains the intent of the Guru to build *Akal Takht*: "The step of constructing the *Akal Takht* near the *Harmandir* was taken on account of the Guru's idea of keeping

temporal and spiritual centres near each other, so that both should influence each other and one should also orientate the activities of the other<sup>49</sup>".

The construction of the *Akal Takht* was a landmark in the history of the Sikhs. Till this day, it commands power over the Sikh psyche and demands unflinching allegiance and obedience to its mandate. In the chequered history of the Sikhs it has played a momentous role. A source of inspiration, it has been the ideal of Sikh heroism and sacrifice. Momentous discussions at the biannual meetings of the *Sarbat Khalsa* on the eve of *Diwali* and *Baisakhi* guided the community at all times. The *Gurmattas* passed in its precincts provided guidance to the community. From here, Guru Hargobind took cudgels against the Mughal tyranny and by decisive battles against them proved his mettle as a saint and saviour – the *Sachcha Padshah*, the Master of *Miri-Piri*.

The tradition was carried on by his successor, the Seventh Guru. His court, writes H.A.Rose, displayed "the pomp and circumstances of a semi-independent military chieftain<sup>50</sup>". While Guru Arjan feared not the imperial ire and blessed the fugitive *Khusro*, Guru Har Rai supported *Dara Shikoh*. This was evident from the fact that at the request of Dara Shikoh, Guru Har Rai with his 500 horsemen checked the advance of Aurangzeb for one day. Sujan Rai also refers to Guru

Har Rai's association with the Dara Shikoh, who had come with a large force<sup>51</sup>.

Martyrdom, as has been referred earlier, is a corollary of *Miri Piri* system. Based on Guru Nanak's doctrine of 'game of love' as prerequisite to discipleship it demands complete self-surrender that culminates in the supreme sacrifice of one's life and thus earn martyrdom to vindicate the master's mandate. Guru Tegh Bahadur had earned the title of '*Tegh Bahadur*' from his valiant father for showing exemplary heroism in battle that the Sixth Master fought against the Mughals. Though the Ninth Master spent a large part of his life in contemplation, yet he enjoyed a state of perfect poise and never waivered from the ideals set forth by his worthy peers. He oriented the Sikh character for the new challenges that the Mughal government had thrown to the Indian society<sup>52</sup>. The socio-political fabric of the country was challenged by the powerful government, which enforced the doctrine of one state and one religion. Fear not and frighten not was his advice to the Sikhs. The Ninth Master in one of his *salokas* says: One that strikes not terror in others, Nor of others stands in fear – Saith Nanak: Listen my self, Know such a one to be liberated<sup>53</sup>.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was unique and rare in the annals of martyrdom. It was not for his own interest, but to protect

*Dharma* of the Hindus, the harassed Kashmiri Pandits, that he offered his head to the bigoted and besotted Aurangzeb. His extensive tours to the east, his following in Assam and Decca and his close association with Raja Jai Singh and the King of Assam reveals that he met them on equal footing as the sovereign Lord of the Sikhs, the embodiment of *Miri-Piri* system of the Sikh Gurus. The Guru courted martyrdom in 1675 A.D. Guru Gobind Singh writes about his father's execution in *Bachitra Natak*. He says, "Guru suffered martyrdom for the sake of his religion; he gave his head, but swerved not from his determination"<sup>54</sup>. Again Guru Gobind Singh refers to his noble father's inimitable sacrifice: "Guru Tegh Bahadur protected the frontal marks and the sacrificial threads of the Hindus, and displayed great bravery in the Kali age. When he put an end to his life for the sake of holy men, he gave his head but uttered not a groan"<sup>55</sup>. Again, "At his departure there was mourning in this world; there was grief through the world, but joy in paradise"<sup>56</sup>.

The emperor had received reports that Guru Tegh Bahadur was trying to create a new nation which would be a challenge to the imperial hegemony and for that reason, the emperor conveyed a message to the Guru that if he desisted from his political activities, he would be given grants for his prayers and preachings<sup>57</sup>. The Guru paid

no attention to the lure and continued his missionary activities and willingly courted martyrdom. Cunningham also writes, Guru Tegh Bahadur's injunction that his disciples should obey the bearer of his arrows, show more of the kingly than of the priestly spirit, ... thus making the disciples of Guru Nanak martial as well as devotional people<sup>58</sup>".

His worthy scion, Guru Gobind Singh, continued the system of *Miri-Piri* which reached its highest watermark with the creation of the *Khalsa*, a perfect egalitarian order as envisaged by Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh held a court so splendid that it became an eye sore in the neighbouring hilly *Rajas* who harboured ill-will against his growing strength and his veneration by the Sikhs as *Sachcha Padshah*, a title, which according to William Irvine, was an important reason for the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Irvine says, One of this Guru's (Guru Tegh Bahadur) crimes, in the Emperor's eyes, may have been the style of address adopted by his disciples, who had begun to call their leader *Sachcha Padshah* or the True King... Its use was extremely likely to provoke the mistrust of a ruler even less suspicious by nature than Alamgir<sup>59</sup>".

So naturally Guru Gobind Singh's worship of open defiance of the Mughal authority was the culmination of *Miri-Piri* system. Jagjit

Singh rightly says: "The Sikh revolution originated in the concept of *Miri-Piri*, which had its roots, as seen, in the earlier Sikh tradition, beginning with Guru Nanak; and the creation of the Khalsa and the continuation of the armed struggle during its revolutionary phase was just an extension of *Miri-Piri*<sup>60</sup>". Guru Gobind Singh's fight was never for any territorial or material gain. It was to make the Mughals recognize his status as Master of *Miri Piri*. He clearly tells Aurangzeb that one should resort to the sword when all other means fail, When all the constitutional and remedial measures ultimately end in fiasco, there accrues, but a legal jurisdiction in brandishing a sabre to chastise the offender thereby<sup>61</sup>.

Guru Gobind Singh's battles against the Mughals, his pains and privation, the supreme sacrifice of his dedicated Sikhs and sons were to protect this ideal advocated by Guru Nanak. That the objectives of the Guru were religious is evident from the fact that even the Muslims fought by his side. To protect *Dharma* and oppose tyranny were his coveted goals. His brief friendship with Bahadur Shah and his honour at the Mughal Court were the recognition of his *Miri-Piri* status. In the *Akhbarat* from the court of Bahadur Shah the first extract refers to Guru, "Gobind the Nanaki came armed, in accordance with order, and presented himself making an offering of 100 *ashrafis* (gold coins). A



robe of honour and *padak* (medallion) set with precious stones was given to him, and he was permitted to leave<sup>62</sup>". He tells in his *Hukamnamas* how the Emperor presented him a *Khilat* and how he rode on his steed right upto the throne, and revealed the purpose of his meeting the emperor. He wished to get Anandpur back<sup>63</sup>.

