

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHTS
OF
THE SIKH GURUS**

349

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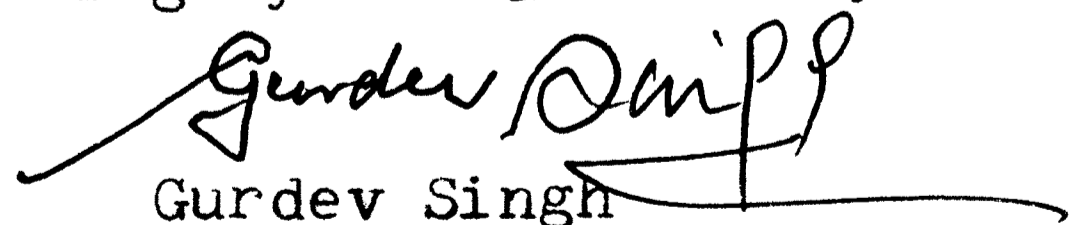
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INTRODUCTORY

The Main Proposition :

The main proposition of this thesis is that the chief object of the Sikh Gurus was to create a society which could lead a morally healthy and materially happy life, with self-respect and without being forced to undergo any kind of oppression - religious, social or political. There should be equality amongst the citizens including equality between the sexes. In other words, all people (including women) should be free and enjoy equal rights in all fields of human activities - social, religious and political. For this sort of life, political power was necessary so that people could enjoy freedom of conscience, speech and religion.

The thesis deals with the subject in two parts. The first part deals with the social thoughts of the Sikh Gurus. Hindu society was hopelessly divided - a house divided against itself - by the caste hierarchy, each caste further divided into innumerable sub-castes. The caste system led to the abominable system of certain castes being declared untouchable, i.e. people of the so-called higher castes would get polluted even if they, by chance, happened to touch a person belonging to the untouchable castes. On the other hand, meaningless rites, rituals and customs came to be declared by the priestly class as the essentials of

religion. However, women and members of the lower castes were denied the right to perform even these soulless rites and rituals.

Political oppression of the Hindus by the alien Muslim rulers was of the worst kind. Hindus had no political rights whatsoever. They were not only treated as second-class citizens but even as slaves. Muslim rulers and their administrators, from the highest to the lowest, thought it their foremost duty to propagate Islam and convert Hindus to Islam even at the point of the sword. Hindus were denied the liberty of conscience, expression and worship and they were hated by the ruling class.

The Sikh Gurus analysed the situation incisively. They came to the conclusion that without political power a community could not practise its religion. However, a divided society could not hope to acquire political power. The first task that the Gurus regarded as of prime importance was to remove social evils from the Hindu society and reorganise it on the basis of equality amongst its members and equality between the men-folk and the women-folk. This meant uprooting of the caste system and the emancipation of women and removal of their disabilities. The first five Gurus addressed themselves to the primary task of reforming, uniting, regenerating and reorganising the Hindu society. Side by side with social reforms, it

was considered necessary to inculcate a true religious spirit amongst the people who were gripped by ritualism and superstitions. With this object in view the Sikh Gurus exhorted the people to believe in one God, give up faith in innumerable gods and goddesses and abandon all sorts of rites, rituals and customs.

The Sixth Guru felt that the new society had become strong enough, morally and socially, to assume some sort of political entity. He started giving his followers political consciousness and organising them as a political power. This transformation was carried forward by the successors of the sixth Guru. The last, i.e. the tenth, Master took it to its logical end and created the Khalsa society, which meant a classless society whose members not only enjoyed equal rights and basic freedoms, but also acquired some political power to guard this equality and their freedoms. Oppressions, injustice, discrimination and aggression were to be met with force.

The second part of the thesis deals with the political thoughts and theories of the Sikh Gurus. The polity as per Sikhism has been discussed in this part. The Sikh Gurus wanted to create a society whose members would enjoy equal political rights. They would not only not commit tyranny and injustice on others, but would not submit to tyranny or injustice perpetrated by others on them. They would, if need arises, lay down their lives in defence of

the weak and the helpless. The rulers did not exist for themselves and just to enjoy life at the cost of their subjects, but they had a duty towards their subjects - to dispense justice even-handedly, to treat the people on the basis of equality of rights, and to protect the life, property and honour of the subjects, irrespective of their status, class, caste or religion. The State, according to the Sikh Gurus, was not an end in itself but a means, an instrument, to keep law and order, to administer justice and to make the lives of the people happy and meaningful. The State is to look after the welfare of the people and not to oppress and loot them. If the rulers did not behave properly and perform their duties honestly and efficiently, the people had the right to throw them out.

It may be noted that the Sikh Gurus did not want to carve out a kingdom for themselves or to enjoy political power for their personal ends. They wanted the people to be politically conscious, so that the latter could safeguard their interests, live a happy, contented and peaceful life, and follow the voice of their conscience, i.e. practise their religion, without any let or hindrance. According to Sikh Gurus, political power should rest with the people and not with the kings, rulers or their agents. It was true and ideal democracy that they preached and upheld.

General Condition of Society before the birth of Sikhism :

During the fourteenth century A.D., Indian society was passing through a critical situation. The common people were downtrodden and they felt dismayed because of the cruel treatment meted out to them by foreign rulers who had invaded and conquered India to satisfy their lust for the immense wealth of this country. It was a period marked by tyranny, injustice, religious fanaticism, political chaos, oppression and all kinds of corruption and highhandedness in all spheres of life. It had resulted in the social, cultural and religious degeneration and degradation of the Indian society. During this extremely dark period of Indian history, there was need for establishing the dignity of the individual and liberating man from oppression of all kinds.

The greatest bane of the Indian life was total lack of nationalism. There were several regional nationalisms, or parochialisms which divided the country into fragments, each warring with the other. In the words of Gokal Chand Narang, "India had too much of religions and no nationalism at all. Her history bears this out. The only way to make a nation of them was to make nationalism their religion".¹ The religion of the common man was confined to worshipping

1. Narang, Dr. Gokal Chand : Transformation of Sikhism, 5th ed., New Delhi, 1960, pp. 159-161.

various gods, goddesses and natural objects, belief in superstitions and observing a number of rites, rituals and customs on various occasions such as birth, marriage, death etc. All these customs constituted the main parts of their religion.

In the words of Professor Niharranjan Ray, "During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, much of the social and religious life of Northern India, including Punjab, was surcharged with the spirit and ideas of the non-Brahmanical protestant and non-conformist cults and sects - like those of Kapalikas, Avadhutas, Aghora-panthies, and Nath-panthy Yogis. Perhaps, what is called the Sant tradition also issued directly out of its older tradition of Sahajyani Buddhists which was conditioned at its conception and birth by two other powerful currents - one, of the Bhakti tradition, and the other, of the Sufi mystics".²

Hindu society in that age was being directed and controlled by religious leaders belonging to different religious sects. They were preaching to the people in their own way. They had divided the Hindu society in a number of water-tight compartments, each at loggerheads with the other and each considering itself superior to others, and also as the only possessor of truth.

The caste system dominated Hindu society. "In the

2. Ray, Niharranjan : The Sikh Gurus and Sikh Society, New Delhi, 1975, p.34.

case of the Hindu community, their religious beliefs and practices were controlled by the Brahmans who claimed to base their edicts on the Vedas and the Puranas. The required response consisted in the performance of the customary rites appropriate to a man's station within the caste structure of society".³

The religion of the masses had few of the higher spiritual concepts of Hinduism. Primitive forms of animism and fetishism were often found in combination with the rites and observances of higher Hinduism. In this popular religion, godlings of nature, of diseases, malevolent spirits, animal worship, heroic godlings as well as totems and fetishes were conspicuous. Details of the objects of this popular worship make a long list : sun, moon, stars, rainbow, milkyway, earth, earthquakes, lightning, rivers, springs, waterfalls, lakes, weather, rain, godlings, ancestors, worthies, sadhus, satis, caste-saints, trees and snakes and bhuts and churails — all these, and many more, find mention in the popular religion of northern India of those centuries".⁴

Buddhism compromised with the Brahmanical religion to such an extent that it could have been regarded almost as

3. Mcleod, W.H. : Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, Oxford, 1968, p.151.

4. Crock, W. : The Popular Religions and Folklores of Northern India, Delhi, 1968, p.104.

a sect of the latter. In the fifteenth century, pockets of tantric Buddhism could be found in the Punjab Hills. But in the plains, Buddhism had suffered a dilution which was little short of disappearance. Buddhism taught non-violence, so the Buddhists offered no resistance to foreign invaders. They expected that the recitation of tantric mantras would save them. But tantric practices failed them, and they were powerless before the advancing foreigners.

"The Sufis had adopted some Hindu beliefs and practices and this added to their popularity. Their looking upon the relations between God and the soul as one of the beloved and the lover and their insistence on a pacific and non-violent attitude towards mankind were as much borrowed from Hindu beliefs, as the starving and torturing of the body were borrowed from the Hindu practices."⁵ The Hindus found it difficult to distinguish them from Hindu sadhus.

Religion was not acting as a unifying force. It did not act as a source of moral and spiritual strength to the people. Religion led to mental, intellectual and moral degradation of Hindu society. Since moral and spiritual decay had weakened and emasculated the soul of the Indian people, there was no stability and moral strength in society.

The period in question was a most depressing period for the Indian society. The common people were subjected

5. Nizami, K.M. : Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India, Bombay, 1961, pp.178-179.

to the most heinous and immoral conditions. The internal structure of religion had crumbled down. Hindu religious leaders had become lovers of materialism. Under these conditions, Hindu society was searching for a spiritual leader to find in him a source of inspiration, guidance, promise and hope.

The fifteenth century leaders of the Bhakti movement appeared on the scene at this critical juncture of Indian history.

Ramanand, the fountain-head of medieval Bhakti movement, was the Guru of Kabir, Ravidas and all other great saint-poets of the fifteenth century India. Bhakti poetry of northern India is directly attributed to him and his followers.

Ramanand would not have cut any ice, as already noted, in the face of Sufi activities and influence, if, in his practices, he had not accorded a generous recognition to the spirit of the age by admitting Sudras and women to his religious order. He also simplified the form of worship and began preaching through the medium of Hindi. The result was that though he did not give up any of the fundamentals of the Hindu thoughts and beliefs, he emancipated, for the first time, the national intellect from the thralldom of scholastic learning. He attracted a galaxy of sharp and sensitive intellectuals like Anantananda, Kabir, Pipa,

Bhananada, Sukha, Sursura, Padmavati, Narhari, Raidas, Dhanna, Saina, and the wife of Sursura. When Ramanand died in 1470 he left behind two schools of religious thought : one conservative and the other radical. The first remained true to ancient beliefs and allowed only slight changes in doctrines and rites. The other struck out a more independent faith. The leaders of the latter school produced a far greater impact on the masses. But the one destined to be remembered as the greatest disciple of Ramanand was Kabir, who was more successful than others because he not only laid greater emphasis on inward spirituality, to the exclusion of outward ritualism, but also set a new objective before himself, viz., the conciliation of Hinduism and Islam. He borrowed the best from Hindu and Muslim mysticism and from the Bhakti cult and the Sufi teachings. Kabir was at the height of his fame when Nanak appeared on the scene with his proclamation that "there was no Hindu and no Mussalman".

Status of Women

The position of women in society in that age was simply degrading. She was confined to the four walls of the house. She was considered to be no more than a 'Man's shoe', and a domestic slave. The birth of a girl was never looked upon with favour. Female infanticide was common. The profession of dancing girls who quenched the thirst of

the lustful eyes was profitable and was patronised by those who should have been the keepers of public morals.

There is indeed a great probability that an average Hindu female was respected as a daughter, a wife and a mother among the Brahmans, the Rajputs, and the Khatries, but even amongst them women were regarded as inferior to men. Her position at best was subordinate.

Hari Ram Gupta has held that women suffered the most during the reign of Babar. Young unmarried girls were carried off by the members of the ruling class. This evil became so widely prevalent that the parents thought of three ways to save themselves and their daughters from this ignominy. First, rich people would murder their daughters at the time of birth. Thus, infanticide became a well-established practice in the country. Second, early marriage was adopted, and girls were invariably married at the age of 5 or 6. This ruined their life. They seldom experienced any period of youth and beauty. Due to the frequency of child-birth they never enjoyed good health. Third, young women, both married and unmarried, were treated in a rough manner. Rough work in the household was assigned to them, and they were made to wear coarse clothes. The idea was not to let them appear attractive.

"Widows led a miserable life. They were hated by all the members of the family. They were blamed for the death

of their husbands. Widow-marriage was not allowed by the Hindu society. She was either forced to burn herself alive with the corpse of her husband, or was forced to cut her hair, wear dirty clothes, and live a very uncouth life. She was not allowed to sing songs or indulge in merriment. She could not go to a fair or participate in family marriages and festivities. In many cases widows were enticed by the Muslims, and converted to Islam, or they set up as prostitutes".⁶

No voice was raised which could make the people realise the dignity of womanhood. Their status was considered equal to that of the Sudras. They were forbidden the study of Vedic literature and were considered as slaves of their husbands who were empowered even to inflict corporal punishment on them.

Religious Bigotry of Muslims

Extreme bigotry pervaded the Muslims. "Their fierce fanaticism which regarded the destruction of non-Muslims as an act of merit which would immensely please God, made them absolutely pitiless".⁷ Deep hatred existed in those days between the Hindus and the Muslims, and the whole non-Muslim population was subjected to persecution by

6. Gupta, Hari Ram : History of Sikh Gurus, New Delhi, 1973, pp. 9-10.

7. Smith, V.A. : India in Mohamadan Period, Oxford, 1923, p.257.

Mohammadan rulers and Mohammadan population".⁸ Sikandar Lodhi, who occupied the throne of Delhi in 1489, was one of the worst bigots. He destroyed Hindu temples, and forbade pilgrimages and bathing at sacred places on the banks of the sacred rivers, lakes or ponds. On one occasion, he is said to have put to death a Brahmin who had been actively propagating the doctrine that all religions, if sincerely practised, were equally acceptable to God.

Regarding the behaviour of Sikandar Lodhi towards the Hindus, Tarikh-e-Daudi relates a story that once, "when a crowd of Hindus assembled at Kurukshetra, he wanted to go there and put them all to death. He was dissuaded with great difficulty from carrying out his resolve by Mian Abdulla, the Malikul-Ulema, who told him that it was against the Prophet's precept."⁹

Farishta relates heart-rending stories of destruction of temples by Sikandar Lodhi in various parts of India. "In Mathura he destroyed all the temples and constructed on their sites caravan-serais and mosques. He gave over their stone-idols to butchers to use them as weights. Hindus were even forbidden from getting their heads and beards shaved. Barbers were given orders not to shave them."¹⁰

8. Latif, Sayad Mohammad : History of Punjab, Calcutta, 1891, p.240.

9. Abdulla : Tarikh-e-Daudi, Vol.IV, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 439-440.

10. Ibid., p.447.

Caste Conflicts

The worst thing was that among the Hindus themselves there were divisions of a most deplorable kind. They were not only divided into four main castes named Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, but these four castes were further divided into hundreds of sub-castes, each of which lived in a water-tight compartment of its own. Daulat Rai explains the caste differences among the Hindus in an impressive manner. He says that these people (the members of different castes and sections) had neither one common religion nor one desire. Their worlds were different. They differed in hopes, differed in temperaments, differed in customs, in habits, in their food and in their sympathies. Their heavens were different and their hells were different. They were different in everything and were one in none".¹¹

Political Scene

"Without doubt the Muslim rulers of the period had lost all sense of justice and of fairplay. Shameless opportunism and unscrupulous greed seem to have been the order of the day, and the light-hearted manner in which pledges were given only to be broken at the earliest opportunity, bespeaks a moral decadence which was keeping pace only too well with the political disruption from which the country had been suffering".¹²

11. Daulat Rai : Chaharchaman (quoted by Chhabra, G.S., in his Advanced Study in the History of Punjab, Jullundur, 1960, pp.11-12).

12. Banerjee, Indu Bhushan : Evolution of the Khalsa, Vol.II, Calcutta, 1947, p.40.

Guru Nanak bitterly described the rulers of the time in these words :

"This age is like a drawn sword,
 The kings are butchers;
 Goodness hath taken wings and flown.
 In the dark night of falsehood
 I espy not the moon of truth anywhere.
 I grope after truth and am bewildered.
 I see no path in the darkness;
 It is the obstinacy with which man
 clings to his petty selfhood
 that causeth this anguish;
 Nanak asketh : where is the path of salvation?"¹³

The provincial governors themselves were less enthusiastic about the religious persecution of the Hindus, but the administration in the provinces was of the worst type. The governors were always busy in romances and pleasures and had lost all sense of duty towards the people.

The general political condition of India during the Lodhi and Mughal periods has been described and commented upon at several places in Guru Granth Sahib. Further, horrible types of murders and dacoities were committed. The rulers, instead of protecting the people, butchered

13. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Majh. p.145, Gopal Singh (Trans.) Delhi, 1964, V.I. p.137.

them. According to Guru Nanak, "the kings have become man-eaters, and their officials behave like dogs. They lick blood and eat flesh of the people".¹⁴

The havoc caused by the invasion of Babar, as described in Guru Granth Sahib, is as follows :

"The entire garrison at Sayadpur was massacred in cold blood and the inhabitants of the place were butchered and carried away into slavery. Wealth and beauty of women proved to be their bane and they were forcibly taken away and dishonoured".¹⁵

At still another place, Guru Nanak has depicted thus the terrible scene of the destruction brought about by Babar's forces :

Sports, stables, horses, bugles and clarions, all vanished in a moment's time. Horses, mansions, palaces and beautiful seraglios were destroyed. Beautiful women, whose sight caused sleep to vanish, met a horrible fate. Foolish indeed it was that thousands of priests, instead of going to the battle-field and fight the invaders, cried before their idols and tried to restrain the enemy by their miraculous powers. But their stone gods failed

14. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Majh, p.145, Vol.I, p.137.

15. Ibid., Rag Asa, p.418, Vol.2, p.415.

to protect them. If a strong man beats a strong man, no feelings of resentment arise. But if a ravenous lion falls on a herd of sheep, the shepherd is expected to show his manliness".¹⁶

The above-mentioned writings show that the Indian society was facing very hard times and needed a spiritual leader to re-establish righteousness.

In that dark moment for the Indian society, a great savant was born in the form of Sri Guru Nanak Dev on Kartik Sudi 15, Samvat 1526 (1469 A.D.) in order to save the people and to purify society of its immoral and irreligious practices. It was through Guru Nanak Dev that a new philosophy of religion, namely Sikhism, came into being.

"The story and content of Sikhism is the story of Guru Nanak, retold in its subsequent stages of nine successive Gurus, but all as commissioned instruments and breathing the soul of Guru Nanak himself. Guru Nanak represented and exemplified the first and prime unit in the vast torrent of luminousness, which gave birth to a vibrant and pulsating religion called Sikhism. It was a mighty earthquake which started with its epicentre at Talwandi, where Guru Nanak was born, and which culminated in a magnificent sunset at

16. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.418, Vol.2, p.415.