Guru Nanak's *Miri-Piri* system was indeed revolutionary, for it made a radical departure from the existing Indian ethos. Niharranjan Ray opines, "To be able to achieve that integration of temporal and spiritual seems to me to have been the most significant contribution of Guru Nanak to the totality of the Indian way of life of medieval India. Indeed, he seems to have reared up a new image of a socio-religious community given at once to temporal and spiritual pursuits of life<sup>64</sup>". It gave a rude setback to the caste ideology and the concept of pollution. The institution of *Langar* demolished all distinctions between man and man based on caste and creed. Casteism in fact has been the bane of the society for centuries. To challenge and demolish it was indeed an onerous task which the Guru did with one stroke – by instituting the *langar*. *Langar* in fact was the practical expression of Guru's ideal of Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man. It led to an egalitarian social order where man was recognised not by his caste but his deeds. The first Sikh leader who struck a coin was Jassa Singh Kalal

considered to be a low sub-caste according to Hindu standards. Bhai Jiwan Singh and Jassa Singh who belonged to the Ramgarhia class rose to position of eminence in Sikh society.

This process of equality and socialism led to the abolition of *Zamindari* and *Jagirdari* system during the rule of Banda Bahadur who created a bold peasantry. The status of women was improved. Some of them became heads of *manjis* and *misals*. The Sikhs developed a secular outlook. Maharaja Ranjit Singh made no distinction between the Sikh, the Hindu and the Muslim. Deeds and merit alone counted. Work was given importance over parasitism. Jagjit Singh rightly concludes that it was *Miri Piri* system that "permanently broke in the Punjab the social stratification in order to raise the level of the lowest classes in the social structure<sup>65</sup>". His purpose was to build a new society in which man would be perfect in all fields, and could help others to achieve the perfection and thus constitute a complete society.

Thus, the Sikh Gurus gave a spiritual basis to politics, for the political power without spirituality and morality would promote selfishness, opportunism, compromise on principles. The Gurus wanted to inculcate the values of universal brotherhood, social responsibility, love, charity, self-surrender so that congenial atmosphere be created

where each one should respect one another and value human relationship. Giani Gian Singh says that a political system of governance is not sustained without the foundation of spirituality and without spirituality everything is a hotch-potch. Thus, the institution of *Miri-Piri* was implemented so that spiritual pursuits could be blended with the material well-being of the people.

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## Chapter-IX

### **KHALSA : A UNIQUE SIKH IDENTITY**

Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom at the hands of the Mughal administration gave a rude shock to the Sikh sensibility. His martyrdom was a unique event in the annals of martyrdom, for he suffered a tragic fate, not for his own religion, but for the protection of the Hindu faith. In his martyrdom he brought forth Guru Nanak's basic conception of "game of love" which demands every kind of sacrifice from the player. Guru Gobind Rai, the Tenth Master of the Sikhs, pondered over the problem and took a step that for ever created for the Sikhs a unique identity and gave them a distinct place in the prevailing Hindu and Muslim ambience.

Guru Gobind Singh took a momentous decision of creating the *Khalsa*, as he observed that there was challenge to his Sikhs, not only from the hill chieftains, who were idol-worshippers and caste conscious, but also from the Mughal government which was hostile and oppressive towards them. Moreover, he found that his Sikhs lacked courage and valour to challenge the tyrannical rule. Therefore,



messages were sent forth to Sikh *sangat* all over the sub-continent to assemble at Anandpur on the Baisakhi eve of 1699. They came from all corners of the land, obeying their master's mandate, and on that fateful Baisakhi day, the Guru held his Durbar at Kesgarh Sahib and proclaimed to the assembled Sikhs that he needed a head. For a moment, death-like silence prevailed. Then arose a brave Sikh who was taken to a tent from which there flowed a drain of blood, then the Guru returned with a blood stained sword and another head was demanded and this went on five times. Afterwards five Sikhs, clad in flowing blue robes, came out and the sight sent thrills of joy amongst the congregation. The Guru baptised them with *Amrit*, sweetened by sugar-plums added to it by Mata Sahib Kaur and the sweetened water stirred by the Master with a double-edged sword. This *amrit* the selected five were asked to take from the same bowl and thereby congealed them into a perfect, casteless community – the Khalsa.

They were renamed as Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Mohkam Singh and Bhai Sahib Singh. The names of the five beloved symbolize the five basic virtues of Sikhs, i.e. *Daya*; compassion, clemency, *Dharam*; righteousness, integrity, *Himmat*; courage, enterprise, *Mohkam*; resolute, fortitude, *Sahib*; Lord, Master. The names have lived and proved them as such. Then the

Master ordained the five to ordain him in turn and thus erected an inseparable bond with the Khalsa and he became Guru Gobind Singh.

## I

Guru Nanak took up the task of social reforms and initiated the process of religious transformation. He created the necessary means and institutions so that the common man could resist political and social oppression and social and caste discrimination. He raised the institutions of *langar*, *sangat* and *dharamsal* and thus tied men together with the bond of the common lease of life. This mission continued for almost two centuries and Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa that marked the culmination of this missionary process. Guru Gobind Singh realized in practice the ideology articulated by the founder of the faith. Guru Nanak also welded the spiritual and the empirical realms of existence. He says: "There can be no love for God without active service in this world<sup>1</sup>". His motto was: "Truth is high : but higher is truthful living<sup>2</sup>".

Guru Nanak's successors followed his tenets with devout adherence and evolved distinct spiritual and practical strategies to realize his vision. Guru Angad and Amar Das stressed the importance of *langar*, while Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan prevailed upon their

devoted followers to settle in Amritsar and start new ventures, business and trade so that they could enhance their status in society. Sikhism played an important role in articulating the aspirations and discontent of social groups of the society, and brought a significant social change in Punjab. "The growth of town-based social elite and a vibrant urban culture are examples of such developments<sup>3</sup>". In the rural areas, the trend of upward social mobility was visible when traditional *Zamindar* castes were displaced by cultivating tenants and peasant proprietors.

Guru Hargobind gave a concrete shape to the creative vision of Guru Nanak. He raised the Akal Takhat and donned two swords of *Miri* and *Piri* to give a predominant shape to Guru Nanak's philosophy of religion as a "game of love" that demands both empirical and spiritual submission to the Master. He brought into practice Guru Nanak's mission: "*Santan manoun dutan danoun*<sup>4</sup>", i.e. the holy I honour, evil doers I chastize. It was this concept of society, envisioned by Guru Nanak that saw its culmination in the creation of the Khalsa.

This idea of blending the sacred and the profane fully blossomed in the life of the Ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur. It is a historical fact that Aurangzeb had specifically conveyed to Guru Tegh Bahadur that he could help the Guru if he confined his activities to the mere spiritual

sphere and did not dabble into politics. The Guru definitely declined this offer and continued his spiritual-political activities and set before him the great ideals: “fear none, nor drive anyone into fear<sup>5</sup>”. Thus, nine Gurus continuously and consistently pursued their aims and ideals and achieved their objects without turning away from them. They never succumbed before the authorities or compromised with the circumstances and laid down their lives for their cause when required. It was on these injunctions that Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa – the ideal order of soldier-saint to resist tyranny and oppression and protect virtue, to establish *Dharma*.

Moreover, the Tenth Master had decided to do away with the *masand* system which had degenerated into selfish and greedy individuals. As Saina Pat, a poet of the Guru’s court testifies, the *masands* were removed from their services and the Guru established a direct link with his disciples<sup>6</sup>. The Guru issued *hukamnamas* that the Sikh should have no contact with the *masands* and come straight to the Guru to offer their respects and offerings. Those who offered defiance and boasted that Guru’s power and prestige were mainly due to their work of preaching and procuring money, were taught a lesson. Thus, the priests were denied the sovereignty of sacred power. The

newsletter of the Mughal court dated May 13, 1710 stated that Guru Gobind had summarily dismissed the *masands* long ago<sup>7</sup>.

To realize Guru Nanak's ideals, the Tenth Master followed the path in tune with the merciless policies of the rulers of the day. He knew that mere pacifism would not deliver the goods and only by matching sword with the sword he could reap justice for the Sikhs of the day. As a unique embodiment of the principle of *Miri* and *Piri*, Guru Gobind Singh took upon him the supreme task of liberating the complex of fear from peoples mind. About the purport of his life, he says:

I was sent to this world by the Almighty to spread the message of *dharma* and to destroy the wicked. Let all the saintly souls know; this has been my mission since my birth; establish the way of *dharma* and to destroy the evil – doers, root and branch<sup>8</sup>.

The Guru launched a *dharma yudh* by blending the *bhakti* and *shakti*. In one of his oft-quoted verses he prayed to his God:

God grant me one boon... I never waver from the path of righteousness... If I had to fight a battle... I do it without any fear... That I lead my life in your worship and praise... and ... die fighting in the holy war<sup>9</sup>.

There was no ambition to conquer anyone's territory; to subjugate and humiliate any section of society. He laid down the twin

ideals of *degh* and *tegh* which for the Khalsa represent the Sikh ideal of *miri* and *piri*. In the *Chaupai* he says: "May the cauldron and the sword prevail in the world<sup>10</sup>". Again in *Akal Ustat* he says: "Food for the hungry and sword for the tyranny should go together. That is my wish<sup>11</sup>". This concept of saint-soldier is also elaborated by him in *Krishna Avtar*: "Blessed are they in this world who repeat God's name with their lips and think of war against evil in their hearts<sup>12</sup>".

The sword was not for aggression but defence and protection. It is precisely for this reason that the Guru sung praises of the sword and equated it with God: "God subdued enemies, so does the sword, therefore, the sword is God, and God is the sword<sup>13</sup>". By connecting the *Khalsa* with the divine, he accorded divine approval to the Sikh struggle for establishing its sovereignty<sup>14</sup>. Guru says: "I bow to the sword and the rapier which destroy evil... In this *Kalyug* and at all times there is great confidence in the powerful arm of the sword<sup>15</sup>". Surjit Hans writes that the "*Vanjara* God of Guru Nanak became in Guru Gobind *Asi-pan, Asi-dhuj*. He also has sword in his hand<sup>16</sup>". Guru says; "When comes the end of life, I die fighting in the thick of a (holy) war<sup>17</sup>".

Guru Gobind Singh in his *Zafarnamah* accuses Aurangzeb, the ruler of Hind, as the most treacherous person, for his generals took false oath on the *Koran* and attacked him when he left the fort:

O'Aurangzeb, you are not loyal to your creed. You do not follow the rules of *Shariat*... You are the master of the world, but you are far removed from true religion<sup>18</sup>.

So great was his faith in the Khalsa that the Guru would say:

The *Khalsa* is the Guru and the Guru is the *Khalsa*. There is no difference between you and me. As Guru Nanak seated Guru Angad on the throne, so have I made you also a Guru<sup>19</sup>.

Again Guru says:

All the battles I have won against tyranny, I have fought with the devoted backing of these people... Through their grace I have attained all learnings, through their help in battle, I have slain all my enemies<sup>20</sup>.

The Guru made his Sikhs as immortal soldiers of true *dharma* and messengers of God and addressed in the words of Hari Ram Gupta "this country's honour and liberty is entrusted to you by *Waheguru*. Mix freely with the world, but remain of one soul, one ideal and one aim<sup>21</sup>.

## II

It is this unflinching faith in the allegiance to the Khalsa to the Guru that becomes a driving force in all the battles Guru Gobind Singh fought for the protection of righteousness and faith against the tyrannous empire. The martyred father's son knew full well the significance of loyalty. It could not be a mere outer ethical code, but something fully dependent on the love of the followers for their master. This zeal alone could provide a permanent bond between the master and his mates. They were given a place of equality in his scheme of things. Everyone had the right to say his mind. Nothing was hidden, nothing kept under check. The *Khalsa* and the Guru were one. There was no difference so long as both of them continued to share the same beliefs and thoughts.

In Guru Nanak's *Japuji*, one of the stanzas referred to *Panch parvan*, *panch pardhan* and by following Guru Nanak, the Tenth Master also attached importance to the numeral five. Dr. Gupta states:

... 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*<sup>22</sup>.



The Khalsa was enjoined to have five-fold belief in God, Guru Granth, salutation and Guru Nanak's *Japuji*. The Singh was obliged to wear five K's: *Kesha*, the long, unshorn hair; *Kangha* or small comb; *Kirpan* or dagger; *Kara*, the iron ring, a symbol of the Khalsa and a means of protection in the battle; and *Kachha* or a pair of knickerbockers. The observance of these provided a sense of fraternity and equality to its members. It was a kind of natural military attire, the least expensive and the most viable.

It strengthened the inner unity of the faith along with outer appearance. It helped the Sikhs to inculcate the qualities of head and heart, a strong body with a sound mind, determined, valiant, faithful and true to its convictions. It brought a common bond of union among them and gave them a new lease of life and provided a fresh line of action. Thus, it provided a strong foundation which helped it to protect and sustain them during the course of their struggle.

The Khalsa were expected to take five vows. They were: not to shave the hair, not to smoke, not to eat *halal*, the meat of the animal killed by the Muslim style; not to wear a cap; and not to worship tombs, graves and relics. In one of his *swaiyas*, Guru Gobind Singh thus defines the Khalsa:

Day and night he meditated on the ever-radiant Light, and giveth not even a moment's thought (to anything else) except the One Lord. Adorneth himself with perfect love and faith and pulleth not his trust in fasts, tombs, crematoriums and hermit-cell even by mistake. In pilgrimages, in charities, in acts of mercy, in austerities and in self-restraints knoweth none save Him. When full light showeth within him, then a man may be deemed pure Khalsa<sup>23</sup>.

Guru freed the people from the age-old rituals, customs, ceremonies, casteism and priest dominance. New society was evolved which was free from taboos, which gave new outlook, provided new ethos, motivations and ideals. Thus he made religion simple, pure and crystal clear.

Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh declared the five deliverances for his disciples: *Dharam Nash* or freedom from previous religious practices and customs; *Karam Nash* – the obliteration of past deeds; *Kul Nash* – freedom from castes, clans and race; *Sharam Nash* – disappearance of hereditary professional distinctions and *Bharam Nash* – discarding the ritualism of the past. It clearly shows that Guru broke himself and his Sikhs from the prevalent customs, religious systems, traditions and gave *Khalsa* a distinct and unique outlook.