Nander where the last Guru fell at the hands of an assassin. It was not a sunset but, indeed, a glorious sunrise".¹⁷

The story goes that at one time Guru Nanak fell into a trance and remained unnoticed for two days. On the third day, holy light suddenly flashed into his mind, and immediately thereafter he gave the message :

✓ "NA KOI HINDU NA MUSALMAN"

(There is no Hindu, no Musalman).

This was the first slogan of the Spirit. The reformation started by Guru Nanak continued through his nine successors and presented to the people of India a great guiding spirit in the shape of the holy scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This redeemer led people from darkness to light and, with his coming, darkness vanished and the sunshine of truth and love and equality spread. He was able to defeat the forces of hatred, narrowmindedness, and intolerance.

✓ Society as per Sikh Gurus :

It was necessary to build up the moral fibre of society and bring about social reforms in order to create a glorious nation out of the down-trodden and suppressed people. The motivating force provided by the Gurus was

17. Varma, Sharad Chandra : Guru Nanak and the Lagos of Divine Manifestation, Allahabad, 1969, p.1.

courage - both of mind and body. They declared that human life had its own dignity. People were admonished not to retreat from the world but to live in it and strive for better life. They preached worship of one God and 'Nam simran' as the only way. A state of spiritual and mental equipoise could be attained through the recitation of the Name.

Every successor of Guru Nanak perceived the real meaning of Guru Nanak's teachings which taught humility, fearlessness, and also refusal to submit to tyranny. The Sikh Gurus gave the message of selfless service and self-sacrifice, and taught that human life had a purpose on this earth. So every Sikh was taught to lead a life free from superstitions and to worship only one God. Every Sikh was free from caste and class fetters. The Gurus elevated man by making him responsible for his own actions and destiny. They extolled free life as an ideal for man. According to the Gurus, man should strive to achieve and practise wisdom, truth, contentment, justice and courage. He should be free from haume (i.e. ego). The Gurus believed in moral education and high ideas for the development of the individual, the society and the whole of mankind. They founded a new society which was both humanitarian and idealistic. They condemned the concept of high and low status in society and regarded the temporal power as transitory. The rulers, such as the Padshahs, the Sultans, the Khans, the Chaudharis, and the

Muqaddams, are as much subject to annihilation as their subjects (the masses).

Women were placed on an equal footing with men in all spheres-domestic, social, political, religious, etc.

The mission of Nanak's religious and moral reformation was, later on, given a political orientation, when circumstances became more congenial for such a transformation. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, created a new society, called the Khalsa, and transformed the Sikh community into a heroic community by putting arms into the hands of his followers. Thus a religious society was transformed into a political society. The spirit of heroism spread and the people were transformed into a nation of fighters for moral causes.

The Khalsa society played a significant role in fighting against evils of all kinds and made great sacrifices to redeem the sufferings of the people. Its aim was to destroy a system which had grown tyrannical and which denied all kinds of freedom. The newly-created society believed in one God and considered all religions as different paths leading to one and the same ultimate goal. Every individual came to be respected as a human being and not discriminated against on religious basis. Sikhism, as founded by Guru Nanak, was a sect of peaceful disciples. As Sikhism moved on in the stifling environment of tyranny and injustice, the later Gurus completely changed the nature of

the disciples. Sikhs went on making rapid advances in the political field and they adopted a form of self-government. The preachings of the Tenth Guru breathed a new spirit in the Sikhs and they were inspired to make efforts for advancing on the path of political power and glory.

The political thinking of the Gurus was wholly based on a democratic way of life. As per Sikhism, sovereignty rests with the people and they should not submit to a cruel or unjust ruler, and must assert their own rights. The political thoughts of the Gurus indicate the process of how the religious society of Sikhs developed into a political community. This political development saved the community from social exploitation and political atrocities. The fundamental rights granted to the citizens by Sikhism includes the freedom of conscience and the right to resist the rulers against brutalities and injustices. The main objective of the Sikh Gurus was to develop a healthy society in a healthy state. ✓

SIKH GURUS AND THE PERIOD OF THEIR GURUSHIP

1. Guru Nanak Dev	1469-1539
2. Guru Angad Dev	1539-1552
3. Guru Amar Das	1552-1574
4. Guru Ram Das	1574-1581
5. Guru Arjan Dev	1581-1606
6. Guru Har Gobind	1606-1645
7. Guru Har Rai	1645-1661
8. Guru Har Krishan	1661-1664
9. Guru Tegh Bahadur	1664-1675
10. Guru Gobind Singh	1675-1708
Guru Granth Sahib	1708 -

PART I

SOCIAL THOUGHTS OF THE SIKH GURUS

CHAPTER I

Ethics in Sikhism

Sikhism, like most of the other religions, believes in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man. In Sikhism social thoughts are generally found interlinked with religious thoughts. It is, therefore, difficult to make a clear demarcation between social and religious thoughts in Sikhism. It would, therefore, be worthwhile to understand the real purpose of the mission of the Sikh Gurus in the context of the social evils and religious malpractices prevailing in society during their times.

✓ Guru Nanak wanted to remove social evils like the caste system, denigration of women, inequality among men, the custom of 'sati', etc. He exhorted the people to love human beings and worship only one God.¹ He wanted his followers not to follow materialistic pursuits which to him were not an end in themselves. All riches, luxuries and pleasures, according to him, are to be had at the minimum level, as these things make man forget God. "After all, the body has to return to dust".

✓ In order to purify religion, Guru Nanak had to wage a war against the forces of conservatism, orthodoxy, ignorance, ritualism and superstitions. He attacked the

1. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Bilawal, p.832, Vol.3, p.789.

citadels of Brahmins, Mullas and Yogis and fought against the cults of the priestly class. He infused the spirit of true worship among the people at large and rid them of the apathy or weariness of the spirit. He tore apart the veil of falsehood and brought people face to face with truth and reality.

Sikhism on Human Life

Sikhism believes that God created the universe and that the world exists for man to make his life sublime. In other words, human life created on this earth is purposeful. It is compared with land. Just as water has no effect on the barren land, so, without good deeds, this life becomes worthless like the barren land. It is necessary that every moment of life should be spent in good deeds, and in a purposeful manner. A purposeless life is like a wall made of mud and without plaster. This wall may fall at any moment.² We should play the game of life in such a way that we do not lose our credit in the court of the Lord. It is necessary for every person to perform his duties fearlessly without caring for the results and without hoping for the fruits of one's deeds, as "these are counted by God and may not be erased by any person. These deeds are true friends of man and accompany him to the other world and stand as a credit whenever an account of our deeds is prepared. Man should

2. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Basant, p.1171, Vol.4, p.1121.

have contentment and should not blame others for his misfortunes. One only reaps what one sows. Why then blame others?"³ God alone knows why He made man or why man is in a state of separation from God. It is necessary that every religious man performs good deeds. The qualities of a Brahmin are not in being a Brahmin by caste, but in having the knowledge of Brahma, in practising austerity and in contemplation and self-control. For the Khatriis heroic deeds are necessary. They should show compassion and charity to others and knowing the right form, sow the seeds of beneficence. Only such a Khatri is approved of at the Lord's court. But he, who indulges in falsehood, avarice and greed, reaps what he sows.⁴

The Brahmin's study of the holy books is superficial and consequently useless because he goes through them but does not understand their substance. In spite of this he gives advice to others and this is false trade.⁵

One may know Sanskrit and read the Puranas, one may count rosary-beads or recite scriptural verses, one may understand grammar, but all these do not lead one to God. According to Guru Nanak, reading of big religious books and

3. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.469, Vol.2, p.462.

4. Ibid., Shaloka, p.1411, Vol.4, p.1337.

5. Ibid., Rag Sorath, p.635, Vol.2, p.613.

mere knowledge unaccompanied by right conduct is despicable. He shows no regard for scriptural books and formal religious learning. "One may load carts with books, one may read them for all the twelve months of the year, or indeed at each and every moment of one's entire life, but all this will be of no account. Instead of all these, one Word, the Name of Lord, is sufficient".⁶

During his meeting with some yogis at mount Sumer, Guru Nanak told Gorakh that "the supporter of the universe is ever awake and He takes no time to do what He wants to do". He further told Bhartri Yogi that that alone happens which the Lord wills and one's only mainstay is the immaculate name of the Lord. Guru Nanak exhorted men to discard falsehood and deception and to serve none other than God. He said the Yogis try to acquire divine knowledge, the Brahmans to read the Vedas, the Khatris to exercise bravery, and the Sudras to work for others, but the highest duty of all is to repeat the Name of the Lord.

Sikhism wants men to live in good company and to lead a good and virtuous life, free of haume (i.e. ego). According to Guru Nanak, man degrades himself from the human level, if he becomes a slave to his ego. Falsehood gets no redemption in God's court. If a person happens to do a good turn to another, he feels proud and makes too much of it. But "God,

6. Guru Granth Sahib, Raḡ Asa, p.467, Vol.2, p.461.

who bestows so much and does countless good deeds to the entire animate world, does all this graciously and never regrets afterwards.⁷ Let us say all hail to Him who gives us all that we eat. He indeed is a great man "who cherishes truth as fasting, contentment as pilgrimage, wisdom and contemplation as ablution, compassion as god, and forgiveness as his prayer".⁸ Instead of washing the idols from without man should wash his own heart from within; his soul should become clean. Only then is he a sublime being. One must work hard and honestly. He alone has found the right path who eats what he earns through toil and shares his earnings with others.

Man should avoid bad qualities as these are harmful. Guru Nanak said, "Avarice is like the (barking) dog, falsehood like the (unclean) sweeper, cheating like the eating of a carcass, slander is the dirt that my tongue tastes. And anger is the fire that burns me. I indulge in nothing but self-esteem. See, these are my doings. O Lord! Man becomes good in good company. If he pursues virtues and keeps his mind clean, society will also become good and clean. Man should work for the good of society, otherwise he will have to repent afterwards".⁹ Again, he says, "Greed is the cause

7. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Parbhati, p.1329, Vol.4, p.1265.

8. Ibid., Rag Sarang, p.1245, Vol.4, p.1190.

9. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.467, Vol.2, p.461.

of immense grief. Man should give up his desires as greed is like a dark prison and vices are like fetters around one's feet".¹⁰

In order to maintain morality and achieve greatness in human life, good character is essential. "Thieves, adulterers and gamblers are pressed in the oil-press (in hell). Slanderers and backbiters are fettered (and duly punished)".¹¹ It is said regarding women, "Blessed is the wife who loves her husband intensely. If a blessed bride is asked : 'with what merits have you been able to win and enjoy the love of your husband' she should be in a position to say : 'by bedecking myself with the virtues of adoration, contentment and sweet speech.'"¹²

Forgiveness is the greatest quality of man. For a person who imbibes this spirit, forgiveness is as virtuous as fasting, good conduct and contentment. "One who can forgive is neither afflicted by any ailment nor tortured by the regent of death."¹³

10. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Basant, p.1191, Vol.4, p.1141.

11. Ibid., Rag Malar, p.1288, Vol.4, p.1229.

12. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.19, Vol.1, p.22.

13. Ibid., Rag Gauri, p.223, Vol.1, p.215.

Commending service to humanity as the best goal of human life, Guru Nanak said :

"Let service with your hands be your persian wheel, its chain and buckets, and let your mind be the bullock yoked to run it. Irrigate thereby the fields of your body with the nectar of God's Name, so that the gardener of the universe may own you accordingly. Dig deep and turn the soil well and weed out the growth of lust and wrath. This kind of gardening will bring you happiness, for your labour shall bear fruit".¹⁴

Guru Nanak condemned ignorance and exhorted people to acquire true knowledge (i.e. knowledge of the self), in the following words :

"Ignorance is the root of man's problem. Knowing neither his true nature, nor his destiny, he is bound to be born and die repeatedly. But a frog does not understand this and while living in the same pond, it eats only the dirt, never realising the value of pure nectar contained therein".¹⁵

In Sikhism we find emphasis on Grace, that is, the way in which God focusses His attention upon a person.

14. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Basant, p.1176, Vol.4, p.1127.

15. Ibid., Rag Kanhra, p.990, Vol.4, p.946.

Man should practise devotion and thus reach the realm of knowledge. He should lead life courageously. For those who are, by chance, enveloped by the darkness of troubles and adversities, Guru Nanak holds out hope in the following words :

The sky is overcast,
The tempest rages in the sea,
Surge waves upon waves,
Now, cry out to the Guru, the boatman
and You have, then,
No fear of the boat being sunk".¹⁶

16. Guru Granth Sahib, Shaloka, p.1410, Vol.4, p.1336.

CHAPTER II

Social Reform through abolition of Caste-system and rites and rituals.

Caste in Ancient Times :

Caste had become a very rigid institution in India by the middle ages. The biological basis of this institution was, and still is, the notion of purity of blood. However, the caste system gave rise to the practice of untouchability. A number of castes were declared 'untouchable' and unworthy to be admitted to any superior hierarchy in society.

"The Aryan immigrants into India are said to have started with the notion that they all belonged to one common ancestor. Manu admits the possibility of Sudras enjoying kingly power, and Huen Tsang mentions instances of Vaishya and Sudra kings.¹ Even so, the dark-skinned natives were despised by the Aryan immigrants. The Sudras and the outcastes, who, by and large, comprised these natives, were the worst sufferers of the degrading process of the caste system. In their case the reason for discrimination is obvious and needs no explanation. But it is important to note that, in course of time, the caste system became a self-propelled downgrading operation, which, once started, gradually unfolded itself so as to engulf even the

1. Sykes : Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol.6,
p. 324.

non-Brahmanical sections of the 'twice-born' Aryans, i.e. Aryans of higher castes.

The position of the Kshatriyas, originally the fighting section of the Aryans, became later less prominent in the Aryan hierarchy. Barth opines that "the rise of great monarchies and the employment of mercenary soldiers must have had the effect of shaking the constitution of the old Kshatriya nobility".² This might have been a contributory factor, but there were other reasons also. Whatever the reasons, however, there is evidence to show that the Brahmins made numerous attempts to establish their own supremacy. The first notable effort in this direction was the monopolization of sacerdotal functions by the Brahmins at an early stage of Aryan history.

In the beginning, there was, it appears, no clear distinction between a rishi and a priest. Even later, when a priestly class got concretized, sacerdotal functions did not become the hereditary monopoly of this class. There was a stage when hymns were composed and sacerdotal functions exercised both by Rajanyas (who were in later times called Kshatriyas) and the Brahmins. There are even instances of Rajanyas having been spiritual preceptors of Brahmins.³ But, later on, sacerdotal functions became the sole monopoly

2. Barth, M.A. : Indian Antiquaries, Vol.III, 1874, p.330.

3. Chatterjee, M.M. : Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, New Series, Vol.26, p.217.

of the Brahmin caste. Manu declared that the Brahmins alone were to teach the Vedas and perform religious rites, and that a Kshatriya was never to usurp a Brahmin's functions.

In the Buddhist literature, the Kshatriyas are given precedence over the Brahmins, indicating that the Kshatriyas were at least no less in social rank than the Brahmins. This was quite natural since political power was concentrated into the hands of the Kshatriyas, and, consequently, the Brahmins depended upon them for political sanction of their social claims and for financial help. Nevertheless, a change in the relative social position of these two castes did come about somehow. It is significant that Buddhism has been regarded as a Kshatriya revolt against the supremacy of the Brahmins. Consequently, the elimination of Buddhists by the Brahmins might be viewed as a part of the struggle of the Brahmin class against the supremacy of the Kshatriyas. The substitution of the Kshatriyas by the Rajputs should have suited the Brahmins because the Rajputs came on the Indian scene later and they were non-Aryans, and, therefore, they had to depend entirely on the Brahmins for the legitimization of their newly acquired political and social status.

The nomenclature 'Vish' (the later-day 'Vaishyas') of the Vedic period was not limited to one caste. It included every body in the Aryan population who had not

been distinguished by religious or priestly position or as the ruling class.⁴ They formed the bulk of the free men amongst the Aryan people. The caste system reduced them gradually to a derogatory social position. According to 'Aitreya Brahman', he (the Vish) is to be lived on by another and to be oppressed at will.⁵ The Bhagvadgita (IX, 32) puts women, Vaishyas, and Sudras in one and the same category of people to whom eligibility to salvation through Bhakti (devotion) is conceded by the Lord.

Originally, the caste system was started on account of colour and racial prejudices against the original inhabitants of India. But gradually it developed into an uncontrolled system. People of all castes were affected by caste conflicts. It became the motto of every group (or sub-caste) to improve its social position, and the chief method to achieve this object was that people of every sub-caste tried to belittle and downgrade other sections (or sub-castes) of their own caste.

Social and Religious Divisions in Mughal Times

Society in the Pre-Mughal and Mughal times was divided into two water-tight compartments on religious basis - namely Hindus and Muslims. There was a severe conflict between them. Fanaticism was the dominant

4. Senart, Emile : Caste in India, Delhi, 1970, p.140.

5. Chalmers : The History and Culture of Indian People, Vol.VII, Bombay, 1965, p.455.

characteristic of the age. The attitude of the Muslim rulers towards non-Muslim subjects was that of hostility, contempt, discrimination and utter injustice.

Even Muslims were divided amongst themselves into several classes. The first was the nobility, or the Mansabdars, who were held in high esteem and who occupied high posts in civil and military departments. Their income was very large. A noble man must have required servants almost by the hundred, if we reckon his household on the scale indicated by Abul Fazal : "Four men for each elephant, two or three for each horse, a crowd in the kitchen, a crowd of tent pitchers, adequate transports, torch-bearers and all the other elements of a respectable establishment".⁶ The second class comprised 'Indian' Muslims, i.e. those aristocratic Hindus who embraced Islam and held high posts in Imperial service. They were small in number, but they were highly paid and spent their earnings most extravagantly.

Both the above categories of noblemen indulged in every kind of pleasure and vice. Their greatest magnificence was in their ladies' quarters, for each of them had a big harem. Alcohol was their common vice. Besides regularly wedded wives, they kept a large number of concubines. These being many, every one of them used all manner of

6. Moreland : India at the Death of Akbar, London, 1920, p. 260.

allurements and caresses, sweet perfumes and ornaments to attract greater attention from their masters. These nobles kept a number of servants, both men and women, at the residence of each concubine. When a noble visited a concubine, a female servant would drive away flies, another would rub his hands and feet, some would dance, some others would play music and yet others would do other jobs. Thus the nobles would spend vast amounts on their household and their pleasures.

The lower class, or the Muslim masses, were poor and downtrodden. They were the workmen. Their children remained naked upto the age of twelve, except for a loin cloth. Tavernier has given a moving picture of this class. He writes, "The country people have no other clothing than a piece of linen to hide their secret parts, being miserably poor, for if their governors know they have anything about them, they seize it either as their right or by force."⁷

The Muslims' attitude towards non-Muslims can be understood clearly from a few incidents which are given below as examples.