Since these principles of conduct, practice and behaviour were inviolable, the Khalsa was congealed into a perfect, coherent, social

and political order. He envisioned *Khalsa* to be physically stout, mentally agile and religiously pious. It emerged as the unique identity that had nothing to do with the prevailing chaotic conditions of the broken Hindu social order. Once for all, the Sikhs attained a unique identity and could never be identified with other communities of India. Moreover, since the Khalsa believed in the power of the Almighty alone, and apart from the Guru, owed allegiance to none, the seeds of nationhood were sown in a firm but rich soil. Thus, Guru awakened the spiritual consciousness which binds together the human race and laid the foundation of national unity by evolving spiritual democracy and restructured the society on egalitarian basis. "His aim was to go beyond the position of Hargobind and to establish a parallel government<sup>24</sup>". He infused political consciousness and "added the sentiment of nationalism to religion<sup>25</sup>". He created new parameters for the political system and aimed at the establishment of an ideal state, which should be governed by the norms provided by the *Gurbani*. The Sikhs saw themselves at the height of their glory during the assault of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and later on during the hay days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

### III

In the words of Koer Singh, when the Tenth Master had baptised the five beloved ones, he thus addressed them to baptise him in turn:

Hear, Khalsa Ji, with all attention, you are dearest of dear to me...The sovereignty of the whole world is given to you, the Khalsa. I have made you leaders of the Khalsa, the way you received *amrit (baptism)* from the Guru, I wish to receive it the same way from you. The Guru and the Sikh are interwoven with one another. It had been so recognized by the nine Gurus. The Sikh and the Guru are related to each other as head is to the body<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, the religious faith of the Sikhs was channelized into achieving a political freedom and the *Khalsa* helped them to capture political power for the plebian objectives. Their hopes and aspirations were fulfilled. The down-trodden were given a clear injunction to capture the political power in their own hands.

Jagjit Singh rightly avers that the "Sikh movement had not only a plebian political mission, but it had also a plebian base", and it was necessary that "the downtrodden castes and classes should be both the architect and masters of their own destiny<sup>27</sup>". The lowest classes became equal with the highest. They all became one. "The beloved five who had offered their head to his flashing sword on the initiation

day were not drawn from the elite but from the different stratified *Varnas* or castes. The Sikh portals were wide open to all - the disinherited and the dispossessed of the world<sup>28</sup>". Rattan Singh Bhangu refers to the plebian composition of the Khalsa at several places, when the *Taruna Dal* wing of the Khalsa Dal was re-organized into five divisions, one of the divisions was under the command of Bir Singh Rangretta. In the battle with Abdali, known as *Wada Ghalu Ghara*, a special mention is made of Ramdasias and Rangrettas who took a prominent part in the field. Says Jagjit Singh, "The egalitarian political aims of the Sikh movement are also brought out by the negative evidence that it was not sectarian or based on clannish, tribal, feudal or dynastic loyalties and ambitions<sup>29</sup>".

Guru Gobind Singh's first battle of Bhangani is a sure proof that his followers were not only the Sikhs, but even devout Muslims like Buddhu Shah who sacrificed his sons for the cause of the Guru. The Guru was not against the individuals but against a corrupt and tyrannous system. Everyone has the right to worship his Lord the way he likes. It was this kind of freedom that the Khalsa wanted to achieve for every individual. Therefore, the fight of the Khalsa was against those who used their men and machines to coerce others to accept their faith and mode of worship. It was indeed a new kind of

revolution, for it provided the ordinary menial the power to hoist the head of an emperor on its stake. It provided an ideology, a living basis to each member of the community and perhaps did more than the French Revolution or the Communist Movement in the west.

The creation of the *Khalsa* thus released a new dynamic force into the arena of Indian history. The "Guru achieved the pinnacle of the social, cultural and political outlook of the people, but also gave to the Sikhs a new social and political philosophy by inspiring them with courage, love of freedom and an indomitable will to fight for their higher ideals" which altogether changed "the destiny of the Sikhs" as well as "the course of Indian history<sup>30</sup>". The Sikh was expected to combine in him the virtues of a saint and the strength and sternness of a soldier. With the creation of the *Khalsa* the Guru has given us "the ideal person (Khalsa as an individual self) and the ideal social structure (Khalsa Panth) in micro-cosmic form<sup>31</sup>". Irvine brings home this truth about the plebian base of the movement most succinctly when he says that "A low scavenger or leather worker, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), when in a short span of time he would return to his birth place as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand<sup>32</sup>". In fact, Guru re-established their lost dignity and their manhood and helped them to re-

assert their power and glory. It clearly reveals the revolutionary change brought out by the social philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh.

It is difficult to influence the crowd of a revolution until its reasons are not "transformed into sentiments<sup>33</sup>" says Le Bon Gustavs. This is what Guru Gobind Singh did. He founded the Khalsa by initiating the solemn ceremony of baptism which involved not only the ceremony of taking elixir from the bowl but also the vows and oaths by way of commitment. In this way the revolution was a beginning and led to an era of total transformation of the Sikh psyche. Every Sikh was given a name that ended with "Singh" and every female name ended with the suffix "Kaur". They were born afresh to look at life and its beauties with clearly-opened, perceptive eyes and to remain for ever ready to encounter the ferocious elements bent on curbing the rights of others to their religious whim.

The Guru's insistence on the outer discipline that he enjoined upon Sikhs is a symbol of his far-sightedness. The Guru believed that outward discipline was essential to maintain inner strength and vitality and whosoever deviated from the ordained code shall not be deemed as the true Khalsa. As standard-bearer of truth, righteousness, justice and equality, members of the Khalsa fraternity were filled with rare zeal and their faith in the Guru and the self-confidence he had filled in

them, changed the entire history of the sub-continent. Every member of the Khalsa was expected to be ever ready to strike sword with the oppressor, the tyrant, the military adventurer. J.D.Cunningham rightly avers that "Guru Gobind Singh transformed his followers into brave fighters who possessed so much strength and courage that they could dare in lions in their own dens and challenged dreadful Aurangzeb in his court<sup>34</sup>".

The Guru gave a new meaning to the age-old concept of liberation or *mukti*. The Guru injected the *Khalsa* spirit which has totally annihilated the fear of death in the minds of his followers. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon rightly states: "The Sikh who died in the cause of righteousness was looked upon as a *Mukta* (a liberated soul)" and further states that for the Sikhs *Mukti* is not release from the world but liberation from its fear<sup>35</sup>". Dhillon rejects J.N.Sarkar's contention that Guru Gobind Singh organized "the Sikhs to suit a special purpose" and converted "the spiritual unity of the Sikhs into a means of worldly success... and instrument of political advancement<sup>36</sup>".

In fact, dying in the battle is considered by the Sikhs a means of salvation (*Mukti*). The Guru had declared in no uncertain terms that the role of the Khalsa was to protect the individual and social dignity and



defend righteousness at all costs. It was a well integrated system that embraced every aspect of human life – social, political and religious and thus institutionalized the system. Cunningham writes, “Guru 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 he relumed it with Promethean fire<sup>37</sup>”.

Thus, the birth of the Khalsa was indeed a unique event, for it rudely shook the caste-ridden Hindu fold. The Sikhs acquired an identity of their own altogether distinct from other communities of the sub-continent. At the time of his departure for the next fold, the Tenth Master gave *Guru-Gadi* to *Guru Granth Sahib* and temporal authority to the Khalsa. Guru-Panth emerged as an entity to guide the Sikh affairs in all times to come. The creation of the Khalsa, therefore, cannot be understood in any other sense than the awakening of the conscience and directing it towards a conscious goal – to strive, protect and maintain righteousness at all costs.