Hussain Khan, the Governor of Punjab, who died in 1575, did not allow the Hindus to ride horses. Many Hindus were converted to Islam forcibly. "During the days of famine in the Punjab in 1645-46, when people began to sell their

7. Tavernier, J.B. : Travels in India, London, 1889, p.23.

children, Shah Jahan ordered that the sale price be paid by the state, the Muslim children be restored to their parents and Hindu children brought up as Muslims".⁸ Aurangzeb issued orders to the Governors of all the provinces that they should destroy the schools and temples of the infidels and put an end to their educational activities.⁹ Criminals who embraced Islam were acquitted and they were appointed in government service. The Hindu population was subjected to many kinds of pressures to make them embrace Islam. Under the Mughals the state became a vigorous missionary institution.

The Hindus were hopelessly divided amongst themselves, on the basis of castes. There was a regular hierarchy of castes under this system - higher castes and lower castes. People belonging to one caste did not mix up and dine with the people belonging to another caste. The people belonging to the Sudra caste were regarded as untouchable and they were obliged to lead an extremely miserable life-worse than that of animals. It was considered a sacrilege if a Sudra heard a Vedic hymn.

It has been aptly said that political lawlessness, social confusion, religious and moral degradation and spiritual slavery were the order of the day.

8. Khafikhan, Muntkhab-ul-Lubab, Vols.I and II, Calcutta, 1869, p.626.

9. Muhammad Mustad Khan, Ma'asirat-e-Alamgiri, Punjab State Archives, No.M/718, p.81.

Ritualism in Society

Hindu society was guided by religious leaders who worshipped various gods and goddesses and laid great stress on rituals and superstitions. Society was morally degraded by these priests and religious men. The common people were exploited in the name of religion which had degenerated into mere forms and ceremonies.

In ancient times the priestly class encouraged ritualism and went to the extent of instilling fear among the people by saying that if such and such ceremony was not performed it would bring the wrath of God on their heads and they would be thrown into hell for ever. Consequently, the hold of priests over the masses became absolute. In the primitive society priests were supposed to possess certain miraculous powers. They associated purification of soul with sacrifices. People were asked to make sacrifices to escape from the curse of God. Priests claimed the power to bring fortune to the people. They also claimed that they could bring rains for good crops, ward off natural calamities and even help defeat the enemy. Thus, the ancient man's religion was based on occult power and magic, and rituals were part of it.

Before the birth of Guru Nanak, besides the Brahmins and Mullas, several hundred Yogis, Fakirs and Siddhas wandered from place to place wearing typical garbs denoting

their particular class or order. They roamed from one end of the country to the other. They smeared their bodies with ashes and painted their foreheads with various designs and marks. They preached asceticism and mortification of the flesh which were supposed to endow the practitioners with miraculous powers. When Guru Nanak was born, the people were ignorant, backward and deeply steeped in superstitions. . Huge sums were spent on ceremonies, even if a person could not afford their cost. People led a life of blind conventionalism. Hypocrisy and mammon-worship were the order of the day. The spirit of both Islam and Hinduism found expression in a number of meaningless formalities and extraneous observances. Formalities reigned supreme.¹⁰

"The popular religion about the time of Nanak's birth was confined to peculiar forms of eating and drinking, peculiar ways of bathing and painting the forehead, mechanical observances, the worship of idols (wherever they were permitted to exist), and pilgrimage to sacred places (wherever they were allowed). The observance of certain ceremonies like the marital and funeral rites, obedience to the mandates of the Brahmins and lavishing gifts on them constituted almost the whole of Hinduism as it was then current among the masses."¹¹

10. Johar, Surinder Singh : Hand book of Sikhism, Vivek Publishing Company, Delhi, 1977, p.74.

11. Gupta, H.R. : Glorious History of Sikhism, p.13.

Guru Nanak condemned these practices and started preaching the Name of God. "Rituals and symbols may be a stepping stone for the uninitiated into the realm of God, but, for the holy and the emancipated, these are irrelevancies, if not actual hinderances, to identify himself with the supreme spirit which pervades all that is and yet does not seem", says Guru Arjan.

"I neither fast on auspicious days like the Hindus, nor for the whole month like the Muslims. I serve Him alone who saves me in the end. The God of the Hindus is no different for me from the God of the Muslims, for I have made passes with both through the One. I neither perform Hajj, nor go on a pilgrimage, neither worship in one particular way nor in another, for I bow down within my heart to the one formless God and not another. I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim and my body and soul I deem to be a blessing of the God of both".¹²

At a very early stage in his life, Guru Nanak, when told to wear the sacred thread by the family priest, told him, "Compassion the cotton, contentment the thread, of continence the knot, and of truth the twist. This indeed

12. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Bhairo, p.1136, Vol.4, p.1084.

is the sacred thread of the soul. O Brahmin, put it on (me), if you have one such with you. For it breaks not, nor is it soiled, nor burnt, not wasted." Nanak further said to the people, with regard to the sacred thread :

"Blessed are those, Nanak, who wear it on their necks. For four kauris is the thread bought, and (the twice-born) wears it in the sanctified square and wisdom is whispered into his ears and the Brahmin becomes his Guru.

But when the man dies, the thread is burnt, and bereft of it man goes into the yond."¹³

In Guru Nanak's view, the Qazi, the Brahmin and the Yogi showed a great gulf between their profession and conduct. They failed to perform their functions in accordance with the positions assumed by them. Nanak commented on these three classes of religious leaders in the following words :

"Then everyone proclaims : 'It is true,
it is true',
The Qazi utters falsehood and so eats dirt,
The Brahmin slays life and then bathes
(at the holy places),
The blind yogi knows not the way,
And so all the three are laid waste."¹⁴

13. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.471, Vol.2, p.464.

14. Ibid., Rag Dhanasri, p.662, Vol.3, p.637.

Guru Nanak emphasised that one who discarded evil and cultivated good qualities was the real trader :

"He alone is wise, who purges his mind (of evil),
He alone is Muslim who scrubs his mind clean,
He alone is a man of knowledge who is also wise,
And who is tempered with the mercy of the Lord".¹⁵

It is not only the conventional and external aspects of Hinduism that invited Guru Nanak's criticism. It was also directed against the worship of many gods. An uncompromising monotheist, he asks Hindus a direct question :

"The gods and goddesses are worshipped,
O Brothers! What ought we beg and what
can they give?
The stone bathed in water, O Brother,
Sinks down in it".¹⁶

Guru Nanak further says about religious practitioners :
"Salvation comes through grace and mediation of the True One who is in all. Some people live in woods and feed themselves upon roots, and some wear ochre robes and are acclaimed as yogis and sanyasis. But within them burns the desire for delicacies and fine raiments".¹⁷ Their life is false.

15. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Dhanasri, p.662, Vol.3, p.637.

16. Ibid., Rag Sorath, p.637, Vol.2, P.614.

17. Ibid., Rag Majh, p.140, Vol.1, p.131.

These activities may not lead to salvation. Truth is the only way for true life. In this context Guru Nanak says :

"In his true mind abides the true word,
And he remains detached, even when attached.
Nanak! they, who serve their true guru,
They rise from desire to desirelessness".¹⁸

Equality of Man :

Every individual who accepted the path of Sikhism was equal before the Guru. All the followers were equal to one another. Class and caste distinctions were declared by the Guru as nonsense. All men are born equal, for all originate from the same source - the light of God - and therefore, there are no high or low men by birth. The one God is manifest in all beings. In fact, people belonging to low castes were respected more by the Sikh Gurus. "One who serves the higher castes is of great merit. But one who serves those of humble castes may indeed wear shoes made from the skin of my body".¹⁹

Equality of man was merely a dream in those days. Sikhism created a classless society. It was similar to the modern type of socialist society where all are treated as equals.

18. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Majh, p.140, Vol.I, p.131.

19. Ibid., Rag Parbhati, p.1330, Vol.4, p.1266.

Sikh Gurus started some new social institutions to remove the practice of untouchability, to strengthen belief in one God and to inculcate the spirit of equality and brotherhood amongst all human beings.

New Institutions created by the Gurus :

For giving a practical shape to the ideas stated above and to establish an equalitarian society, the following institutions were set up by the Sikh Gurus :

1. Sangat (congregations) : It was an association of the pious Sikhs. The Sikh places of worship were thrown open to men of all castes and creeds without any distinction. It was made compulsory for all the Sikhs to visit the gurudwaras.
2. Langar (Community-kitchens) : These kitchens were financed out of the offerings made by the Sikhs. It was the command of the Gurus that whosoever came to have 'darshan' of the Guru must first take his meal at the free kitchen, called the Langar. Even the Mughal emperors Humayun and Akbar took their meals at the langar, when they paid visits to the Gurus.
3. Initiation : Guru Gobind Singh introduced a new system of initiating the non-Sikhs into the Sikh faith. He took water, mixed sugar crystals in it, stirred it with a double-edged sword (Khanda) and repeated over it sacred verses of

the 'Bani'. This was called 'Amrit'. This was given to the initiates, who drank it from the same container.

Gurus on God and Religions

The Gurus denounced the injustice perpetrated by the caste system. The Brahminical ritualism was the covering cloak for this system. He said, "Be not proud of thy caste. For, he alone is a Brahmin who knows Brahma, the only God. O unwise one! be not proud of thy caste. It is from God's sperm that every one is born. Yea, from the same clay the great Potter makes vessels of all kinds."²⁰

The Sikh Gurus practised deep humility which emanated from their all-embracing love for mankind. They identified themselves with the lowest of the low and the humblest of the humble.

Sikh Gurus declared that caste and power were of no account. When man is reborn in the world, all his past belongings and his previous caste are changed.

Sikhism condemns the pride of superior castes :

"Vain is the pride of caste,
 Vain the pride of glory.
 The Lord alone gives shade to all;
 He, who of himself feigns glory (is vain)
 For only if the Lord approves of him,
 is he approved".²¹

20. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Bhairo, p.1128, Vol.4, p.1077.

21. Ibid, Rag Sri, p.83, Vol.I, p.75.

All the universe is created by God. So if a person declaring himself of high caste, forgets God and hates humanity, he in fact is of a low caste. Gurbani says :

"He who forgets Him is indeed a
low caste wretch,
Without the Lord's name, Nanak,
One is a low worm".²²

Sikh Gurus said that belonging to a high or a low caste was totally irrelevant to the attainment of salvation. Only humility, love and devotion to God could lead to emancipation :

Some wear skins, others take to the begging bowl,
others to the Yogi's staff, others to a deer skin,
While some only raise the tuft of hair
and wear the sacred thread and tuck up the
loin cloth (Brahmin way).

O Lord, thou art my master,
I am player of many parts,
Says Nanak, O Lord, how can (my garb)
determine my caste?²³

22. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p. 349, Vol. 2, p. 339.

23. Ibid, Rag Asa, p.359, Vol. 2, p.349.

For salvation Sikh Gurus depend upon God's name and on the company of saints and high souls :

In the society of the holy, I am imbued
with the Lord's name
And I win victory in the great
battle-field (of life).
Says Nanak : seeking the Lord's refuge,
I am slain not again by the Yama.²⁴

Nanak stresses that those persons who remember the name of the Lord are highly respected in society :

"They, who are brimful with the Lord's love,
Lose not a particle of it.
If Nanak be the dust of their feet,
Then he, the ignorant one,
would also be fulfilled".²⁵

Sikhism stresses that men who act on the words of the Guru and give up the pride of caste, colour and tribe - they alone enjoy the true love of the Lord. His love is compared with the love of the bride for her spouse :

"My loved lord is near at hand, not far;
Yea, ever since my mind was pleased

24. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.461, Vol.2, p.455.

25. Ibid, Rag Gauri, p.156, Vol.I, p.149.

with the Guru's word, I attained to my God,
the mainstay of my vital breath.

This is how the bride meets with her spouse
and is beloved of him;

Yea, reflecting on the Guru's word,
I am rid of the sense of my colour,
caste and tribe."²⁶

Macauliffe has referred to the composition of Guru Gobind Singh called 'Akalustat' as below to show that Sikh Gurus believed in equality of men in the eyes of God and that Hinduism and Islam were identical :

"Karta (the creator) and Karim (the beneficent) are the same; Razak (the provider) and Rahim (the merciful) are the same; let no man even by mistake suppose that there is difference between them.

"Worship the one God who is the one divine Guru for all. Know that His form is one, and He is the one light diffused in all.

"The temple and the mosque are the same, the Hindu worship and the Musalman prayers are

26. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sarang, p.1198, Vol.4, p.1148.

the same. All men are the same. It is an error to regard them as different. Musalmans and Hindus only wear their customary dress, and that is the only difference between them.

"All men have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body, the same build. All are compounds of earth, air, fire and water.

"Allah and Abhekh are the same, the Puranas and the Quran are the same, they are all alike, it is the one God who created all."²⁷

The Sikh Gurus regarded the whole human race as one and they emphasised that an individual was to be respected not because he belonged to any particular class or creed but because he was a human being.

The Indian society which was facing tyranny and injustice under the alien rule was exhorted by the Sikh Gurus to lead a fearless life and oppose tyranny and injustice. The aim of the new society created by them was to combat and destroy unrighteousness and tyranny. Sikhism created fearlessness and religious zeal which resulted in shining and noble deeds of heroism. At the root of their glory lie such virtues as faith in one God, tolerance,

27. Guru Gobind Singh : Akal Ustat, quoted by Macauliffe, in his Sikh Religion, Vol.5, Oxford, 1909, p.275.

humility and a spirit of service. This new society was created as a classless society and it was created on the principle of the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man. Every individual in this society is expected to be respected as a member of humanity and not because one belongs to a high caste or noble lineage or any higher worldly order, class or creed.

CHAPTER III

EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

Social Status of Women in Ancient Times :

In the middle ages women were considered an inferior section of society. This was the result of the caste-system. Polygamy combined with rigidities of the Varna (caste) system* reduced the status of woman to that of a slave in society. The social relation of man and woman is permanent and enduring, and it provides the moral basis of social relations at large. In order to appreciate the contribution of Sikh Gurus to the cause of the upliftment of women in India, it is necessary to examine the general condition of women in the country before the birth of Guru Nanak and even during his early days.

The position of woman in society had not always been the same. While at times she was accorded a very high status, there had also been periods when, due to certain factors, she was relegated to an inferior position. However, it is now believed that in the epic period women did not suffer from any social disabilities.

*Marriages in ancient India were strictly confined to one's caste only. In this system a highly cultured and beautiful woman would sometimes be married to an ugly and uncultured man in her caste in case a suitable match was not available. But she could in no case be married out of her caste. This system degraded the value of woman in society.

In the Rig Veda husband and wife are described as taking equal part in the sacrificial rites. "The 'dampati' (the husband and the wife) together prepare and offer the adoration to God."¹

One may also find that during the Vedic period the position of women was generally not unequal to that of men. They had similar education as men had, and they took part in philosophical debates with men. This shows that men and women enjoyed equal status in the social life of the early Aryan period.²

In 'Smrities', however, there are clearly conflicting commands. At one place in the Manusmriti, it is laid down that "women are to be honoured and adored by fathers, brothers, husbands and also brothers-in-law. Where women are honoured, gods reside; but where they are not honoured, all religious rites are of no avail. "But at another place in the same Smriti a lower status has been accorded to women. Many of the remarks in this Smriti are directed towards depriving women of the right of worship and of performing other religious rites. At one place the Manusmriti says, "Yagya by a woman displeases gods",³

1. Macdonell, A.A. : Rigveda (translated), London, 1922, VIII, 315, also X, 186, 277.

2. Valvalkar, P.H.: Hindu Social Institutions, p.172.

3. The Ordinance of Manu (Translated by Burnell, A.C.) New Delhi, 1971, pp.55 and 59.

and "The woman who burns oblation will sink into hell."⁴

We also find that, in the case of women, certain sanctifying rituals have to be performed without the recitation of sacred texts (unlike in the case of men). Her service to her husband is considered equal to service to the Guru and the daily household duties are equalled with the daily liturgy.⁵

The ideals of asceticism and renunciation (sanyas) also had their impact on the status of women. The inherent attraction of the female was considered to be a temptation, something against which the 'sanyasi' must guard himself. Woman was called a seducer. "For that reason the wise never remain unguarded in the company of females, as women can lead astray not only the unwise and the ignorant but even the learned, and can make them a slave of lust and anger."⁶

It is for this reason that the same Smriti advised that "One should not sit in a lonely place with even one's own mother, sister or daughter for the senses are powerful and they can master even a learned man".⁷

4. The Ordinance of Manu (Translated by Burnell, A.C.)
New Delhi, 1971, p.206.

5. Ibid., pp.26-27.

6. Ibid., p.284.

7. Ibid., p.215. . . .

Female Infanticide :

The practice of destroying female babies had been followed in India (as in several other countries) since early times. This practice was rampant in pre-Mughal and Mughal times and, indeed, in the British times upto the middle of the nineteenth century when it was abolished and strictly banned by the Britishers.

A scholar holds that "The necessity of providing a handsome dowry for the daughter contributed to female infanticide in China and India." The cause of female infanticide is also traced to the ancestor cult. According to the same scholar, "the ancestral culture of Greece, Rome, India and China could be transmitted only to the males and this also resulted in the destruction of female infants."⁸

The heinous crime of female infanticide is not peculiarly Indian in its origin, but here female-infanticide was indirectly encouraged by the attitude of religious authorities towards the fair sex. They deplored the birth of a daughter, and regarded her as a source of misery. The abnormal climate of status-consciousness created by the caste system further

8. Hocart, A.M. : Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences,
New York, 1953, pp.27-28.

aggravated this evil. Despite the severe anti-infanticide law enacted by the British Government in India in 1829, as late as 1869, in 22 villages of Rajputana there were only thirty-three girls as against 284 boys."⁹

It is in the context of the practice of female infanticide in India that the great reform ushered in by the Sikh Gurus comes in.

This immoral practice has been severely condemned in Sikhism and various steps have been envisaged for its eradication. In order to overcome the difficulty in terms of the requirement of dowry to be offered by the bride's father, it is laid down in Sikhism that "No dowry should be accepted from the bride's parents".¹⁰ Help from society is required to be offered to the parents of a girl, if he is facing difficulty in finding a match for his daughter. It is laid down that "If there is some difficulty in some one's marriage then Sikhs ought to make efforts and take pains to arrange a match in their own family or persuade others for the same".¹¹ The same compiler advises against female infanticide.

Because many superstition are at the root of female infanticide, imperatives are found in Sikhism against

9. Max Webber : The Religion of India, Glencoe, 1960, p.42.

10. Sikh Rahit Maryada : S.G.F.C., Amritsar, 1956, p.32.

11. Daya Singh : Rahitnama, Lahore, p.15.

having any superstitions or consulting astrologers or soothsayers.¹²

It is further enjoined that "female infanticide should not be practised, and not only social relations with persons indulging in it should be broken off, but such persons are to be excommunicated from Sikh Society permanently, and those having any social relations with them are to be punished."¹³ The punishment in Sikhism for this evil is thus severe and extensive. Moreover, as we have seen, apart from denouncing female infanticide, all the three possible causes leading to this heinous practice, namely, the economic disadvantage, the difficulty in finding a match, and superstitions are sought to be effectively removed. In view of the fact that the Sikh Gurus did not have political power to translate their moral disapproval of female infanticide into legislation and make this practice unlawful, remedy had to be sought in terms of social boycott.

The practice of 'Sati'

The practice of 'Sati' had been widely prevalent in India from early times. The term sati means burning of women alongwith the dead bodies of their husbands. Some

12. Sikh Rahit Maryada, op.cit., p.28.

13. Ibid., p.23.

similar customs have prevailed in other countries of the world also. The death of a king or a chief was followed by the immolation, either voluntary or forcible, of his wives, concubines, attendants and servants, so that they might keep company with their deceased lord in the other world and serve him there in the same way as on the earth.

In the case of India, towards the close of the ancient period, some scriptural authority was appropriated to back the contention that self-immolation of a woman on the funeral pyre of her dead husband was the only course that a virtuous woman could follow. It was further asserted that "Not only would such a woman enjoy eternal bliss in heaven alongwith her husband, but her action would expiate the sins of three preceding generations of her husband's family - both on the side of his father and mother." Thus, both hope and encouragement were used in order to induce women to immolate themselves.

The practice of Sati seems to be very old. A detailed account of some cases of Sati that occurred in India in the fourth century B.C. have been left by some Greek writers.

It may be relevant to add here that while self-immolation by widows was extolled in some ancient scriptures, it was not declared to be obligatory and

compulsory. We find the provision that a virtuous wife, who constantly remains chaste after the death of her husband, reaches heaven.

The custom of Sati has been totally rejected in Sikhism. Guru Amardas declares that "The Sati is one who lives contented and embellishes herself with good conduct and serves her lord with all her heart"¹⁴ and that the virtues of a housewife are to be judged in terms of her role in the family, and not in terms of self-immolation. Guru Amardas says :

"The widows burn themselves on the pyre of their lords,
 But if they love their spouses well, they'd suffer the pangs of separation even otherwise.
 Nanak! She who loves not her spouse, why burns she herself in fire?
 For be he alive or dead, she owns him not."¹⁵

Widow re-marriage- a taboo :

The practical solution of the problem of widows was to permit them to remarry — just as in the case of widowers. The widow should have the right to remarry if she wants to do so. Thus, apart from expressing religious

14. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Suhi, p. 787, Vol.3, p.747.

15. Ibid., Rag Suhi, p.787, Vol.3, p.747.

and moral disapproval of the practice of Sati, practical measures, such as allowing a widow to remarry, were also taken in Sikhism to ensure a complete eradication of this evil.

Impurity of Women :

A woman was considered to have become impure and 'untouchable' when she gave birth to a child. If the idea of impurity is admitted in the case of a woman in confinement, then it has to be admitted that there is impurity in everything. In this context, Nanak says :

"If impurity attaches (to life's birth), then all,
all are impure,

In the cow-dung and the wood too is the life of worms,
Many are the grains of food and not one is without
life.

And, is not water life, that brings all to life?

How can then we believe in life's impurity,

When impurity is in our very bread.

Nanak ! Impurity goes not, save by being wise".¹⁶

Further, Guru Nanak has emphasised that impurity lies in bad or immoral deeds :

16. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p. 472, Vol.2, p.466.

"The mind's impurity is covetousness, the
tongue's impurity is falsehood,
The ear's impurity is to hear and carry tales
Nanak! even the purest of men, thus bound, go to
the city of the dead".¹⁷

Women in Sikhism

In fact, Guru Nanak was one of the greatest emancipators of women in this country and the best guide for family life. Among Sikhs, married life is considered to be very sacred. Deliberate bachelorhood and prolonged virginity are looked upon as social evils. Extra-marital relations are strictly prohibited, and are considered as sins. Life of celibacy is regarded as unnatural.¹⁸

Truthfulness^{and}/fidelity are the necessary qualities of a woman. The woman of merit scatters merit and without merit one writhes in distress, and, further, if she wants to seek her lord, that would not be met through falsehood.¹⁹

Man is incomplete without woman. Our birth is from woman and our body is shaped in her womb. Again, we wed women, and the family institution is unthinkable without women. The human race will end without woman.

17. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.472, Vol.2, p.466.

18. Gill, P.S. Heritage of Sikh Culture, op.cit., p.99.

19. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.17, Vol. I, p.21.

"Nanak! without the woman is the one true Lord alone.
 The fortunate and gracious, pearl-like mouth that
 utters the Lord's praise,
 Is luminescent, Nanak,
 And it sparkles in the true court".²⁰

Bovel follows Guru Nanak when he says that next to God, we are indebted to woman - first for life itself and then for making it worth living. Lamartine also says that there is woman at the beginning of all great things.

Guru Nanak was the first person in India who revolted against the injustice done to women in Hindu society since times immemorial. Under his teachings Indian women broke the shackles of slavery. Guru Nanak fought for their liberation in the sixteenth century, whereas the emancipation movement started in Europe much later - in the 19th century. He declared that she must be respected because she is the source of man's physical existence and the base of the social life. Man is attached to the world through her.

The half portion of humanity, that is women, was suppressed by the dominating males and the bad religious customs and beliefs of society. Sikhism not only liberated the female section from these customs but opened the path

20. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.473, Vol.2, p.467.

of progress for them — on equal footing with the males. Sikhism stressed that all human beings were born equal, and were free, without any distinction of sex. All have equal dignity and equal right in the eyes of God. Women are as much endowed with reason and conscience as men are. They should, therefore, be respected as much as men are.

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CHAPTER - IV

Heroism in Individuals and Society

According to Sikhism, the country belongs to the people. Kings are appointed to rule, but they have no right to indulge in tyranny. On the other hand, it is a sin for people to bear tyranny patiently. If the king is doing wrong, the people must rise in revolt. Force is essential to strengthen political liberty, and without political liberty, religious, cultural, intellectual, social and economic freedoms cannot be maintained. With this objective in view, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, created a new society named 'Khalsa'. It is believed that the Guru composed his famous composition Vachitar Natak when he was about to announce the creation of the Khalsa. He has explained his mission in it with his usual clarity. He has also explained the object which he desired to achieve, as also the means by which that mission was to be fulfilled.

"You I adopt as my own son.

Appoint you to propagate

The true religion. Go, promote it,

and turn men from the ways of sin."¹

1. Guru Gobind Singh, Unique Drama - Vachitar Natak
(Trans. by Sant Singh Sekhon), Chandigarh, 1968, p.40.

The Guru categorically said that he was born to spread the true religion and to uproot the tyrants. He does not arrogate to himself the role of the Lord — contrary to most other religious teachers who have been described by their followers as 'messengers' or 'incarnations' of God. "Those who call me the Lord Supreme shall fall in the burning pit of hell. Regard me as a slave of the Lord. Of this, there be no doubt at all"². Further, the Guru has said that he came into this world to witness the show of mankind which is going on on this earth. "I am a slave of the Lord Supreme, come in this world to watch the show. As the Lord instructs me, I will say, Fear of no one can silence me."³

The Guru thus came into this world to fulfil a mission. On account of the tyrannical policy of the Mughals, the Guru found that all the people of India were in sad plight, and corruption, ignorance and superstitions were very common in society. The execution of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, by Aurangzoh, generated in his mind a sad feeling about the cruelty of the Mughal emperor. The force of circumstances in which he was moving led him to liberate the society. He considered himself a man who could lead the society in that dark moment.

2. Guru Gobind Singh : Unique Drama (Vachitar Natak), op. cit., p. 41.

3. Ibid., p.41.

Guru Gobind Singh decided to evolve a new action for the people. He decided to encourage the people to fight against the tyranny of the rulers. He wanted to put spirit into dead souls so that they could sacrifice their lives for the cause of 'dharma'. The people at that time were too mild by nature and too much afraid of the rulers. They were attached strongly with their religion, but they lacked the feelings of nationalism. They were contented in their desires and were moving in limited spheres of life. The Guru wanted to overcome their lack of aspirations and physical exertion. He wanted to make nationalism their religion. The Guru advocated that the sword was necessary for meeting oppression and for defending their rights. He preached that the state had no right to interfere with the basic human rights of individuals. He stood on the strength of his sword and relied on the will of God. He changed the psychology of the people and ordained that mere prayers, humility and submission were outdated methods, and these should be replaced by weapons to ensure the protection of human rights of individuals in society. He considered the worship of the weapons more important than even the worship of God. He proclaimed that the sword was God and God was the sword. He said :

"I bow before the holy sword with love and devotion.

Oh God, assist me finish this task.
 Thou art the conqueror of countries, the
 destroyer of the forces of the wicked
 in the battle-field.
 Thou greatly admirest the brave.
 I bow before the arrow and the musket.
 I bow before the sword, spotless, fearless
 and unbreakable.
 I bow before the arrow and the canon
 which destroy the enemy.
 I bow before the sword and the
 rapier which destroy the evil."⁴

The Guru sent letters to his Sikhs throughout the country to come to Anandpur for the festival of Baisakhi. Sikhs were exhorted to come in large numbers. It was a Hukamnama for them. The Sikhs started coming like swarms of locusts. It was the year 1699. A day before the Baisakhi, a large number of men, women and children collected at Anandpur. A vast shamiana was pitched and decorated with buntings. Hymns from the sacred Granth were recited in the morning and a divine atmosphere was created. The gathering was estimated

4. Guru Gobind Singh : Unique Drama (Vachitar Natak),
 op. cit., p. 43.

to be about eighty thousand strong. The Guru was present in the pandal and listened attentively to the chanting of 'Asa-di-Var'. He sat motionless for some time and then stood up before the people. His eyes were red and shone like the rays of the sun. He took out his sword from the sheath. Flashing the naked sword in his hand, he thundered like a lion : My devoted Sikhs! This goddess of power clamours for the head of a brave Sikh. Is there anyone in this huge gathering ready to sacrifice his dear life at its call?

The people were puzzled. They thought there was something wrong with the Guru. There was complete silence and nobody stirred. The Guru again asked for a head in a louder voice. After a while, Daya Ram, one of his followers, stood up and stepped forward. The Guru took him by the hand into a tent where he had a goat provided before - hand. He seated the heroic Daya in the tent, and slaying the goat with his own hand, came out with the blood dripping from his sword. He appealed for another head, brandishing the blood-red sword in the air. One by one four other followers came forward, making a total of five. The Guru took the four, one by one, into the tent and repeated the drama every time.

Harbans Singh has narrated further : "After a while, Guru Gobind Singh led the five Sikhs back from the tent

into which they had been taken one by one. In that tent, erected on a hillock and confidentially guarded, he had kept suits of dresses especially made. Decked in saffron-coloured, gorgeous raiment, topped over with neatly tied turbans similarly dyed, the glorious five walked deferentially behind their master, overwhelmed with thankfulness. The master was himself attired in the same manner as his chosen disciples. The assembly, considerably stunned and still in shocked muteness, was further puzzled to see those whom they had thought to have been sacrificed to the Guru's whim return in flesh and blood."⁵

✓ Of the five who had offered their heads, one belonged to the Khatri caste, while all the others were from lower castes. But the Guru called them "Panj Pyaras" or the "five beloveds" and baptised them and introduced the method of initiating people into his brotherhood. Guru Gobind Singh said, "I have created the Khalsa in my own image." The Khalsa was, thus, his embodiment, his alterego.

He stood with folded hands before the five initiated Sikhs and requested them to prepare the 'Amrit', as he had done, and further requested them to baptize him into their brotherhood. He explained to them that the Order of the Khalsa had been created under the direct command

5. Harbans Singh : Guru Gobind Singh, Chandigarh, 1966, p.71.

of Akal (God). He told them that there was no difference between them and himself.

The Guru further declared : You all embrace one creed and adopt the same principles of religion and obliterate all caste differences. No one should deem himself superior to others and should mix freely with one another.

"This new Khalsa society is your religion. Love your nation rather than follow the old scriptures. Follow the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. All the people belonging to different castes can receive my baptism. Eat in the same vessel and have no contempt for one another."

✓ After initiation, the Guru declared : "All those who had taken Amrit belonged to a new class of the Kshatriyas. To help and serve the weak, the needy and the oppressed was to be their sacred duty. They were to practise the use of arms. They were to be 'Sant-Sipahis' 'Saint soldiers', worshipping one God, as also the sword. He erased their previous castes and told them that they all belonged to one family. He asked them to live by the sweat of their brow. They were to bow their heads only to one Almighty God and not to worship stones, idols, tombs, gods or goddesses."⁶

6. Jagjit Singh : Guru Gobind Singh, Bombay, 1967, p.71.

The Guru aimed at creating a compact brotherhood in faith, which was also to be a brotherhood in arms. The Guru's reliance, as we have seen, was on the sword, and he sought to exalt military prowess in all possible ways. "He transformed his Sikhs into 'Singhas, (lions) or warriors, and exhorted them to regard the sword as their principal stay in this world. The sword became an object of worship for the Sikhs, God himself being given the name of 'All Steel'."⁷

For several days, Anandpur, 'the city of eternal bliss', presented a unique sight. A new nation of saint-soldiers had arisen. The weakness of spirit and heart had vanished. In every heart now throbbed a new longing to be free and to make others free. The saint-soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh were to desire neither women nor gold. They were also forbidden from spreading their religion with the sword. The sword was to be lifted in defence of their own and others' faith, honour and life. They were to die for others, with the name of God on their lips and swords in their hands, and with their faces (and not backs) toward the enemy.

The new ideas preached by Guru Gobind Singh influenced the lives and conduct of thousands of

7. Banerjee I.B. : Evolution of the Khalsa, Vol.II, op.cit.
pp. 116-117.

politically backward people. The people of different castes who had been socially disinherited were welded into a strong brotherhood and were pledged to the service of mankind. Indeed, it was a living and vivid faith in the gospel of equality of all men.

Hari Ram Gupta, in his book History of Sikhs, says that the formation of the Khalsa was a step of the greatest significance in the history of the Sikhs, because it united them in a compact body. It served the most useful purpose of giving the Sikhs an ideal of unity and power, and kept them bound together by the common tie of faith in the teeth of the severest persecution. It made them a disciplined body. They came to believe that every sacrifice made for the Panth was service rendered to the Guru. This singleness of purpose and sense of unity made them the strongest military body of the day and prepared the way for the establishment of a political power.⁸

Guru Gobind Singh says in praise of the Khalsa :

I won my battles owing to them;
 with their aid practised charity.
 By them I have been saved from ill,
 and with their aid my stores are filled.
 My education I owe to them,
 and with their help my foes were killed.

8. Gupta, Hari Ram : History of Sikhs, Lahore, 1939, p.56.

I am what I am - thanks to them,
 otherwise go millions of beggars like me.

And them alone I would like to serve,
 to serve none else would make me glad.
 Charity is good if given to them,
 to none else seems it right to me.
 Gifts made to them bear fruit both here
 and there; all else is vanity.
 All in my house is meant for them -
 My mind, my body, ay, even my head.⁹

Guru Gobind Singh realised that if his followers were to be saved from extinction, they had not only to be taught the use of arms but also convinced of the morality of the use of force. Even the concept of God became a militant one. As has already been pointed out, Steel was declared to be the symbol of God. Armed with this concept, Guru Gobind Singh set about training the sparrow to fight the hawk and one man to fight a legion.

The first thing the Guru did was to change the psychology of the people. This he did through introducing a new form of baptism and by asking his followers to

9. Guru Gobind Singh : Unique Drama - Vachitar Natak,
 op.cit., p.131.

wear the five symbols.

Guru Gobind Singh, after inaugurating the Khalsa brotherhood, created a global fraternity of knights of honour, fully awakened to a new inspired life, blending the high courage of a soldier with the enthusiasm of a fully enlightened devotee. He rekindled the dead soul of India with the spark of life by a flash of his sword. Before he physically left this planet (at Nander - Deccan), he declared the holy scripture - the Granth - as the spiritual guide of the Sikhs for the future. During his last moments, he addressed the congregation assembled round him in the following words :

"I give you now these divine songs. The incorporated sacred hymns will be the voice of the Guru to his disciples. The divine word, Gurbani, is the Guru and now I name this embodiment of the word, as Guru Granth Sahib.¹⁰

The object that the Guru had set before himself was to infuse a new life into the dead bones of the Hindus, to make them forget their differences, and present a united front against the tyranny and persecution to which they were being subjected by the Mughal rulers - in one word, to make once more a living nation of them and enable them to regain their lost independence.¹¹

10. Gupta, Hari Ram : Glorious History of Sikhism, p.105.

11. Cunningham, J.D. : History of Sikhs, op.cit., p.8.

The Khalsa signified that nationalism was a very essential constituent of Sikhism. The last apostle of the Sikhs effectively roused the dormant energies of a vanquished people and filled them with a lofty desire to attain social freedom and national entity. All the Hindus, without distinction of caste and creed, became one. The Guru said that the four castes of the Hindus - the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Sudras - would be like 'Pan' (the betel-leaf), 'Chuna' (lime), 'Supari' (betel-nut) and 'Kattha'. They would all be of one colour when well chewed.¹² Non-violence practised by some of the predecessors of Guru Gobind Singh was given up, and, instead, the sword was placed into the hands of his followers. The followers of the Guru fought under his command as many as fourteen battles, in twelve of which they were distinctly victorious against the large Mughal forces. The spirit of self-confidence was thus created amongst the Hindus. It is the result of the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh that today "Sikhs are considered to be one of the best martial races of the world. They have earned an international reputation for being the best soldiers, by the display of their courage, bravery, valour, gallantry, hardihood and self-confidence in the two World Wars of this century."¹³

12. Gill, P.S. : History of the Sikh Nation, op.cit., p.223.

13. Ibid., p.120.

Hindu society had suffered politically for lack of martial spirit. It needed infusion of a new spirit, and this was provided by Guru Gobind Singh. The skeleton of the Khalsa society was supplied by Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh made its contours clear by placing the needed emphasis on each aspect. There were no doubts left as to the revolutionary structure of the new society, which Sikhism stood for. Thus, Guru Gobind Singh regenerated the old decadent society and released a dynamic force into the arena of history.

It must also be added here that the aim of the tenth Guru was not to establish a kingdom for himself nor had he any lust for gold. He wanted to maintain the continuity of the Sikh religion and to defend it from the onslaughts of an alien and tyrannical rule, and wanted all the people to enjoy freedom of conscience and belief and to lead a free and honourable life on the basis of equality.

CHAPTER V

INDIVIDUAL LIFE IN SOCIETY

Life of Householder preferred :

Every Sikh Guru led a householder's life. The Sikh Gurus held that 'Girhasth Ashram' was a better way of life. Sikhism condemned the life of asceticism. A householder is the pivot of society and he gets opportunities for social, mental and spiritual growth. A householder makes good use of worldly things for the members of the society. He never depends upon others for his livelihood. He supports the members of his family and provides for all their necessities. The householder who gives in charity whatever he can afford is as pure as the water of the Ganges. Even an ascetic has to knock at the doors of householders for food and clothing. In this context Guru Nanak says :

"He alone is a householder who disciplines his sense-desires and begs from God contemplation, austerity and self-control and gives in charity all he can. Yea, such a householder is pure like Ganga's water".¹

Guru Nanak was himself a married man and he never spoke of married life in contemptuous or condemnatory

1. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Ramkali, p.952, Vol.3, p.909.

terms. The transitory character of all earthly pleasures and possessions and the hollowness of all earthly love and friendship had been so constantly upheld by Hindu religion that an active zeal for worldly pursuits was almost absent from Hindu society. Guru Nanak exhorted the people to live in society. An important teaching of Sikhism is that men must live in the world and society, and must participate in its activities. Man is not to become a recluse and a burden on others.