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## Chapter-X

### CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have been a modest attempt to demonstrate how Guru Nanak took full cognizance of the shortcomings of prevailing religions and rightly assessed the socio-political and religious milieu of the day. On a dynamic philosophy, he founded a new religion based on moral principles which led to far-reaching changes in the socio-political and economic environment. His entire system was life affirming and ideology congenial to human growth. To give his ideology a concrete shape, he introduced various institutions which proved a unique contribution towards the establishment of his faith. Through these institutions, he organized his activities, consolidated his base, fulfilled his objectives and provided permanent base to his ideology. Thus, Guru Nanak brought revolutionary changes in religious ideology, social structure and political approach and they proved that Guru Nanak was an originator, a unique and revolutionary prophet.

Guru Nanak's description of socio-political and religious institutions and practices revealed that there was subjugation and exploitation of the people by the priestly classes, rulers, officials and upper crust of society. The institution of *Varna-Ashram-Dharma*, pollution and purity, untouchability and poverty were reigning supreme. The politico-administrative set up of his time was in a sorry state of affairs. The social organism had become still and inelastic. The Hindus managed to survive by withdrawing into the web of exclusiveness provided by caste and kinship. Religion had become an instrument of socio-political exploitation and hypocrisy. The Hindu and the Buddhist creeds looked upon this world as *maya* or a vale of suffering. For them the highest end of life was to secure release from worldly traps. This release could be attained through self-torture and silencing of desire in one's ownself rather than flowing out of oneself to secure one's bliss with others. Thus we find that there was an absence of resistance on the part of victims against these oppressive and evil designs.

Guru Nanak had a revolutionary message to convey. He challenged the fanaticism and religious hypocrisy of the priestly classes and at the same time the religio-political oppression of the contemporary rulers. He rejected the authority of the *Vedas* and the strongly entrenched caste system. He denounced asceticism, idolatory,

ceremonialism and the role of intermediary agents between God and man. His aim was to enthuse such strength in the people as could give a concrete blow to tyrant rulers and the priests, and could safeguard their interest.

Guru Nanak propounded a revolutionary ideology which was altogether distinct from the earlier religious traditions. He envisioned all problems of life to be socio-religious problems which must be solved in a righteous and truthful way. Against life-negation, he recommended life-affirmation and complete social participation. Against asceticism and monasticism, he accepted life of a householder. He emphasized the role of religion as an instrument of liberation, personal as well as social. He laid the path of universal love and emancipation of man, discipline of self purification, of devotion, of meditation of God. He emphasized universal brotherhood of equal living in love and harmony without discrimination based on caste, colour, creed, gender, social status or geographical religion. Thus, equality and justice were the basic features of the Guru's system. He laid the foundation of a dynamic religion, which, as Kapoor Singh says, "was not a mere system of philosophy, but a practical way of life, something that must be lived and experienced rather than something which may be intellectually grasped and declared<sup>1</sup>".

Guru Nanak gave us a simple philosophy of life. He gives us straight answers of each question like how to become *sachiara*? How to get a glimpse of His court? What in return to offer Him for His boons? What words to utter to win His pleasure? It is the easiest way to achieve perfection and attaining God. Guru Nanak emphasized true *Naam* which is as holy as Lord. There are various methods to express our devotion to Him. Everyone asks for blessings and He confers these on all.

Guru Nanak emphasized four things; one should get up in early morning (*amrit-vela*), meditate on His holy Name (*sach naam*), always admire His greatness (*vadiae*) and practise contemplation (*vichar*). Through obedience to His ordinance and Will, a person could become *sachiara* or true to the creator and thus demolish the wall of nescience. Thus Guru Nanak offered a new way to achieve perfection and God.

To Guru Nanak, truthful life was more important than truth. The basis of spiritual life was ethical conduct. He says: "Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is truthful living<sup>2</sup>". He emphasized on compassion, understanding and charity and wanted that man should be humble before everyone, be ever-sweet of speech and forgive everybody. Humility for him was the source of moral courage and strength.



At the same time, he recognized fearlessness as one of the divine attributes. The goal of man should be freedom from fear, which ultimately led to the freedom of conscience, an essential stage on the way to perfection. Similarly, he emphasized that the goal of religion is the service of man, which can materialize only if the spiritual level of man is raised and strengthened. He also prescribed that it was both the duty and responsibility of religious man to resist aggression, oppression, brutality, discrimination and conflict. Guru Nanak even sanctioned the use of force for the righteous cause. Thus Guru Nanak started the process of revolution, not as a mob violence or massacre of ruling classes, but as S. Radhakrishnan says, "An urgent desire for intense and drastic change of the foundation of civilized life<sup>3</sup>".

Guru Nanak visualized a new social order based on morality, love, truth, righteousness, justice and mercy and practically brought creative changes in the spiritual values and sympathized with the oppressed classes. This sense of social responsibility of Guru clearly involves that he had to create institutions and associations.

The Guru was fully aware that mere verbal utterances would not be enough to bring about a required change in the outlook of the people, as early experience of *Bhaktas* and *Sants* had shown. The institution of caste was so deep-rooted in society that it could not be

removed by mere lip ideology. He perceived the need for their inner transformation, and had a definite aim to give his message an organized form so that it should not be lost to the conviction of an individual or mixed up with the beliefs and practices of other religions, with the passing of time. To provide a strong and broader foundation, to bring about socio-political changes, and to build a new social order, there is necessity of setting up of institutions. Thus Guru took practical measures, made organized efforts and suggested ways and means in the form of institutions which could provide alternative moral and social structure and his ideology a permanent footing.

To preserve, practice and perpetuate his ideology, first of all Guru Nanak established *Sangat*. It was a co-operative body which met daily around the Guru, mostly for socio-religious purposes. Its purpose was mutual co-operation for all round development of the individual and collective betterment of the group. It gave a concrete expression to his ideal of unity, equality and fraternity, as high and low, rich and poor, men and women, could sit, pray and dine together. It brought a structural change in the social and mental set up of the people. It acquired great sanctity, owing to the belief that the spirit of the Guru lived and moved among them. Thus, a real brotherhood based on egalitarian principle was created.

The Guru established *Dharamsal* as centre of this new society. It literally means a place for practice of *dharma* or righteousness. Guru Nanak enjoined upon all *sangats* to set apart a place where they could hold congregation regularly for recitation and contemplation of *Bani*. It was a meeting place where they could hold congregation regularly for their socio-spiritual problems and matters of common concern. These not only came to serve as repositories of Sikh faith, but also played a vital role in maintaining the corporate life of the community. It reinforced the notion of religious collectivism and played great role in Sikh politics and welded them into an independent community, bound together by faith in the teachings of their Guru. These places also became the centres of missionary activities, education and Sikh learning. Thus, the establishment of the *Gurdwaras* was a practical step for carrying the society forward towards collective enlightenment and they became centres of unity and freedom.