"Siri Chand, son of Guru Nanak, had formed a separate sect, called Udasis. But Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, authoritatively declared that the active and domestic Sikhs are wholly separate from the passive and recluse Udasis. He thus preserved the infant faith from disappearing as one of the many sects that had arisen and vanished within the fold of Hinduism."²

✓ Sikh society is necessarily a society of workers who have to perform a dual duty - firstly, to work for the subsistence of their bodies, and secondly to work for their spiritual advancement. As regards their physical subsistence, they have to do either manual or mental labour as healthy constituents of society, and for their spirit they have to work under the guidance of the true Guru.

2. Gill, P.S. : History of Sikh Nation, op.cit., p. 101.

Here is a hymn from Guru Granth Sahib in support of the dual role of householders :

"When one cherishes the (Lord's) Truth,
 one's mind is illumined.
 And then one remains detached in the midst
 of attachments.
 Such is the glory of the True Guru,
 that in the midst of the household,
 one is emancipated".³

A householder's life is a worthier way of life and the daily routine of a householder does not stand in the way of his emancipation. A householder is a greater devotee than an ascetic in the eyes of God. Contemplation of the true Lord brings illumination which enables one to live a detached life even in the midst of family. Such is the distinctive greatness of the true Guru that through his grace and guidance one can attain salvation even while surrounded by one's wife and children. One must continue to put in efforts and struggle for a better life, rather than adopt the life of an ascetic for attaining Moksha (emancipation).

Self-labour :

Guru Nanak stressed that one should work hard

3. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Dhanasri, p.661, Vol.3, p.635.

and should not snatch the fruits of the labour of other people. He instructed the people on this point through a remarkable incident connected with two rich brothers of Lahore, Bhago and Gangu. They belonged to the Khatri caste. In order to gain the grace of God, they arranged a grand feast called a 'Yagna'. By profession they were bankers, money-lenders and state factors and their occupation had made them very rich. Hundreds of Brahmins were fed on choice dishes, and fine clothes were given to them as gifts. The whole populace shouted praises of the charitable rich brothers. They expected that the Guru too would praise their meritorious deed. They approached the Guru, who had earlier refused to join the feast, to taste something. He kept silent. The rich men pressed him again to take something. They said, as a result of his blessings, their food would bring them further prosperity and benefit the souls of their departed ancestors. For whose benefit had they arranged the feast and charity on such a vast scale? asked the Guru, pointing to their wealth, which, according to him, was ill-gotten, and which was only contributing to their worldly pleasures and pride.

The Guru further said :

"If a thief robs a house, and this plunder he offers to propitiate his ancestors, the thing in the other world is recognised,

and the dead souls are charged with theft.
 The hands of the go-between (the Brahmin)
 are chopped off;
 Thus is the Lord's justice ministered.
 Nanak ! that alone is received whole in the yond,
 that one gives out of one's honest bread."⁴

This stern judgment of the Guru on their charity flabbergasted the wealthy money-lenders, who had rather expected the Guru to join the chorus of their admirers. The Guru said, "My friends, this is what I call thieving. Such charity as 'yagna' is not acceptable as meritorious by God, to whom the small, hard-earned gifts of the poor are more pleasing than the display of your wealth, got through extortion."

The Guru's words entered into the inmost souls of these rich men. They touched his feet with contrite hearts, and said, "Sire, we are sinners. Save us and bless us in your divine mercy". The Guru exhorted them to take only what was just and to shun greed and the lure of wealth.

Thus the Guru always stood by and for the poor and the humble. He did not like the display of wealth and power. He stood for those who earned their livelihood by

4. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.472, Vol.2, p.466.

5. Ibid., Raj Asa, p.466, Vol.2.

the sweat of their brow and not for their exploiters. Dependence upon others' earnings, he said, was a sin. A Sikh should earn his livelihood by honest means.

The Guru further laid down that all Sikhs should share their earnings with others. They should spend at least one-tenth of their earnings in charity. If, he said, a cloth soiled with blood became defiled, then why could not people see that one who sucked human blood did not remain pure. An ill-gotten income should indeed be like pork to the Muslim and beef to the Hindu.

PART II

POLITICAL THOUGHTS OF THE SIKH GURUS

CHAPTER I

POLITICAL THOUGHTS— FROM GURU NANAK TO GURU ARJAN

The tradition of Sikhism is mainly that of spiritualism which provided a dynamic boost to the people of Punjab in the darkest moment of its history. Though the Sikh Gurus were highly spiritual, yet their mission was to uplift society.

The Sikh Gurus were not happy over the condition of society in their times. There was political suppression by Muslim rulers. People became quite helpless since they were subjected to blind submission in the political field. The Gurus wanted to liberate society from foreign rulers. They thought that political freedom was essential to maintain and develop culture in society because the loss of political freedom lowered and even destroyed the culture of society. The foreign conquerors who ruled over India degraded society and were inimical to the religion of India, i.e. Hinduism. Muslim rulers favoured the Muslim population. The Sikh Gurus were opposed to the tyranny, injustice and maltreatment meted out by foreign rulers to the Hindus. The religious fanaticism and bigotry of Muslim rulers was intolerable.

Guru Nanak never advocated the life of pure Bhakti, unconcerned with the political conditions of the country

on which the life of the common man depended. If the rulers commits tyrannies it is the duty of a religious man to fight against him.

The signs of the kings being the oppressors of Hinduism was this : when they saw a Hindu their eyes glowed red and they wished to bury him alive. They also wanted to completely destroy the Brahmans who were regarded as leaders of 'Kufr' (irreligiosity or Godlessness), and owing to whom 'Kufr' thrived.¹

The claims of Muslim orthodoxy were steadily and zealously upheld by the influential and crafty class known as the 'Ulema'. Self-interest formed strong links between them and the ruling classes, and the nobles also needed their 'fatwas' (religious mandates). On the other hand, the Ulema needed royal and aristocratic patronage. A Muslim writer says in this context :

"The Ulema were always on the look-out for ways and means by which they might enhance their prestige and invest themselves with a superior social status akin to that of Brahminical priesthood or the Christian clergy, because this status was denied them by the Shariat and Sunnat, which they aimed to propagate and enforce. They resorted to circulating and popularising spurious traditions

1. Habib, M.: Political Theory of Delhi Sultanates, Delhi, pp.137-138.

regarding their prestige and prerogatives".²

Sikhism, in earlier stages, did not have clear ideas about political institutions. The contemporary rulers were extremely hostile in their attitude towards their non-Muslim subjects. They did not behave justly towards the people of Indian origin. There was oppression in the name of religion. "Under the Lodhis assignments became fewer in number, but individually more lucrative. In the second half of the fourteenth century, holders of larger assignments were expected to maintain smaller men on the same terms. A complicated system, analogous to sub-infeudation, grew up. They sometimes claimed the assignments as hereditary. In practice, they exercised unlimited executive powers. They could, in fact, rule as if they were kings themselves". Moreland considers it probable that "the great bulk of the kingdom was administered through assignees rather than salaried officials".³

The character of kings was deplorable. Corruption was openly indulged in. Some verses of Guru Nanak give us a glimpse of the actual sufferings of the common people

2. Rizvi, S.A., Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Agra, p. 13.

3. Moreland, W.H. : The Agrarian System of Moslem India, Cambridge, 1921, pp. 67, 68 and 71.

under the then rulers and sub-rulers :

"There is no one who receiveth or giveth
not bribes.

The king dispenseth justice when his palm
is filled.⁴

At another place Guru Nanak points out :

"Greed and sin are rulers and village accountant :
Falsehood is master of the mint.

Lust, his minister, summoneth and examineth men
and sitteth in judgement on them.

The subjects are blind and without divine
knowledge and satisfy the judges'
greed with bribes".⁵

Muslim judicial officers (the Qazis) denied justice
in the cases in which Hindus were involved and they decided
according to the politicians' instructions and demanded
bribes :

"The Qazi sitteth to administer justice;
He turneth over his beads and invoketh God,
But he takes bribes and doeth injustice.
If anyone calls him to account
he will read and cite texts".⁶

4. Guru Granth Sahib, Ras Asa, p.350, Vol.1, p.339.

5. Ibid., p.468,469, Vol.II, p.462.

6. Ibid., Rag Asa, pp.468-469, Vol.II, p.462.

The credit for political awakening amongst the Hindus entirely goes to Guru Nanak. Sarbdyal says regarding the political achievements of the Sikhs that the sole credit for this miracle of history goes to Guru Nanak.⁷

At the time of Babar's attack on India Guru Nanak had the most poignant experience of his life. He reached Eminabad after Babar had carried out general massacre in that town which had resulted in its total ruin. Soon after the massacre, Babar ordered large-scale arrests of the surviving residents, including holy men. Guru Nanak was also arrested and brought to the presence of Babar. Nanak called him a tyrant on his face and asked him to stop destruction and senseless ^{killings} of the people. Babar realised his mistake and stopped them.⁸

The large-scale and terrible suffering caused by these events deeply pained Guru Nanak. He addressed the following words to Lalo, a villager, who was carpenter by caste :

"O Lalo, as I receive the word of God,
so do I utter its content.

(Babar, the Mughal) has come from Kabul,
with sin as his wedding party, and bids us
by force to gift away (motherland).

7. Sarbdyal : Ideal Gurus, Ambala Cantt., p.20.

8. Gill, Pritam Singh : History of the Sikh Nation, p.34.

Righteousness and the sense of shame have hid
themselves and falsehood walks abroad.

The days of the Qazis and the Brahmins are over,
and the devil himself plays the priest".⁹

A factual and depressing description of the condition
of society after the invasion of Babar, as given in the
Adi Granth, is as below :

"They whose lustrous hair shone in plaits
and were filled with vermillion in the parting,
Their hair was sheared with the scissors and
their mouths were choked with dust.
Yea, they who revelled in their palaces now find
not a seat even in the common. Hail to Thee
O Lord, all hail!
O Primal Lord, I know not Thy end,
for Thou changest the scene of the play
many many times.
When the beauties were married, their glamorous
spouses sat by their side.
They were carried in palanquins and the bangles
of ivory dangled round their arms.
(In greetings), (pots containing) water were
waved over their heads,

9. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Tilang, pp.722-723.,
Vol.II, p.692.

and they were fanned with glass-studded fans
 A hundred-thousand coins were offered to them
 when they sat and also when they stood,
 and they chewed nuts and dates, and enjoyed
 the bridal couch.
 (But) today, round their necks is the noose, and
 their necklaces of pearls are broken into bits."¹⁰

Further, Guru Nanak refers to this unfortunate
 aspect of war :

"The robes of some are torn from head to foot.
 Or, they have been carried away having been dishonoured".¹¹

Again :

"The Muslim women read the Quran,
 and, in misery, pray to their God.
 And also pray (in distress) to Him
 the Hindu women of all castes.
 Yea, the wedding song reeks with blood,
 And (not with saffron but) with blood
 are the wedded ones anointed."¹²

"Many died in war and left wailing widows behind".¹³

10. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.418, Vol.2, p.414.

11. Ibid, Rag Tilang, pp. 417-18, Vol.II, p.415.

12. Ibid., Rag Tilang, p.723, Vol.III, p.692.

13. Ibid., Rag Tilang, p.417, Vol.II, p.415.

"There was great destruction of buildings
and princes were cut to pieces and rolled
in the dust."¹⁴

Guru Nanak was deeply pained at the misdeeds of the
Mughal invader and his hordes, and expressed his feelings
of anguish for his motherland in the following words :

"God has protected Khurasan and brought
terror to Hindustan
But, our creator-Lord takes not the
blame upon Himself,
And so has made the Mughal the Angel of Death
Such intense is our suffering,
O Lord, and Thou feelest no pain?
O Creator, Thou belongest to all,
If the powerful duel with the powerful,
I grieve not;
But if a ravenous lion falls upon a flock
of sheep, then the Master must answer,
The Jewel (of my motherland) has been laid
waste by curs,
But none shall cherish their memory when they
are gone.

14. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Tilang, pp.722,23, Vol.III,p.692.

Thou thyself separatest, O Lord ; Thou
 thyself unitest
 So I revel in Thy glory.¹⁵

Guru Nanak wanted to save Hindustan from foreign invaders. He could not tolerate foreigners over the Indian soil and he wanted the nation to be powerful. He condemned the Lodhi emperors of Delhi and their tyrannous administration. He could not tolerate their attitude towards the people, as is shown below :

"The deer, the hawks, the courtiers are
 called clever and learned,
 for they trap their own caste;
 But in the yond they find no refuge.
 Yea, he alone is learned and wise who
 practiceth the Name;
 for, unless a tree is rooted in the soil,
 how will it spread out its shade?
 The kings are like whores; the courtiers
 like dogs, for they awaken those who sleep in
 God's peace.
 The king's servants tear the docile subjects
 with their nails.

15. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Tilang, p.360, Vol.I, p.351.

And like curs lick up all the blood that
they spill."¹⁶

The above verse vividly depicts Guru Nanak's anguish at the political conditions of his times, and the nature of the rulers of the times.

Guru Nanak felt the need for a change in the ideal and form of the state. The state, according to him, should be based on justice :

"One cleanses one's mouth, not with
a handful of water,
but if only one knows;
for the monarch through justice
and the learned
By dwelling on truth (cleanse their mind)."¹⁷

From the verses by Guru Nanak, it appears that he felt deeply hurt at the unjust the foolish acts of the contemporary kings. He was deeply moved at the tyrannous march of the Mughals and the havoc they wrought upon Punjab. He witnessed political atrocities on Indian soil. He challenged the rulers for their cruel deeds. He was the first Indian reformer who started war of

16. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Jaijaivanti, p.1288, Vol.4,p.1229.

17. Ibid., Rag Sarang, p.1240, Vol.4, p.1185.

thoughts against tyrannical rulers. His teachings gave hope to the common man. They paved the way for a healthy political development. It is clear that political thoughts are concealed in his religious teachings.

Sikhism considered all humanity equal in the eyes of God. "Beggars and kings are equally the creations of God.... In this world of God some people are begging even for livelihood and some others are drunk with power, and they are provided with the opportunity to rule over the people. But all these riches keep not their company in the yond."¹⁸

Sikhism condemns tyrannical kings and advises them that they should act as human beings. They become egoistical, having gathered the world's riches. But the kings should not forget that the riches will not help them in the court of God.¹⁹ So the kings should care more for their subjects, and perform their kingly duties towards all of them, without distinction of caste and creed.

Slowly Sikhism developed into a religious sect under the Guruship of Ram Das and Arjan Dev (1552 to 1606) and began to attract into its fold even the Pandits (religious scholars) of Banaras and the Rajas of Kulu,

18. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Gauri, p.344, Vol.I, p.354.

19. Ibid., Sawayyas, p. 1342, Vol.4, p.1277.

Suket, Hamirpur and Chamba.²⁰

We have seen how Nanak emancipated the minds of the people of Punjab from superstitions and hypocrisy. The second Guru (Angad) gave Sikhs an individuality of their own. The institution of 'Langar'²¹ (free and common kitchen) started by Angad was a distinctive feature of the Sikh sect. It developed the spirit of equality and brotherhood amongst the people, and gave a crushing blow to the caste system and the social hierarchy based on birth. In other words, this was the first step that encouraged people to sit together, dine together and consider themselves members of one family. As a matter of fact, the institution of 'Langar' was the first step towards developing society on political lines, as people learnt to assemble at a fixed place as members of one family, regardless of race, wealth, sex, caste, occupation or religion.²²

The third Guru, Guru Amar Das, reformed the Langar. The Langar was intended not only to feed those who were unable to work but also those who came to the Guru from distant places in order to acquire spirituality. This

20. Bhakat Mal : History of Sikhs, in the India Historical Quarterly', June, 1936, p.151.

21. Santokh Singh : Suraj Parkash, Vol.5, para 1604.

22. Banerjee, Indu Bhushan, op.cit., pp.153-156.

institution helped in removing untouchability, which was a great curse in the Hindu society. The Langar provided a powerful aid in propagating and popularising Sikhism and it gave a definite direction to the charities offered by the Guru's followers.²³

In the words of Gokal Chand Narang : "The third method adopted by Angad to popularise the mission of Nanak and keep up the enthusiasm of his followers was the starting of a Langar (free kitchen).... The institution proved a powerful aid in the propaganda work. In the first place, it did the same service as the orphanages, hospitals, asylums and other charitable institutions, started by the Christian missionaries, do,not only as a means of relieving the destitute and the needy, but also as a most efficient means of advertisement and popularity. Secondly, it gave a new direction to the charities of the Guru's followers. Of Alms-houses supported by Hindu individuals there was, and has always been, plenty; but the Langar of the Guru was probably the first to be supported by the combined contributions of a community. And it taught the Sikhs the first lesson of contributing money towards a common fund. Thirdly, charity being the root of religion and the charities of the Sikhs flowing into

23. Bannerjee, I.B., op.cit., p.159.

the funds of the Guru, their religious sentiment could not move in any other direction, so that the duty of supporting the Langar not only concentrated the attention of the Sikhs upon their Guru, but being the object of common patronage and support, it served as a strong bond of union among the new brotherhood. Fourthly, this institution proved a powerful weapon to break the crust of caste as all Sikhs, rich or poor, Brahmans or Sudras, dined together without any distinction."²⁴

Now Sikhs became a concrete community, and they started regarding themselves as members of a common brotherhood. However, there was now need to organise this community on the national basis to impart them political education. The credit for organising Sikhs into a national entity goes to the fourth Guru. The number of Sikhs had increased and they were spread over the whole region of Punjab. The work of teaching and preaching and administering to their spiritual needs could not, therefore, be carried on centrally. "Guru Amar Das, consequently, divided the whole region inhabited by his followers into twenty-two Dioceses (or 'Manjis' as they were called), and a pious and influential Sikh was placed at the head of each Manji, who acted as a bishop and viceregent of the Guru and

24. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit.,p.50.

carried on the pastoral work in his diocese".²⁵

It was the first powerful step towards the birth of a political institution of the Sikhs. This step strengthened the society in a focal point and they started to think in terms of a common and wide nation.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, laid the foundations of Harmandar in Amritsar in 1589.²⁶ He organised its finances on sound lines and compiled the holy Granth. "Sikhism, by and by, came to acquire, primarily through its 'Sangats' and 'masands' (Guru's agents to collect money), a far-flung but, at the same time, a centralised organisations".²⁷

Guru Arjan set himself to the task of consolidation and organisation of the Sikhs. He went on tours, preaching and organising sangats or congregational worship, which he declared to be of greater merit than individual worship. He reorganised and gave a permanent character to those missionaries who had been appointed earlier by his predecessor, in order to spread the Sikh religion and collect the offerings made by the faithful. Sikhs were exhorted to give a part of their earnings in the name of Guru. The 'masands' collected the offerings from various

25. Narang, G.C., op.cit., p.56.

26. Bhakat Mal : History of Sikhs, op.cit., p.10.

27. Banerjee, I.B., op.cit., p.11.

places. This spiritual tribute reached the central treasury at Amritsar.