Another unique institution was *Langar*, which was established to demolish old prejudices of caste, pollution and untouchability. It not only emphasized the need for good food for a normal life which includes *Bhakti*, but also gives concrete shape to the Guru's vision. In *Guru Granth Sahib*, the term '*Deg*' has been used by Guru Nanak to denote the infinite generosity of the earth that sustains and nourishes

every creature living on it. It was started for the purpose of teaching service, spreading equality and removing untouchability and other prejudices born of caste system. Through it, the principle of universal brotherhood, collective efforts and concern for others particularly those in need was emphasized. The maintenance of *Langar* was the corporate obligation. Thus, the responsibility of *Langar* rests on the entire Sikh community.

Guru Nanak then nominated his successor to carry on his divine task assigned to him. His ideals were still to be nurtured, motivated and developed. It was onerous to complete the destined task during his life time. Thus Guruship assumed the institutional form. The Guru is an enlightener and teacher. According to Guru Nanak "the true Guru must be such as to unite all men". He was the central, unifying personality who brought cohesion and gave directions in the moral forces of society. Guru removed the barriers of caste and position set up by men among themselves and gathered them all unto himself, to unite them with God. The Guru was thus the *Brahmgyani*, who showed the way to spiritual deliverance. Guru Nanak inspired a line of nine successors, each of whom was great, unique and a true embodiment of the spirit of the founder.

Guru Amardas established twenty-two *manjis*, and knit the *sangat* into an organized system. He trained the first group of Sikh missionaries who were householders, something unique in the religious history of the world. The trained missionaries included women as well who held independent dioceses or areas of spiritual jurisdiction. Guru Arjan Dev further strengthened the mission by appointing *masands* to collect offerings from the Sikhs residing in different parts of the country to support the increasing demand of *Langar* and the construction of *Harmandir Sahib*.

Guru Arjan played a pivotal role in establishing the Sikh religion and carried forward the message of Guru Nanak. He took an active interest in material, moral and spiritual welfare of his followers. He actually built a corporate society in which the Sikhs were supposed to lead their social and political life in accordance with their *Dharma*. Guru Arjan compiled the *Granth Sahib* and built *Harmandir* which became the focal point of the Sikh faith. The process of development of these institutions continued while *Harmandir Sahib* emerged as a self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating institution. It was on the basis of the strength of their institutions that the Sikhs became a force to be reckoned with and came to occupy a status of a 'state within a state'.

These institutions helped Guru Arjan to build a nation of self-respecting individuals, purely devoted to God, filled with a sense of equality and brotherhood for all, ever eager to die as martyrs for their faith, when opportunities so called. It soon came under attack from the State which saw the new religion as a threat to its power. Guru Arjan had to court martyrdom for it and he saved the Sikh religion from annihilation by safeguarding its ideals. It was this spirit of martyrdom for the cause of faith and freedom that gave Sikhism a taste of complete political and cultural freedom.

Guru Hargobind raised *Akal Takhat* adjacent to the *Harmandir Sahib* and thus handed down to the Sikhs a unique idea of spiritual and empirical unity. The installation of two flags of *Miri* and *Piri* at the common compound started the process of converting Sikhs into saint-soldiers. It was from the *Akal Takhat* that the Sikhs conducted their long drawn out political struggle against the foreign invaders., Thus, the Guru gave a concrete shape to the creative and life-affirming vision of Guru Nanak. It is due to this ideological approach that the Guru came into conflict with the contemporary rulers and Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the religious freedom of man. His martyrdom was to vindicate the individual right to religious freedom. The Gurus, thus by their example, enthused such spirit amongst their

disciples as we discover in a long line of martyrs in Sikhism. Martyrdom became an institution in itself in Sikhism.

At the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the social structure was complete and various institutions had been tried and tested for two centuries. He reformed the existing order from within and set all doubts, dissensions and differences at rest by setting aside all those elements which were likely to create schism and lead to cults and sects. Accordingly, the *Udasis*, the *minas*, the *Dhirmalias*, the *Ram Raias*, etc. were not allowed to associate in any way with the mainstream of Sikhism. The Tenth Master put an end to the institution of *Masands* as they started deviating from the path shown by the Guru. He transferred the spiritual and temporal authority of the individual Guru to the collective spirit of the Khalsa.

Thus, Guru Gobind Singh performed the epitomic act of creating the Khalsa and prescribing the role of *sant-sipahi* for his followers. The Guru laid the foundation of a grand collectivity called the *Panth*, which was invested with the collective leadership of the community and was to guide itself in the light of the word (*shabad*) incorporated in the *Guru Granth*. He abolished, once and for all, the nomination of any person as the Guru and democratized the Sikh community. The personality of the Guru was incorporated in the *Panth* and spirit in the

*Granth*. The Guru's authority was vested in the Khalsa. He bestowed on the Khalsa the high power to take decisions, binding on everyone, irrespective of position and rank. The greatest respect began to be shown to the incorporated Word. The Guru's injunction that 'there shall be one Guru, one word and only one interpretation<sup>4</sup>' became the guiding principle for the entire *Panth*.

Thus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, the period of two centuries is the period of fundamental importance as most of the distinctive features of Sikhism as a religion took shape through its institutions. As they were created for the growth and development of Sikhism, they greatly influenced man's conduct and brought radical changes in their behaviour. These institutions channelized and organized human activities in new directions. They provided guidance in programme of social action and helped in social control and cohesion. They played an important role in the organization and preservation of new society, which in turn created an egalitarian order. Jagjit Singh rightly says: "What the radical *Bhaktas* could not do, the Sikh Gurus did. They created an egalitarian society outside the caste society and made it a springboard for giving shape to a revolutionary movement<sup>5</sup>". Thus, these institutions fulfilled the mission of Guru Nanak.



Institutions also helped the Gurus to organize their disciples on new ideological lines. It strengthened the Sikh way of life and preserved and transmitted the tradition, wisdom, technique and laws from one generation to the next. They were essential for the survival of the new religion and to preserve its originality.

Sikhism also acted as a powerful force in creating and maintaining group cohesion and unity and helped them emerge as a socio-political force in Punjab. The ideal of collectivism, feeling for common interdependence, bound and integrated Sikhs and their conformity to them resulted in the progressive social order, and generated a spirit of confidence amongst the Sikhs.

The task of institutions was to attain the goal envisaged by the founder and helped in establishing the autonomous and unique status for the Sikhs. They also elevated the socio-political ideology of the community to a higher level by creating a value-carrying social structure which gave it permanent and distinct character, and prevented its absorption into other faiths. Thus they imparted strength, sustenance and stability to Sikhism.

By replacing the existing institutions with deliberation and planning, the Gurus sowed the seed of socio-political revolution. With support and strength of these institutions, the mission was organized,

moral ethics were reconstructed and a new environment was created for its growth. The institutions had tremendous potentialities for spreading the word of the Guru worldwide and for a better furthering of the Sikh *Panth*. They streamlined the process of collection and mobilization of resources for the successful completion of shrines, tanks, *baolis*, *sarais* and fortresses. These institutions show that the Sikh religion is neither syncretic, nor a sect of any other religion, but is independent, original and unique. Through these institutions, writes Bhai Gurdas, the successors of Guru Nanak gave Sikhism a completely new social regulation, new code of conduct, new rites, new scriptures, new organization and church of their own: "*Nanak nirmal panth chalaya*<sup>6</sup>". These developed institutions later provided safeguard for the protection of freedom, human rights, dignity and justice. The Sikhs gradually became familiar with a kind of self-government of their own at the centre of which was the Guru with his un-challenged authority, his magnificent *Darbar* and his control over the entire organization of the *sangats*. He was to them a symbol of unity and of something mystical beyond all ordinary considerations, imbued with the ideals of discipline, dedication and self-sacrifice. The institutions gave practical shape to these ideals and the Sikh *Panth* began to be looked upon as a potential threat to the rulers.