Guru Arjan Dev was installed as Guru in full regalia of power and authority and with great pomp and splendour. He was declared and accepted by the Sikh community as a Sacha Padshah, i.e. their 'true or real emperor, both spiritual and temporal', evidently in comparison to the 'false' Padshah (emperor) who was sitting on the throne at Delhi or Agra.

Guru Arjan Dev turned the Sikh society into a theocratic state, but with a clear political shape. The political implications of this new society forced the Mughal power to take increasing notice of it. "Guru Arjan gave this society written rules of ethics and faith in the form of the Adi Granth. He provided a common rallying point for the new society, in the city of Amritsar, which he made their religious as well as political centre. He changed their voluntary contributions into a systematic levy, which accustomed them to discipline and paved the way for a fuller and larger organisation".²⁸ He started taking a deeper and more active interest in the politics of his times and became a supporter of the Mughal prince Khusrau, who had rebelled against the emperor.²⁹

28. Macauliffe, M.A. : The Sikh Religion, Vol.III,op.cit.,p.20.

29. Mohsin Jani: Dabistan-e-Mazahib, Vol.II, Paris, 1843, p.273.

Guru Arjan Dev was executed by Jahangir on the charge of rebellion. After his martyrdom, Sikhism was substantially transformed from a religious sect into a political sect. Hari Ram Gupta has remarked that Guru Arjan set the noblest example of courage and sacrifice in resisting the wrongs of the mightiest power on earth and thus sowed the seed which was to bear rich fruit in due course.³⁰

Guru Arjan Dev started a tradition of sacrifice which the Sikhs developed and which gave to them a new line of action and thought and proved a turning-point in their history. Use of arms against tyrannical rulers was freely advocated by the Gurus. The dying message of Guru Arjan Dev to his son was, "My dear son, sit fully armed on the throne and maintain an army to the best of your ability."

The Sikh community evolved during the period of the first five Gurus on the lines of the teachings of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. But his mission was still incomplete since the community had not acquired power. He condemned the ruling class openly, and even a mighty king like Babar was challenged by him in his verses. These verses reflect his response to contemporary politics. They not only reflect his anguish, but also his desire to

30. Gupta, H.R. : History of Sikh Gurus, op.cit., p.104.

establish a society of Indians with moral dimensions. But he was unable to establish a society that could use the sword against foreign rulers. However, in his teachings the use of force is concealed. He found that Indians lacked the national spirit. He studied the society and diagnosed its ills. He felt that in the first instance religious revival should be attempted. He sowed the seeds of nationalism against the oppressive ^sdepotism of alien rulers. The seeds sowed by the founder of Sikhism developed slowly with the passage of time. The task started by Nanak was completed by his successors. The necessary elements which constitute a theocratic state were almost complete by the time of the sixth Guru. Sikhs had their religious code in the form of the holy Granth, their sacred city in Amritsar, and their chief in the person of the Guru. The finances of the organisation were organised on sound, regular lines. The Guru was regarded as the true king. The Sikh community became a strong force in the political field of Punjab. It was a turning point in the history of Sikhism. It slowly and steadily turned into a political entity while maintaining its spiritual character.

CHAPTER II

FROM GURU HARGOBIND TO GURU GOBIND SINGH

The Sixth Guru, Hargobind, found that the Sikh community had evolved into a concrete society. The martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, gave the alarm to Guru Hargobind that there were sterner days ahead. He realised that the peaceful movement of the Sikh Community would hardly survive in the circumstances created by the rulers. He felt that the time had come when the peaceful Sikh society should be changed into a warrior, political community, in order to bring to a logical end the teachings of the founder of Sikhism.

The approach of the sixth Guru changed entirely. He included in his person both 'Miri' and 'Piri' powers. It was a new development of momentous importance, pregnant with great possibilities for the future. He decided to use force against the mighty Mughal power, and, unlike the previous Gurus, he attired himself in a martial dress and girded two swords - one to avenge his father, and the other to destroy the Mughal power.¹ Moreover, he had a natural martial disposition. To the end of his life he took as much part in military adventures as in religious

1. Narang, G.C. : Glorious History of Sikhism, op.cit.,p.75.

activities. He issued orders to the Sikhs to offer him arms instead of money.²

Soon, a number of warriors and wrestlers came to be enlisted. Then about 500 men came from Malwa and Majha areas to offer their services. They were given a horse and a sword each. Piara, Jetha and Langha were made captains of a hundred horses each.³ People flocked to Guru Hargobind in large numbers. They came under his banner merely for two meals a day, and a uniform after each half year.⁴ The Guru had, by now, come firmly to the conclusion that force was essential in order to be able to exist in the world.

The Akal Bunga (later on named as Akal Takht) became a place for daily gatherings. The Guru appointed some bards who would sing heroic ballads before the brave Sikhs. Two bards, Abdulla and Natha, were prominent among them and were well known and highly respected.⁵

Like the Mughal emperor, Guru Har Gobind also held his courts. He was a fine judge and his followers, instead

2. Macauliffe, M.A. : The Sikh Religion, Vol.4, op.cit., p.3.

3. Ibid., Vol.3, p.4.

4. Mohsin Fani : Dabistan-e-Mazahib, Vol.2, op. cit., p.248.

5. Shamsheer Singh Ashok : Sikhi Te Sikh Itihas, Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1951, p.108.

of going to the Mughal courts, placed their cases before him.⁶ His justice was quick, impartial and equal for all.

Matters of Sikh interest were discussed at the Akal Takht.⁷ Policies in regard to political activities, and the welfare of Sikhs, etc. were also discussed by the Guru at the Akal Takht. The Guru sent envoys to the ruling princes and also received their agents in his Darbar which was held at the Akal Takht.⁸ Here he also received disciples, visitors, seekers of truth and warriors who were ready to fight for righteousness.⁹

A number of historians believe that the step of constructing the Akal Takht near the Har Mandir 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.¹⁰

With all this the Sikh religion became the religion of saint-soldier people. To quote Toynbee, "though they were goaded into militancy by the tyrannical oppression of an aggressive Mughal government, they nonetheless renounced their spiritual birth-right by turning militant."¹¹

6. Archer, J.C. : The Sikhs, op.cit., p.174.

7. Khushwant Singh : A History of the Sikhs, op.cit., Vol.I, p.63 (foot-note).

8. Ibid., p.63 (foot-note).

9. Trilochan Singh : Guru Tegh Bahadur, p.3.

10. Teja Singh: The Religion of Sikh Gurus, Amritsar, 1957, p.2.

11. Toynbee : A Study of History, Vol.5, pp.666-667.

Archer also says that the Akal Takht ... considerably changed the Sikh character and organisation.¹² Regarding this change Guru Har Gobind told the great Maratha saint, Samarth Ram Das (at Sri Nagar in Garhwal) in 1634 A.D., that arms meant protection to the poor and destruction of the tyrant.¹³

Sikh Gurus had, by now, fully realized that force was an essential means to defend society against cruel and unjust rulers. Guru Har Gobind changed the entire outlook of the Sikhs. They must defend themselves against political aggression with their own power. They should not look to any supernatural power for this. Permitting a tyrant to commit atrocities is a sin. Force can be met only by force.¹⁴ According to Guru Ram Das and his successors, existence of the state is essential for a community to develop politically. In other words, since force is an essential part of a state, the people must have their own state. Only then would they be able to protect themselves and their religion against political or religious persecution carried out by an alien or internal enemy.¹⁵

The seventh and eighth Gurus remained constant to

12. Archer, J.C., op.cit., p.174.

13. Ganda Singh : "Development of Sikh Thoughts", published in the 'Punjab, Past and Present', April, 1968, pp.17-18.

14. Gill, P.S. : History of the Sikh Nation, op.cit.,p.156.

15. Gupta, H.R.: History of the Sikh Gurus, op.cit.,p.109.

the teachings of the previous Gurus, and continued their teachings on the same lines. The ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, provided opportunity to develop the Sikh society further on the lines laid down by the previous Gurus. Tegh Bahadur had been given full training as a soldier and a military leader, and he had even fought a battle under his father against the Mughals at the young age of 14. Yet he died without having been able to do much towards military organisation of the Sikhs. His Guruship lasted only ten years. During this period he was harassed either by domestic quarrels or by the powerful Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

Guru Tegh Bahadur used to spend his time in peaceful pursuits and charitable works. By the time he sat on the throne of Sikhism, Sikh society had been organized into a militant organisation and the people were exhorted not to tolerate tyranny, oppression and injustice from any political ruler. Aurangzeb had started considering Tegh Bahadur as more of a political enemy than as the leader of a religious sect. The Guru was convicted and awarded death penalty, and was executed in Delhi on 11th December, 1675.¹⁶ The Guru, however, achieved with his death what he had failed to achieve in his life. The execution of

16. Article 'The Religious Policy of Aurangzeb' by Prof. S.R. Sharma, in the 'Indian Historical Quarterly', June, 1936, p.401.

Tegh Bahadur proved a baptism in blood and fire. It helped his son and successor, Guru Gobind Singh, to transform the Sikh society into fiery warriors as they proved themselves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ The work of military organisation that had been initiated by the sixth Guru (Guru Hargobind) had been slowed down due to various reasons in the times of the succeeding Gurus, but the execution of Tegh Bahadur stirred up once more the spirit of Hindu resistance against Mughal tyranny.¹⁸

People in thousands rallied under the banner of Guru Gobind Singh who inspired and moulded them into a vigorous and intrepid band of warrior-saints. He developed his people verily into a military community and created a new society named 'Khalsa'. He brought a new dynamic force into the arena of Punjab history. The new Khalsa society was a new entity arraying spiritual as well as military forces against the mighty Mughal government. The power of the Guru went on increasing day by day. His idea was to infuse a new life into the dead bones of the Hindus and make them forget their differences, and by presenting a united lost front against tyranny and oppression, emerge into an independent and powerful nation and regain their lot independence.¹⁹ Thus Guru Gobind Singh completed the work

17. Article 'The Religious Policy of Aurangzeb' by Prof. S.R.Sharma, in the 'Indian Historical Quarterly', June, 1936, p.402.

18. Narang, G.C.: Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit., p.72.

19. Ibid., p.77.

that was started by Baba Nanak.

The society that was downtrodden in the times of Guru Nanak was converted by Guru Gobind Singh into a mighty force that could challenge the mighty Mughal army. The mission of Guru Nanak was completed by Guru Gobind Singh. Cunningham writes :

"The last apostle of the Sikhs effectively roused the dormant energies of a vanquished people and filled them with a lofty, though fitful, longing for social freedom and national ascendancy, the proper adjuncts of that purity of worship which had been preached by Nanak".²⁰

The political concern of the founder of Sikhism was concealed in his religious teachings and his successors developed political activities according to the prevailing circumstances.

In J.D. Cunningham's views, "Guru Nanak probably did not possess any clear idea of political advancement and his reform in its immediate effects was only religious and moral".²¹ This view arises from the apparent difference between the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. Indu Bhushan Banerjee has said in this context that the political views of Guru Hargobind and Guru

20. Cunningham, J.D. : History of Sikhs, op.cit.,pp.74-75.

21. Ibid. op.cit., pp.41-42.

Gobind Singh as well as the later political activities of Sikhs appear to be a deviation from the teachings of Guru Nanak".²² In reality, however, there was no basic change of Sikhism from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. The difference was only that of accent. The founder of Sikhism appeared on the Indian scene in a strange period when Indians were living under the tyranny of cruel rulers. Dr. Ganda Singh has commented that Guru Nanak had a first-hand knowledge of the condition of the people under the Lodhis and of the behaviour of the ruling class towards the subject people".²³

Guru Nanak's verses relating to politics occur at several places in Guru Granth Sahib. These suggest his familiarity with contemporary politics. His preachings contain his views against the tyrannical rulers. The conditions of his times were not favourable for the use of force against the tyranny of kings. But in his verses he upbraided the tyrannical rulers of the times, and sowed the seeds of nationalism through his teachings although they were mainly spiritual. He aroused the spirit amongst Indians to stand up against the tyranny and injustice of the rulers.

22. Banerjee, Indu Bhushan : Evolution of Khalsa, op.cit., pp. 1-2.

23. Ganda Singh, Presidential Address at the Panjab History Conference, Patiala, 1969, p.77.

His successors understood his aim of establishing a powerful society which could rise against the tyrannies of the rulers.

The sixth Guru, Hargobind, adopted arms to defend his religion. This change was in accordance with the changed conditions of the Indian society in his times. He prepared the way for a thorough reorganisation of the Sikhs under Guru Gobind Singh. Several writers have discerned a close connection between the reforms of Guru Nanak and the politics of some of his successors and followers. G.C. Narang believes that "the 'steel' for the 'sword' of Guru Gobind Singh was provided by Guru Nanak".²⁴

Dorothy Field feels that the teachings of Guru Nanak paved the way for political development in later times.²⁵ J.C. Archer says there was something positive and realistic in the reforms of Guru Nanak, something that made for a religion and a state."²⁶ It is suggested by some other scholars that "the apt phrase to use is transfiguration, for there was no break, no digression in the programme of Sikh life".²⁷ The Order of the Khalsa, far

24. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit., p.17.

25. Dorothy Field : The Religion of the Sikhs, London, 1914, p.60.

26. Archer, J.C. : The Sikhs, op.cit., pp.60-61.

27. Teja Singh : A Short History of the Sikhs, Madras, 1950, p.12.

from being a contingent phenomenon dictated by the exigencies of the moment, appears to be a logical development and entelechy of the teachings of Guru Nanak.²⁸ Dr. Sher Singh says, "Who knows that given the means which Guru Gobind Singh had at his disposal, with the work of ten generations which had prepared the ground for him, Nanak would have met the situation in the same way in which the former did in his own time afterwards".²⁹

The Sikh community slowly developed under the guidance of ten Gurus. It had started from the initial stage of Sangat in the darkest moment of Indian history and developed into a strong militant community with the passage of time. The later Gurus faced many difficulties and had to make all kinds of sacrifices including martyrdom of the fifth and the ninth Gurus. But ultimately they achieved the aim of the founder of the religion.

28. Kapur Singh : Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh, op.cit., p.12.

29. Sher Singh, Philosophy of Sikhism, Lahore, 1944, p.24.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND IDEAL STATE AS PER SIKHISM

Sikhism believes that man is a creation of God. The soul in him is a part of the Supreme Soul, i.e. God. But it was shrouded by the veil of 'haume' or 'I-ness', when God created man. This 'haume' is responsible for his death, birth and transmigration.¹ The 'haume' is of the nature of free will of man, and can lead him towards good or evil. 'Haume' is a chronic malady, but its remedy also lies in itself.²

By nature there are both goodness and evil in man. By nature there is in man ego and pride.

Sikhism lays great value on human life. It is a rare gift that has been bestowed upon man. So man should put in all efforts to make it good.

"Thou hast obtained from
thy God a human body;
Now alone is the time to
attain thy Lord. Of no avail
are thy other works."³

1. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Maru, p.999, Vol.4, p.954.

2. Ibid., Rag Asa, p.466, Vol.2, p.459.

3. Ibid., Rag Asa, p.466, Vol.2, p.459.

Sikhism enjoins upon man to lead a virtuous life and do good deeds. All the deeds of man are constantly observed by the Lord.

"In the domain of Truth, the Formless abides,
He watcheth what he createth with
bounteous eyes.

In it are all the worlds, universes, spheres".⁴

Man cannot live by himself. He depends upon social, economic and political institutions for his survival and development. Man must aim at achieving certain objects to make his life purposeful. Freedom of thought, speech, action and worship can be practised only if a society has political freedom, and the state is the instrument for the exercise of that freedom through political power.

Institution of Kingship

Sikhism does not regard kings or rulers as special creations of God. In other words, it does not believe in the divine right of kings and kingship. Both the beggars and the rulers are the creations of God - as everything else in the universe. Riches and rulership are not acquisitions of men, but they are gifts from God.⁵

The king as well as the beggar exist because of divine

4. Guru Granth Sahib, Japu, p.8, Vol.1, p.11.

5. Ibid., p.6, Vol.1, p.7.

dispensation⁶... Some he has raised to rulership, others wander about begging.⁷ In fact, all luxuries and pleasures are enjoyed by the rulers in accordance with God's will⁸. It is the will of God to degrade a king or exalt a man.⁹

However, there are some natural relationships between the rulers and his subjects. These can be established only when the subjects meet the demands made on them by the rulers, and, on the other hand, the rulers also perform their duties towards their subjects. Both must observe the law. Even the kings are not above the law. If a king breaks the law, the subjects, according to Sikhism, have the right to remove and punish the king. A unique example of the subjects punishing their king for breaking the law and the king receiving punishment without resistance or rancour is found in Sikh history and perhaps this is a unique example in the world history. The most powerful ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was punished by the people under the authority of the Akal Takht by Akali Phula Singh to maintain the dignity and high position of the Akal Takht and Sikh religion. The fear that it (the Takht) would become a secondary institution or a simple shrine for worship

6. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.354, Vol.2, p.344.

7. Ibid., Rag Vadhans, p.566, Vol.2, p.553.

8. Ibid., Shaloka, p.145, Vol.1, p.136.

9. Ibid., Rag Asa, p.354, Vol.2, p.344.

due to the expansion of the political power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was undone by Akali Phula Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had married a Muslim woman, who refused to embrace Sikhism. On this account Maharaja Ranjit Singh was declared guilty by the Akal Takht, and was awarded punishment. The Jathedar ordered that the Maharaja be tied to the nearby tree and given twenty-one lashes. Maharaja Ranjit Singh accepted the punishment given from the Akal Takht without protest or rancour. Some historians believe that the punishment was remitted by the Sangat (Congregation) present there".¹⁰

Sikhism does not condemn the institution of kingship as such. But it does not uphold the theory of the divine right of kings to rule. The kings can enjoy the right to rule only as long as they rule with justice and look after the interests and welfare of their subjects. The subjects, on the other hand, have the duty to obey the rulers and pay the state dues. But they have also the right to punish and even remove the ruler if he fails to perform his duty and acts against the law.

Sikhism on Government

Sikhism believes that the government should be based on reason rather than on sentiments or emotions. The government is an instrument to carry out the functions

10. Hoti, Prem Singh : Jiwan Birtant of Akali Phula Singh, p.135.

of the state which should be based on justice and law. A government which does not administer law and justice has no right to exist. It is the dharma of the people to demolish a corrupt, inefficient and unjust government.

It is obvious from the above that the government is a temporary body which can be changed by the will of the people. Sikhism separates the government from religion but upholds moral attitude in the functioning of the government. Guru Nanak observed that the great mischief, to which politics of those times had been subjected, was due to the influence of religion on politics. Therefore, he emphasised that politics should be wholly freed from the yoke of religion.