The growth of these institutions made the Sikhs tough and untiring under different stress and strain of invaders. When during the eighteenth century the Sikhs were passing through a turbulent period and prices were fixed on their heads, the collective will of the community expressed itself through the *Sarbat Khalsa* and *Gurmatta* which provided cohesion and unity to them. Many a time, they had to sacrifice everything to protect the human rights, individual liberty and freedom of thought, speech and action. Though they had great difficulty in preserving their institutions, they always performed their religious duty of helping the downtrodden, helpless and needy, at the cost of their life.

But unfortunately, when the Sikhs were literally in exile, the *Gurdwaras* came under the control of *Mahants* and *Udasis*, who were corrupt and indulged in practices that were contrary to the spirit of Sikhism. Later when they organized themselves in *Misls*, the institution of *Sarbat Khalsa* and *Gurmatta* infused a spirit of unity and cohesion in their ranks and enabled them to devote their energy for the well-being of the *Khalsa Panth*. The emergence of Ranjit Singh as a ruler of Punjab was a unique historical phenomenon. He was the characteristic product of the Sikhs tradition and referred his government as *Sarkar-i-Khalsa*, which derived its legitimacy from the *Khalsa* common wealth.

This great task was accomplished, due to the vision of the Gurus, who had set up institutions and strengthened them to perfection.

When the Britishers annexed Punjab, the institutions of, Sikhs were in doldrums. This period was a time of intense trauma and turmoil for the Sikhs. The Britishers knew fully well that Sikhs derived their entire strength and vigour from these institutions. So they made sure that the Sikh religious places were kept in the hands of those who were hostile to the thesis of the Gurus and sought to divert them to the ritualistic urge of Hinduism. *Mahants* were appointed by them in *Gurdwaras* including *Harmandir Sahib* and thus adopted a strict and rigid policy detrimental to the growth of Sikhism.

Luckily, for Sikhism, in the nineteenth century men like Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Gurmukh Singh, Bhai Jawahar Singh, Bhagat Lakshman Singh and Bhai Mayya Singh rose to the occasion and ushered in a new era of socio-religious awakening. The *Singh Sabha* leadership helped the Sikhs to regain their strength and cohesion. They invoked the authority of the Sikh gurus, the Sikh scriptures and the Sikh traditions in support of everything they said and preached. These learned men rendered a great service to the community by raising institutions like the *Singh Sabha*, the *Khalsa Diwans*, the Sikh educational conferences, the *Chief Khalsa Diwan*, *Khalsa College*

Amritsar, and scores of Sikh educational centres. In 1909, the *Anand Marriage Act* was passed, which legalized the Sikh form of marriage. It was another significant achievement of the *Singh Sabha*. All these helped in re-assertion of independent socio-religious identity of the Sikhs.

In 1920, the *Shromani Akali Dal* was formed, which pleaded that Sikh shrines and religious establishments be handed over to the elected body of the Sikh community. They could no longer afford to permit their religious institutions to become places of corruption and practices to destroy the very roots and sap that in history had given them unbelievable strength and vigour. They led a peaceful campaign for the Gurdwara reforms and control, and were successful in forcing a reluctant colonial government to pass the Sikh Gurdwara and Shrines Bill (1925). The *Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee* was set up as an elected body to manage historical Gurdwaras and use their funds for their management, missionary work, educational endowment and educational institutions. The *Harmandir Sahib* became the centre of Sikh power and inspiration. It is from here that the *Akalis* waged a struggle for the liberation of the country. They fought their country's freedom on the basis and strength of their religious identity and

institutions. The *Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)* became the sole institution of the community.

But a retrospective look reveals that the SGPC has not been able to provide a good recruiting ground for the political leadership of the Sikhs. The educated elite section of the community has not been successful in gaining representation in the SGPC. The so-called leaders of the Sikhs displayed a complete lack of political vision and far-sightedness. In free India, the basic issue faced by the Sikhs has been that of preserving their distinctive socio-religious and political identity. In the current socio-political milieu, the Sikh tradition, institution, culture, language and identity are seriously threatened. For whole-life religious system like that of Sikhism, the calibre, vision and commitment of the religio-political leadership matters more than anything to keep the community cohesive and vibrant and institutional framework intact.

Enemies of the community are within the community, who are responsible for dishonouring the august institutions of Sikhs and undermining the Sikh value system. Religious institutions began to be controlled by irreligious politicians who were either illiterate or semi-literate and were not aware of the ethics and values prescribed by the Gurus. Institutions like *Miri-Piri* were wrongly interpreted by them. For

them their personal agenda was much more important than the welfare of the community. The Jathedars of *Akal Takht* had been used by them as pawns for their political ambitions.

The Sikhs have been and are being exploited by various semi-literate and self-proclaimed *Babas*. Their *deras* are mushrooming and they are being patronized by politicians. These *Babas* are most dependable allies of the politicians and with their help they have established unchallenged spiritual and intellectual supremacy over the Sikh masses and exploited the glorious Sikh traditions for themselves. They distorted the original Sikh concepts and debated and tried to prove their description as genuine. The Sikh institutions which are supposed to uphold the true Sikh spirit, act in subordination to political power. The political leadership is doing immense harm to the Sikh cause by knowingly or unknowingly compromising the higher values of Sikhism. Unfortunately, those in power lack the vision and those with vision are powerless to change the popular mind set.

The preachers of the SGPC are not role models. They themselves do not adhere to the Sikh *Rehat Maryada*. Unaccounted money collected in the *Gurdwaras* is being misused and the *Gurdwaras* become the places of commercial interest. As far as spiritual development is concerned, there is no element of activity in the

gatherings. The *Langar* in the *Gurdwaras* has lost its purpose. Instead of doing *sewa* or sharing food with others, the *sangats* come to *Gurdwaras* to have their lunch and take along with them tiffins full of food. Similarly, the real purpose of the *Sangat* has been lost.

The Sikh institutions flourished as long as the Sikhs followed the Gurus injunctions. Though initially they played a significant role but subsequently had failed to evolve to the extent required by the new and formidable challenges. The Sikhs are passing through a challenging time. There is a concerted attack on the purity of the Sikh doctrine both from inside and outside. The present is similar that of Guru Nanak's age. Every evil has crept into Sikhism against which Guru Nanak had raised his voice. Brahmanism has made deep inroads in Sikh thought. There is degeneration in the character of the Sikhs. Apostasy has become prevalent among the Sikh youth. For one full year, unaccounted or unofficial *Degh* slips were sold to the devotees at *Harmandir Sahib*. No proper guidance is given to the people who want to offer *Rumala Sahib* at Amritsar, instead some specific shops and their owners play an important role in its sale. Religious institutions which were meant to attain the higher values, collectivism and humility, have now become defunct. Formalism and ritualism have taken the place of devotion. At present they are marked with the lack



or inadequacy of performance and their failure is indicative from the crisis faced by the Sikh Panth these days.

The Akali leadership has failed to salvage the socio-political identity of the Sikhs. Lacking in commitment and sincerity of purpose, the Akali leaders have reduced their politics to a sordid game of self-interest, political expediency, internal struggles, mindless opportunism and corruption. Thus the Sikh institutions are rendered subservient, impotent and alienated. They have been deprived of their democratic character. Ridden by nepotism, corruption and factional loyalties, these institutions have suffered an unprecedented decline in the recent past.

Society is dynamic and the world is changing. There is a change in education, means of communication and industrial technology. Modern techniques have led to the fusion of western and eastern culture. The result has been a tremendous change in social and economic environment. The Sikh diaspora all over the world need adjustment to different ways of life and yet to preserve its identity. They are obliged to modify *Rehat Maryada* at times without changing the spiritual aspect of life. So institutions must necessarily adapt themselves to the changing structure for survival. Religion must be

redefined, clarified, reorganized and subjected to much thoughtful experimentation to meet the demands of the day.

There is a need to re-orient and rejuvenate institutions in the light of present ideals and past traditions. Decadent leadership which has caused enough damage to the ideals and institutions of the Sikhs, must be replaced by learned, vibrant, visionary, honest and committed leadership. The Sikh religion does not consist in showing others how devoted and religious a person is, but actually living by the teachings and principles of the Guru for one's sake rather than for others. Ideals which Guru Nanak stood for, can be realized only if their true significance is clearly placed before the people. Thus Sikhism must be propagated based on its virtues and principles. There should be a proper mechanism and a recognized authority competent to interpret it. A religious advisory committee had existed all along on paper with the SGPC. At the moment it is defunct. It should be revived, reinforced with acknowledged authority on *Gurmat*.

There should be supreme Sikh Board or an apex body to meet the new challenges to tide over the critical time to which the Khalsa Panth is passing. This body is to be on the lines envisaged by Guru Gobind Singh at the time of conferring eternal Guruship on *Guru*

*Granth Sahib* and entrusting the *Panth* with empirical responsibilities under the doctrine of *Guru-Granth* and *Guru-Panth*.

Jathedars of *Akal Takht* should be persons of the highest calibre and well-versed in the Sikh scriptures and the Sikh tenets and men who have made contribution in the service of the *Panth*. They should have integrity of character, moral fortitude, well- educated and trained in the institutes of repute. They must be non-controversial, have the knowledge of other religions and show an impassionate approach to problems and controversial issues. They could be appointed by the SGPC, but after their appointment should be autonomous from their appointing authority. They should be role models for Sikhs.

The Guru is necessary in acquiring true wisdom, to inculcate the feeling of discipline, to attain the highest spiritual realm and guide the Sikh in his endeavour. The service of the Guru consists in understanding his divine sermons and acting upon them, abide by His will, obey His command, meditate on the *Shabad* and the submission of the ego. Guru Amardas had said that without the true Guru every word is unripe. It means only the Guru's word is the voice of God and, therefore, this word alone could be the abiding Guru of mankind. Bhai Gurdas affirmed it when he said *Guru-murat Guru Shabad Hai, Sadh Sangat vich Pargatyaiya*<sup>7</sup>. Actually, Gurbani is the true Guru which has

come from God and effaces all worries and anxieties. Thus the *Guru Granth Sahib* is the everlasting Guru. Baba and Sant culture must be rejected as non-Sikh model.

The stature of the *Sangat*, the stature of the *Panth*, should be raised so that it should represent Guru in person to spread Guru's mission all over the world. *Sangat* should be given the right to amend, change or abolish altogether any of the customs, rituals and ceremonies. Decisions and orders of the *Sangat* must be obeyed. *Sangat* should work for the upliftment and development of the institution of the *Gurdwara*. The *Sangat* as a whole should care and look after widows, orphans and poor people. They should manage historical *Gurdwaras*, use their funds for management, missionary work, educational endowment, and educational institutions. Thus, *Sangat* should undertake projects for the welfare of the community as a whole.

The purpose of *Langar* requires a proper understanding. The Guru's mission to unite all beings of the world under the Lordship of God and to tie them together with bond of common brotherhood based on equality must be fulfilled. *Sewa* should not be limited to *Langar*, upkeep of custody of shoes of the devotees or cleanliness of premises. Help should be given to those affected by natural calamities

such as drought, floods and earthquake etc. and also to the elderly, the handicapped and the destitute.

The Gurdwaras should provide facilities for *gurmat prachar*. Dedicated volunteers be prepared for *prachar* at national and international level and arrangements be made for inter-faith discussions and debates. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is replete with philosophical wisdom. If the Bible could reach the people, why can't the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Seminars on *Amrit Prachar* to educate Sikhs about the need of taking *amrit* be organized. Debates, declamations, poetical recitations, lectures should be held at the school and college level. Arrangements must be made for proper reading, explaining, understanding and discussion of *Guru Granth Sahib*. Properly trained *bhais* should be employed to teach the new generation to recite *gurbani* in the *ragas* prescribed for it.

Gurdwaras should provide facilities for education, career guidance, dispensaries, first aid centres, libraries, museums and lecture halls and money collected must be used for development and constructive purposes like managing schools, colleges, asylums, old age homes, etc. They should emulate the activities of the Christian Church and missionaries.

*Akal Takht* is the supreme Sikh authority. It should be accepted as a venerated institution and should act as a unifying force. It should provide institutional solidarity for people of Sikh faith. It has a commanding role. So it should inspire, guide and direct a global Sikh mission. Learned and impartial *Jathedars* must work for enthusing the revival of Sikh ethics and must check the cultural derecination and work for *Sarbat-da-Bhalla*.

The perception of the Sikhs as people who are willing to kill is erroneous. It should be changed. Sikhism, in fact, is a religion that has transcended death. The tradition of sacrifice should be given a new line of action and thought. The Sikhs must sacrifice lust, greed, self-interest and above all work for the welfare of others. They must sacrifice themselves to protect human rights, freedom and liberty of thought, action and dignity of man.

The Sikh institutions presented a solution to the theological, ethical and moral conflicts generated by semitic and Hindu faiths. It found out ways and means for the solution of various human and social problems. Judged from this angle, the Sikh thought has contributed a lot to the reshaping of the image and scope of religion to make it more useful for practical human life, by inter-relating its spiritual ideals with the worldly life of man.

Sikhism became a well-knit original, distinct, revolutionary and efficient organization due to its institutions. A new society was created which was free, united, democratically constituted and ushered an egalitarian social revolution. Thus, institutions should bear the stand of all that is best, progressive and dynamic in Sikhism. These institutions should grow, develop and cope with the need of the time, but without compromising on the basic principles on which they were established. These must be made functional to articulate the highest expectations and aspirations of the Sikhs. They should be reoriented, assimilated and consolidated. The task could be accomplished by a new and well equipped leadership who would blaze new paths of thought and action. Thus, decadent leadership must be replaced by vibrant, visionary, honest and committed leadership which should exercise the corporate will and authority of the entire community and also give unity and coherence to their decisions. Sikhism then would become truly a major world religion, as the Guru envisioned, in the twenty-first century.

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