Mode of Government in Sikhism

Sikhism formed the council of state and preferred theocratic form of government based on democratic principles. The first state council met in 1762.¹¹ On this occasion Sikhs assembled at Amritsar, took bath in the sacred tank and held the first regular Gurmata or state council.¹²

In the words of Gokal Chand Narang "The whole nation had a living faith that it was under the special protection

11. Ishar Singh : Nanakism, New Delhi, 1976, p.225.

12. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit., p. 139.

of God."¹³ Next to God was the Guru who was supposed to be always aiding and guiding his followers. The sovereignty of the nation was vested in the general body of the nation itself.

Mode of Election in Sikhism

To ensure healthy functioning of the government, Sikhism believes in the democratic form of government. To form the government representatives are elected by the people. There is no distinction between men and women. Khalsa society was established by the tenth Guru on democratic principles. It is a classless society. The smallest democratic unit in Sikhism is called 'Sangat'. It is a most peculiar type of democratic institution. Sikh society accepts universal adult franchise as the basis of election.

A Sangat is a very powerful unit. Every member is considered equal in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. It makes the Sikhs democratic-minded. All the members of a Sangat have got equal status and rights without distinction of caste, creed and sex. All have an equal right to vote, or to be elected. The method of election is direct. It is no less than the universal adult franchise method adopted

13. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit., p.139.

by the Indian Constitution. Sikhism rejects the communal election system as Sikh society is ^a society without the distinction of community, caste or class.

The Ideal State

Sikhism believes that political freedom is as essential as social and economic freedom for the development of a healthy society. The State is the highest political institution to provide liberty and to give a society security, liberalism, individualism and equalitarianism. Sikh Gurus envisaged such a state to guarantee freedom of personal beliefs and actions and at the same time to provide for certain social obligations. It guarantees uniform law for all, without any distinction, in order that each may live his life in his own way, as freely and as completely as possible. The Indian society did not enjoy political freedom for a very long period. In the words of Gill, "For the recent seven centuries the common man remained a political slave of the Muslim kings, the Mullahs and the Qazies".¹⁴

Anil Chandra Banerjee says, "In Islamic theocracy only Muslims were entitled to full citizenship and all privileges flowing from that status. A more or less grudging recognition was given to Jews and Christians who belonged to the category of the 'people of the

14. Gill, P.S. : History of the Sikh Nation, op.cit.,p.253.

Book'." ¹⁵

Therefore, from the very beginning, the Sikh Gurus wanted to inculcate in the minds of the people the ideal of freedom and a liberal way of life without distinction of caste, creed and sex. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, wanted to establish a new society based on democratic principles in the widest sense. The aim of the Guru was to save society from slavery, tyranny and injustice. The newly created society was based on healthy and rational principles of politics and social relationship. To fulfil these objects, the Guru started his teachings to the masses and established an institution named 'Sangat' as the basic institution, in order to inspire the people to work collectively for a common cause. It was the first institution of its kind to impart political education to the masses. This institution was strengthened with passage of time, and took deep roots in the course of time. "Guru Nanak toured extensively to preach the true name of God and his other ideas. He not only visited places of Hindu and Muslim pilgrimage in India but also went abroad - even upto Mecca, Medina and Baghdad. He also visited China. Wherever he went, he left behind a group of men and women who were asked to build a shrine where they could meet and hold 'Diwan' and sing hymns together". ¹⁶ This gave

15. Banerjee, A.C. : Guru Nanak and His Time, op.cit.,p.23.

16. Johar, S.S. : A Hand-book of Sikhism, op.cit. p.63.

inspiration to the people to build a united society and liberate themselves from oppressive governments.

Guru Gobind Singh fought against the Mughal power to save society from tyranny, misrule and injustice. He built a sort of theocratic state, but the real purpose of Guru Gobind Singh was ultimately ^{to} turn the theocratic state into a political state. Thus, in a way, the first national state was established in northern India, after a gallant fight by the tenth Guru for 29 years against the Mughal theocratic government and the anti-national forces of the hill chiefs.

This state which was entirely based on spiritual concepts liberated the people from Mughal tyranny.

Definition of State

Sikhism believes in the theory of the divine origin of the state. The universe is created by the Lord.¹⁷ It is divided into countless worlds.¹⁸ The kings are appointed according to the will of God,¹⁹ but God is the highest of the Kings.²⁰ The state is a permanent feature of the universe, but kings are not permanent. They can

17. Guru Granth Sahib, Rāg Asa, p.9, Vol.I, p.10.

18. Ibid., Japu, p.5, Vol.I, p.6.

19. Ibid., Japu, p.6, Vol.I, p.8.

20. Ibid., Japu, p.6, Vol. I, p.8.

and must be everthrown by their subjects if they fail in the righteous performance of their duties.

In an article on the political ideas of Guru Nanak, J.S. Bains has elaborated the concept and functions of the state in the following words :

"The state should create conditions which may help the individual to further his personality. The good of the human beings is the first duty of any constituted authority. The state is, therefore, for the individual and not vice-versa. An ideal ruler must, therefore, be an embodiment of divine wisdom and he should always cater to the needs of the people. If he fails to fulfil his duties, he loses the mandate of God and his removal from power may be considered as a religious and moral duty."²¹

Every institution in a state, whether political or otherwise, including the machinery of the governing body, is empowered by the Lord. Righteous or unrighteous forces exist but sometimes they are suppressed by unrighteous forces. A continuous battle is going on between the forces of evil and good. The evil forces spring from temporal power and they hinder the spiritual development of the people. These evil forces can be negated by

21. Bains, J.S. : 'Political Ideas of Guru Nanak' in the 'Indian Journal of Political Science', Oct.-Dec., 1962, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4, p. 318.

spiritual forces. It is the duty of a state to strengthen spiritual forces and develop the moral standards of its citizens. Sher Singh says, "Had the divine element remained dominant in the minds of men, then everything on this earth would have been smooth, soft, sanguine, satisfactory and satisfying. But in the very process of creation God created the opposites and the battle between these forces will continue so long as the 'sarguna sansar', the world, continues. These opposites appear in millions of ways and in billions of spheres of the becoming aspects of nature. These opposing forces also appear in social relations and, somehow or other, progress gets retarded or obstructed. The tardiness must be overcome and obstructions must be removed. That means force in an organised form - which is given the name of State."²²

It may be concluded from the above discussion that the state is a handiwork of God and that the Lord has created the state with a definite purpose.

Society in Sikhism

Sikhism believes that honest religious consciousness can contribute to social development. Sikh Gurus always struggled to uplift society and continuously inspired the people for self-reformation, and thus ultimately reform,

22. Sher Singh : Social and Political Philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh, op.cit., p.187.

uplift and develop society as a whole on healthy, moral lines. The Gurus believed that man is an integrated being and so is society. Society has its political and cultural bases. If political freedom is gone, its culture is bound to suffer. Certain ideas of the Guru regarding good society are quoted below :

The dirt of Egoism of ages which has
soiled the soul

Will be removed only in the society of the
holy.

Just as iron floats when tied to wood,
So will one cross the ocean of life by
following the Guru's word in the company
of saints.

In the society of the saints, one comes
upon the treasure of the Lord's name,
Which keeps one company ever
and is efficacious for the soul,
He who bathes in the dust of the saints feet,
He is rid of the sins of myriads of his
(past) births.

Sublime is the word of the saints,
and contemplating it,
all men are ferried across".²³

23. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Kanhra, p.1300, V.4, p.1240.

Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Gobind Singh, linked the destiny of man with that of society and of society with that of man. He gave practical shape to a social set-up which was at once both human and divine. Like the ancient thinkers of India, the Gurus start with the ultimate reality of God, but they bring Him down to man, bind Him to man and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The Gurus conceive the well-being of man in a social set-up characterised by the nobility and divinity of man. Therefore, there must be a just political set-up. Only that is a good government which works in harmony with man in society, as also in harmony with divinity.

Guru Gobind Singh created the new Khalsa society to awaken his followers to a new life, and to give precision and aim to the broad and general institutions as envisaged by his predecessors. It ultimately led to the growth of a nation. A living spirit seemed to animate the whole Sikh society and bind them together by a community of inmost sentiment and of outward objectives. This Khalsa society was a classless society and full of spirit. Many great deeds were done by this society in its struggles for a just and honourable life. There was a determined bravery, which defended itself foot to foot in the darkness, and attained a noble and mysterious triumph which no eye could see.

According to Niharranjan Ray, organisation of the Khalsa has been rightly characterised as a landmark in the history of the Sikhs. It was indeed the armed strength of the growing^{and}/expanding theocracy of the community and one can hardly doubt that it paved the way for the Sikhs to gain political power and authority. This was helped to a very great extent by the general political confusion and insecurity through which the north-western areas of the country, particularly Punjab, were passing during and following the series of Durrani invasions.²⁴

Further, Khalsa society was organised, on new lines, into twelve sections. Every section was named 'Jatha', which later on came to be called 'Misl'. Every Misl was commanded by a chief. One of them acquired large territories to the east of^{the}/Sutlej, which later on became the princely States of Patiala, Jind and Nabha, together known as Phulkian States. The other eleven Misls were all to the west of the Sutlej. Through acquisition of territories they enhanced their power in different parts of Punjab and founded states in the names of their chiefs.

Sovereignty in Sikhism

Sovereignty regulates the functions of a state. In Sikhism, sovereignty rests with the people. After the

24. Niharranjan Ray : The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society, New Delhi, 1975, p.111.

martyrdom of the fifth Guru (Guru Arjan Dev), Sikh society started changing into a militant organisation. The Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, established the Sikh political centre at Akal Takht, in Amritsar. The building of the Akal Takht opposite to the Har Mandir has great significance. The Har Mandir stands for spiritual guidance and the Takht for dispensing justice and for temporal activities. Niharranjan Ray thinks that "this was a step towards sovereignty. Guru Hargobind constructed the Akal Takht, as a raised platform, about 12 feet high, which was intended to resemble the raised platform on which the emperors sat while giving audience. He introduced the custom of beating the drum which was the Mughal custom and which was an attribute of sovereignty."²⁵ Khushwant Singh also upholds this version. The Guru's abode, in fact, became like that of a king. He sat on a throne and held his court. He went out with a royal umbrella over his head and was always accompanied by armed retainers. Instead of spiritual hymns, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and the Guru, instead of giving religious discourses, discussed military plans. He was called 'Miri Piri da Malik' (the lord of spiritual and secular domains). According to Khushwant Singh, this step was the starting point of

25. Ray, N. The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society, op.cit., p. 25.

double sovereignty.²⁶

Sovereignty in Sikhism belongs to the Khalsa Panth, since Guru Gobind Singh passed on the political power to the Khalsa. There is a special method to exercise sovereignty in the Khalsa society. Whenever there is any important issue that relates to the society as a whole, it is referred to the 'Sangat'. The Sangat comprises all the members of the society who assemble on the basis of equal status before Guru Granth Sahib. The light of God is the guide. The matter is discussed and decided by a majority of the Sangat and is considered as having been decided in the presence of God. The decision is based on the general will or consensus which is the basis of modern democracy. Such decisions, as made by the congregation, are called 'Gurmata'.

Dr. Surjeet Singh Gandhi comments : "That the people were held to be the wielder of sovereign power in Sikh polity can be seen from the examples of the Gurus. Once the Guru saluted the shrine of Dadu. Sikhs objected to this act of the Guru on the ground that it was not in conformity with the fundamental Sikh tenets, and they did not hesitate to fine the Guru".²⁷

26. Khushwant Singh : A History of the Sikhs, op.cit.,
Vol.I, p.208.

27. Gandhi, S.S. : History of Sikh Gurus, op. cit., p.487.

The classic example of the high esteem in which Guru Gobind Singh held the community - the common people - is found in the incident in which, after selecting the five loved ones, he drank the holy water at their hands, thereby giving the Khalsa the pride of having selected their leader. The idea of the popular basis of sovereignty and its equation with the divine mandate was a unique idea and it should be considered as a distinct contribution of Sikhism to the democratic system.

One more example of the true nature of sovereignty in Sikhism has been given by P.S.Gill :

"Once the Khalsa army was fighting against the Mughal army. The Guru was left with only five disciples. In such a dark moment, the five Sikhs assembled and passed a resolution and requested the Guru to leave the battle-field in the interest of the Panth. They said, 'Your life is more important to guide the Sikhs again to defend the society against the tyrannous rule of the Mughals.' The Guru accepted the decision of the five Sikhs and left the battle-field with three disciples while the other two later on died a martyr's death."²⁸

The chiefs of the twelve Misls, as mentioned earlier, exercised their authority with the goodwill of their followers who always went through the ceremony of electing

28. Gill, P.S. : History of Sikh Nation, op.cit., p.235.

their chiefs. That these elections were not always nominal is shown by the fact that many times the heirs-apparent were ignored and a really capable person was elected from amongst the descendants or relations of the deceased chief, and sometimes even from amongst the troops themselves.

How to operate sovereignty

Sovereignty was vested in the Khalsa society by Guru Gobind Singh. But if we study this issue deeply, we find that sovereignty was operating earlier also in the same manner, though it was called by a different name, i.e. 'Sangat'. The tenth Guru was aware of this process. He established various organisations for the exercise of sovereignty by the people.

The decisions of the 'Sangat' had always been based on reason. The verdicts of a composite higher-self subordinated the petty considerations of the composite lower-self. "Such decisions were considered to be the decisions of God who guides man's reason, and they were placed above personal or emotional levels. "The atmosphere of impartiality, selflessness, reason and justice prevails among the members of the Sangat sitting at a place which has assumed the name "Gurdwara"²⁹. The 'Sangat' consists

29. Gandhi, S.S. : History of Sikh Gurus, op.cit.,p.485.

of all the Sikhs - baptized or unbaptised - Amrit - dharis or Sahaj-dharis - but they must all be true Sikhs. They sit in the Gurudwara with their minds attached to God and to the Guru and then take decisions, overcoming their ego, meditating on the name of God, in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, beginning with an Ardas (prayer) and concluding with an Ardas, each time invoking the grace of God and the Guru. But each one of the 'beloved ones', the five, must, without exception or relaxation, always be a pancha Singh - a member of the order of the Khalsa.

Dr. Sher Singh observes in this context :

"In the olden days, the 'Sarbat Khalsa' met every year on the Dewali day at Amritsar and took some policy decisions. This meeting was like the democratic Greek assembly of Athens. They passed a Gurmata and authorised the Jathedar and the 'beloved ones' to exercise all executive powers to carry out the decisions. Now-a-days, the Khalsa is spread over the entire globe and, therefore, the 'Sarbat Khalsa' assemblies of the 18th century are not possible now".³⁰

But one thing continues as it was ordained by the founder of the Khalsa. The five 'beloved ones' can be chosen at any time and at any place by a small Sangat, or

30. Sher Singh : Social and Political Philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh, op. cit., p.233-234.

by a representative Sangat. These five continue to enjoy the powers conferred on the original 'five beloveds' by Guru Gobind Singh, when he created the Khalsa in the year 1699 at Anandpur Sahib.

The Form of Government

Sikhism believes that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. They wanted to establish a healthy democratic state. However, Sikhism believes that the ruling power should be placed in the hands of 'five persons'. Guru Nanak says, "Panch (the five) must be supreme in the organisation of power and only Panch should be considered as occupying the seat of supreme authority. Panch can give the real guidelines to the nation".³¹ In the Khalsa society, Guru Gobind Singh, while glorifying the 'Panj Pyaras', declared :

"I am ever present, unseen, in the collective deliberations of the Panches and there is no higher guidance on earth".³²

Sikhism is not in favour of the monarchical form of government. Instead, it has placed power in the hands of the Khalsa Panth. Guru Gobind Singh himself became a

31. Guru Granth Sahib, Japu, p.4, Vol.1, p.4.

32. Kapur Singh : Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh, op.cit., p.349.

part of the Khalsa. He turned the society into a theocratic state. As Gokal Chand Narang has pointed out "Gobind Singh turned Sikhism into theocracy. The whole nation had a living faith that it was under the special protection of God."³³ The leaders were elected on the basis of merit alone. The Guru believed in democratic equality among his followers. "In his system there were no privileges for the chiefs or the leaders. No leader could be regarded as fit to lead unless he was elected or accepted by the followers."³⁴ These were always chosen from amongst men of the best reputation in the place where they met.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh in the year 1708, the Sikhs, who were now without a personal leader, started the tradition of deciding matters concerning the Sikh society at the biennial meetings which took place mostly at the Akal Takht on the days of Baisakhi and Diwali. The decisions taken at these meetings, as already pointed out, were called 'Gurmata', and this tradition became very powerful in Sikh society. This was a good method to solve the problems of a leaderless nation.

'Gurmata' had to be made in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. The force of the Gurmata was such that

33. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit.,p.169.

34.Narang : Glorious History of Sikhism, New Delhi, 109.

nobody could dare to defy it. During the period from 1721 to 1805 all the matters of Sikh national interest were decided through 'Gurmata'.³⁵

In this form of government, the power of governing was inspired by the leading spirit of the Gurus and was based on plural executive, which has one advantage, namely, that it is a safeguard against absolutism of the executive. The leaders are elected by the Sangat by consensus and then the direction of every project is entrusted to them.

35. Narang, G.C. : Glorious History of Sikhs, op.cit., p.169.

CHAPTER IV

AN IDEAL MAN

The Sikh Gurus wanted to establish a healthy democratic state. They wanted to stir up higher faculties in the citizens of the ideal state, which they wanted to set up. They wanted that the citizens should be highly spiritual and above the materialistic thinking of the ordinary people.

Sikhs have such deep and genuine faith in their Gurus as is hardly found in other religious communities. They utter the word of 'Guru' at all times and consider serving him as the most meritorious act.

Hari Ram Gupta observes about Guru Gobind Singh :
"In the capacity of a leader the Guru gave light. He taught, enlightened, kindled, proclaimed human rights, and sowed enthusiasm. He was the greatest leader the Punjab had ever known since the advent of Islam."¹

Ideal Man

Sikhism lays down the qualities of an ideal man. In the Sikh way of life, ethics come very near the Platonic idea of 'the good'. One of the basic

1. Gupta, H.R. : History of Sikh Gurus, op.cit.,p.244.

characteristics of an ideal man in Sikhism is to lead a virtuous life. In some of the older Indian literature the term 'Guna' is also used to denote 'good qualities, virtues, merits, excellences'. In Sikhism 'Guna' is understood to mean 'good qualities', and 'Augun' evil traits. All Sikh Gurus have emphasised the importance of high virtues in Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak says :

"Nanaki, as many the vices there are in
man, so many are the chains round
his neck.

One removes vice with virtue : for virtue
is our only friend.

When one goes into the yond,
the vicious man is accepted not,
And is driven out, being bereft of the
instruction of the (true) Guru".²

Again, Guru Nanak says :

"Let thy mind be the farmer, good deeds
the farming, and thy
body the farm. And let effort (in the way
of God) irrigate thy farm.
Let the Lord's name be the seed,
and contentment the furrowing, and let

2. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sorath, p.595, Vol.2,p.577.

the fence be of humility
 And, if thou dost deeds of love,
 thy seed will sprout and fortunate
 will then be thy home
 O friend, Maya keeps not company with thee".³

There are certain cardinal virtues which a person must possess to become a real man and to attain spirituality. The general virtues which have been recognised and approved are wisdom⁴, truth⁵, contentment⁶, justice⁷, and courage.⁸ In Sikhism these are the virtues for the well-being of the whole world and for an ideal man. Guru Nanak further says that man should not feel discouraged if his virtues are not appreciated by others. Virtue is priceless.⁹

Truthfulness :

God is Truth and Truth is God.¹⁰ One makes true friendship of the Lord if one utters His true name.

3. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sorath, p.595, Vol.2, p.577.
4. Ibid., Rag Sri, p. 25, Vol.1, p.21.
5. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.27, Vol.1, p.30.
6. Ibid., Rag Gujri, p.595, Vol.II, p.577.
7. Ibid., Rag Maru, p.1106, Vol.1, p.1059.
8. Ibid., Shaloka (Kabir), p.1105, Vol.4,p.1058.
9. Ibid., Rag Maru, p.1087, Vol.4, p.1038.
10. Ibid., Japu, p.1, Vol.I,p.1.

If one tries to assess the value of a true man, it will not be easy to do so, because the jewel of a truthful heart is priceless.¹¹ Truth is the highest of all virtues but higher still is living in truth.¹² Whosoever considers God as Truth, he ultimately merges in God.¹³ Truth comes through submission to His will. Truth is continuous for ever. They who realised the truth were happy through all the four yugas.¹⁴ Those who practise truth in this world shall be considered truthful in the next world. Their truthful mind is absorbed in the true word. They remember the true one and practise truth.¹⁵ Everything that has been created by the True Lord is true and righteous. "Thy regions are true. Thy worlds are true. The material creations are true. The truthful person becomes Godlike when he is alive in this world and merges in Truth, i.e. God, when he leaves the world".¹⁶ Truth makes the life true and pure. Truth is the cure-all. It washes one clean of sins.¹⁷ Truth never gets old.¹⁸ Only pure-hearted persons can realise the truth and it is with the grace of

11. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.22, Vol.1, p.25.

12. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.62, Vol.I, p.58.

13. Ibid., Asht Padi, p.283, Vol.I, p.275.

14. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.54, Vol.I, p.52.

15. Ibid., Rag Asa, p.468, Vol.2, p.426.

16. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.62, Vol.1, p.58.

17. Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p.468, Vol.2, p.462.

18. Ibid., Rag Ramkali, p.955, Vol.3, p.912.

God that true men are saved from all difficulties and in all ages.¹⁹ They who practise truth remain in comfort throughout the four ages for they have stilled their ego and desires and have enshrined truth in their heart.²⁰

We may also observe another important aspect of this virtue. Guru Nanak declared that a person speaks the truth because love inspires him to do so.²¹ This brings to our mind the fact that a person who loves others would not like to deceive them. Truthfulness is thus linked with a person's love for his fellow-beings. As Hartman points out, "Sincere expression is good. One might accordingly think that the dispositional value of truthfulness is only a special instance of neighbourly love. A lie is in fact loveless. A lie has an element of selfishness in it. In truthfulness, there is transcendence of his ego."²²

2. Justice

Justice is the next great virtue of an ideal man. Truth is linked with justice. Only a true person can be just. All actions in the world should be based on truth

19. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.62, Vol.I, p.58.

20. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.55, Vol.I, p.52.

21. Ibid., Rag Parbhati, pp.1344-45, Vol.4, pp.1279-80.

22. Hartman, Nicolai, Ethics, London, 1951, p.280.

and justice. The virtue of justice is referred to in terms of social equality. The Sikh Gurus ensured equality of men by rejecting the caste system. The Gurus realised that justice without social equality was meaningless. Sikhism emphasizes that no class should be exploited by another class and every individual should get his rights without fear or favour.

The virtue of justice as conceived by the Sikh Gurus is of universal application. Justice is considered as higher than worship. It urges a person to defend the rights of others. Justice is a great virtue in Sikhism - even in the case of an enemy's property. The compiler of Prem Sumarag says that the same norm of justice should be applied to the property of the enemy even in war, and Sikhs should not plunder the enemy.²³

Bhai Gurdas says that during the three yugas, preceding the present one, the virtue of justice was universally practised. Cases were decided in an impartial and upright manner, irrespective of the persons involved in the case. He then laments that "in the present age justice is not administered in an impartial manner. At present only those can get a favourable decision who bribe for it".²⁴

23. Kahan Singh : Prem Sumarag, para 851.

24. Bhai Gurdas, Varan, Var. 1, Stanza 7, Amritsar, 1957.

According to Benjamin, justice is the excellence of the soul and injustice the defect of the soul.²⁵ Sikh Gurus believed that exploiting man is no less than being carnivorous.²⁶ A justice-loving man will not exploit others, even if he has an opportunity to do so.

Sikhism also explains justice in a legalistic sense. Bhai Kahan Singh has commented that justice is generally used in its legalistic sense and identified as a virtue of the ruler or the king. He says that in the dispensation of justice one should not give any undue favour to members of one's own religious or social group.²⁷ Giani Randhir Singh comments, "Before the Divine Being, the ruler would not be questioned about his worship or obedience but the primary enquiry would be about the state of justice in his domain. He would be asked as to who had to suffer the rigour of unjust pain. The ruler, therefore, ought to be vigilant to dispense justice carefully. He should always bear in mind and ensure that none under him unjustly persecutes the weak, or causes them any injury. The ruler must haul up the wrong doer and hand him over to the weak, so that whatever wrong the former has done to the latter, the same may be done to the former."²⁸

25. Benjamin Rand: The Classical Moralists, Boston, 1937, p.22.

26. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Malhar, p.1289, Vol.4, p.1230.

27. Kahan Singh: Prem Sumarag, op.cit., p.866.

28. Ibid., p.85.

Giani Randhir Singh further stresses that the above canon of justice ought to be applied in all cases, irrespective of the parties involved in any dispute. The case may be against the administrator's own son, brother, mother, wife or minister. But the administrators of justice ought not to give any weightage to the fact of himself being a close relation of the accused. He ought to decide the case in an impartial manner.²⁹ Guru Nanak has advocated the virtue of justice as the principal virtue of the ruler or the administrator.³⁰

The ruler also should subject himself to the same canon of law and justice. It means that the evils for which the ruler punishes the subjects should also be avoided by himself. In Sikhism justice is the motivating virtue of universal love. It enjoins on the rulers to respect the rights of others, non-exploitation of others, and equality. The virtue of justice guides humanity towards universal love and strengthens the moral forces of the community.

Contentment :

Contentment is an important virtue in Sikh ethics. All Sikh Gurus have stressed the importance of contentment.

29. Kahan Singh : Prem Sumarag, op.cit., p.85.

30. Ibid.

The Gurus have laid emphasis on three virtues in the first instance. Contentment is one of them: Sat, Santokh, Vicharo³¹ (Truth, Contentment, and Reflection).

A Sikh must remain contented in whatever circumstances he is placed. He must always bow before the will of God. He should have no private ambition.

A man not contented with his fate only multiplies his troubles and miseries. He should never compare himself with the more fortunate people. His mind should remain contented and this alone brings him joy and happiness. Peace can be attained only through contentment.

At more than one place, Guru Nanak emphasises the inter-relationship between contentment and 'Dharma' or the social order. In Japji, he calls Dharma that which holds men together. As the beads of a necklace are held together by the string, so men are held together by contentment. In the Var Asa, he calls contentment the chariot and Dharma the charioteer. Contentment is the first stage in the path of the seeker after God and is described in stanza 34 of Japji.

The cause of lack of contentment in a man may be traced to the presence of fear in him. The first fear

31. Guru Granth Sahib, Rāg Mandhavan, p.1429, Vol.4, p.1351.

in man is that he may not achieve success. This fear, and its adjunct complacency, are opposed to the virtue of contentment. In this connection Guru Ram Das says, "Make contentment the father. What are the qualities associated with an ideal father? What else, if not the persuasive encouragement to go ahead?"³² A father is a symbol of the power which removes fear. Thus contentment, according to the Gurus, is to provide peace of mind both in the event of success and failure. The second fear is the uncertainty of life hereafter. Guru Arjan Dev says, "The world is contented for the Guru has given the message of emancipation to all."³³ Contentment is thus also indicative of emancipation from fear or misgivings about the life hereafter. A contented person rises higher and continues making efforts without fear. Contentment is a disposition born of the honest conviction that one is doing one's best in a spirit of humility, and leaving the rest to God. Bertrand Russell supports the same position when he says, "Christianity taught submission to the will of God, and even for those who cannot accept this phraseology, there should be something of the same kind pervading all their activities."³⁴ The

32. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Gauri Furbi, p.172, Vol.I, p.163.

33. Ibid., Rag Sorath, p.629, Vol.2, p.607.

34. Bertrand Russell : The Conquest of Happiness, London, 1960, p.235.

attitude, therefore, should be that of doing one's best and leaving the result to God. Sikhism upholds this very view and attitude towards life.

Wisdom

Wisdom is an important condition for success in life. It is a fundamental virtue and plays a key role in human life for the attainment of other virtues. In a general sense, 'Gyan' (Knowledge) is wisdom. But other terms, such as 'meet', 'mun', 'budh', and 'vivek' are also used to denote wisdom. What is wisdom? Which knowledge should be considered as wisdom? These questions are important in order to understand the nature and scope of wisdom. Guru Nanak felt the need to explain wisdom as he understood it. He, therefore, takes up this question in Japji, which is the epitome of Guru Nanak's philosophy. The concept of wisdom is examined in great detail from various angles. He lays down three steps for the cultivation of wisdom, which deal with the various aspects of knowledge. The three steps are Suniye (hear), Manne (reflect) and Ek Dhyān (concentrate), assimilate and synthesise.

"Wisdom and knowledge are different things. One may have knowledge but still lack wisdom. Wisdom means an insight into the values which should govern one's

individual life and social life. It is a virtue which comes by meditation on moral ideals, and on the Name of God. So wisdom means moral attainments and refinement. Knowledge gives rise to ego and pride while wisdom teaches humility".³⁵

Guru Nanak defines wisdom and the wise in the following terms :

"The Pandit is well-read only if he reflects
on the Word all-too-spontaneously,
And churns his wisdom to find its quintessence
attaining to the Lord's name.
The egocentric sells his knowledge,
and poison he earns and eats
Yea! the unwise dwell not
on the Word and know
naught and realise naught.
The true wisdom is to know the
essence of the Word
through a pure mind.
Nanak! He alone is wise who
wears the necklace of the
Lord's name".³⁶

35. Gill, Pritam Singh : Heritage of Sikh Culture, op.cit., p.169.

36. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Ramkali, p.933, Vol.3, p.894.

Wisdom has always been of great value in the world. Civilizations which did not pursue wisdom went down and were destroyed, while those which sought sustenance from wisdom still survive.

Wisdom in the early stages of Christianity had come to acquire an increased moral connotation. There was already manifest a marked tendency to magnify the ethical and religious elements of wisdom which later came to acquire full recognition.³⁷ Another scholar supports this view and says that wisdom in the early stages of Christianity became more and more practical and the moral aim predominated.³⁸

Sikhism gives great importance to wisdom. Rare in the world is the man of wisdom who reflects on wisdom, and rarer is the wise man in this world who practises wisdom. But wisdom comes by the grace of Guru. As Guru Nanak says :

"The Guru is the sea (of wisdom):

The true Guru is the embodiment
of Truth.

(But), it is when one is of perfect destiny
that him one serves.

37. 'Wisdom' in the 'Dictionary of the Bible', ed. by James Hasting, Edinburgh, 1947, p.975.

38. Edward E. Nause, "Wisdom" in A New Standard Dictionary ed. by M.V.Jacolus, New York, 1936, p.765.

And, he alone knows (the Lord), to whom
 He of Himself reveals Himself.
 And, so by the Guru's grace, serves him He
 Awakened is the wisdom in one
 and one knows the essence of things
 And, through the Guru's grace departs
 one's ignorance.
 And one keeps awake night and day,
 and sees Him, the Truth."³⁹

Wisdom in Sikhism is linked with practice. A
 wise person should show his wisdom in his actions.

Some other aspects of wisdom also deserve attention.
 Wisdom should make a person open-minded and receptive.
 Sikhism declares that when man destroys his ego he becomes a
 wise man. Knowledge and self-examination are possible
 only when one has destroyed his ego.⁴⁰

The views of the Sikh Gurus regarding wisdom are
 of practical utility for enabling a person to develop
 his personality to the full. Open-mindedness alone is
 the correct attitude that enables a man to advance in
 knowledge and ultimately in wisdom.

39. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.364, Vol.2, p.355.

40. Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 356, Vol.2, p.347.

Courage

Courage is another great virtue in Sikhism. Without this virtue all the other virtues become worthless.

In relation to courage Guru Arjan Dev remarks :

"God has protected me and has made me fearless. I now enjoy the state of eternal bliss".⁴¹

Fearlessness and courage, according to Guru Nanak, are prime virtues of life. Guru Gobind Singh declares courage to be a virtue of the highest order. According to him, the brave and the benevolent attain the highest honour in the world.⁴² John Clark Archer observes in this context, "From the start, Guru Gobind Singh committed all the Sikhs to the exercise of arms, pledged them never to turn their back upon the enemy in a battle, and never to surrender".⁴³ "A true hero never leaves the battle-field even if he is cut into pieces".⁴⁴

It has, however, to be realised that courage as a virtue must, in the ultimate analysis, transcend the narrow interests of groups and nations, and must concern itself with the welfare and good of the whole mankind.

A true hero fights for 'dharma' and defends those who are oppressed.

41. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Dhanasri, p.675, Vol.3. p.648.

42. Guru Gobind Singh, Vachittar Natak, Chap.8, Verse 22.

43. Archer, John Clark : The Sikhs, Princeton, 1946, p.196.

44. Guru Granth Sahib, Shaloka (Kabir), p.1105, Vol.4, p.1058.

Following the example of Guru Nanak, later Sikh Gurus first tried their level-best to persuade the rulers of the time not to commit atrocities on the innocent people. This Christian virtue reached the highest level in the lives of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur (fifth and ninth Gurus) when they faced execution at the hands of the Mughal rulers. Their sacrifices are unparalleled in the history of any community. However, when a Sikh is convinced that there is no change of heart in the persecutor, he takes up the sword and fights against tyranny. One fails in one's moral duty if he lets a tyrant continue in his misdeeds.

Courage is a most essential quality of a leader who wants to protect society from injustice, oppression and tyranny, and enable the human race to live a life of honour.

Acting on the will of God

An ideal man must submit to and carry out the will of God. In Sikh theology the will of God is called His 'hukam'. What is the meaning of 'hukam'? Dr.S.S.Kohli says that 'hukam' is an Arabic word which means order of judgement of God. In the Quran it pertains to the order of God. In Muslim theology it includes the orders of the Prophet as well. With the coming of Muslims this word

was adopted in our language also.⁴⁵

In Guru Nanak's compositions it has acquired a special metaphysical meaning. Its original meaning in Islamic theology may be order or judgment, but its meaning in Guru Nanak's 'Japji' has no connection with its original meaning in which it has been used in the Quran.

'Hukam', in Guru Nanak's thought, means the principle which governs the movement of the universe and controls existence in the world. It is a constant, regular and continual principle which distinguishes it from the Islamic concept of 'hukam'.⁴⁶

The will of God is to guide mankind on the right path. Sikhism seeks to create a class of God-conscious people who would operate in the mundane world of phenomena with the object of transforming and spiritualising life into a higher and fuller life. God-conscious men are animated with an intense desire to do good in this world.⁴⁷

P.S. Gill comments, "Sikhism believes that the whole universe is being run by the will of God. He

45. Kohli, S.S. : Outlines of Sikh Thought, pp.45-46

46. Sikka, Ajit Singh : Facets of Guru Nanak's Thoughts, Ludhiana, 1975, p.76.

47. Ranbir Singh : Sikh Way of Life, New Delhi, 1969, p.84.

creates the sentient and non-sentient. His will ordains joys and pains of individuals. He bestows greatness on those whom He likes. Some have to struggle in life, but that too is His will".⁴⁸

God is the true King of the world. He commands as He wills. The following hymn says :

That command is good that pleases Thee,

The rest is fruitless prattle

Nanak! the true King seeks no counsel

(And does what He wills)

The rest is all vain,

for it fills the mind with evil and

Makes the body writhe in pain.⁴⁹

Kaviraj A.P.Roy comments : "The individual soul has no power of its own. It is controlled by laws. But if we deny any free will to the individual soul, there will be no ethics. Human will is a part of the universal will. Man, due to his limiting adjuncts, is free to exercise his will-power upto a certain limit. Free will is granted to him only according to his sincerity as to how much he abides by the will of God and exerts himself to attain perfection. Man's free will is operative so long

48. Gill, P.S. : Heritage of Sikh Culture, op.cit.,p.178.

49. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.17, Vol.1, p.20.

as he lives on the egoistic plane. God never interferes with the free will of man before he surrenders the self-will to the will of the Providence. When self-will is surrendered, it results in the transition of the self into the higher".⁵⁰

Guru Nanak compares a self-willed man with a deserted woman. She never enjoys the bed with her lord and is thus wasted away.⁵¹ Sikhism divides men into two kinds - 'Gurumukhs' and 'Manmukhs'. The former look to God, practise truth, and work for the welfare of the entire mankind. The latter practise deceit, falsehood and selfishness. An ideal man is always happy in the will of God and believes in the theory of predestination, as is shown in the following hymn :

Some blest are by the will of the giver;
Some lost in girdling the cycle ever,
All yea, all are subject to the will,
None, O none, beyond its pail
And he, who knows the will, doth feel
The I in him no more, no more.⁵²

50. Roy, A.P. : The Quest of the Infinite, Calcutta, 1958, p.260.

51. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.37, Vol.I, p.33.

52. Ibid., Japji, p.2, Vol.1, p.2.

CHAPTER V

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND DUTIES

Every democratic government grants fundamental rights to its people, but they are denied in monarchical or aristocratic forms of government. It is essential that fundamental rights granted by a government are recognised by the society, otherwise they have no meaning. Sikh polity regards it as the foremost duty of a state to develop the personality of every citizen, and it grants certain fundamental rights to the people to enable them to develop their personality to the full.

Regarding these rights, Gill comments, "Now-a-days, fundamental human rights are incorporated in the constitutions of democratic countries and they occupy a very important place there. Every government is legally bound to grant these rights. The following are considered to be the chief fundamental rights.

1. Right to life.
2. Right to property.
3. Right of expression
4. Political Rights
5. Freedom of conscience .
6. Right to resist."¹

1. Gill, P.S. Trinity of Sikhism, op.cit., p.250.

1. Right to Life

The foremost duty of the state is to guarantee the security of life of all its citizens.² The right of life promotes social cohesion by enabling each individual to shoulder his responsibility collectively.

It is necessary to establish a peaceful social order so that individuals can lead a free life without fear. The state is responsible if law is violated and there is unrest and chaos in society. It is the duty of the government to take necessary steps to save weaker people from oppression by the stronger sections.

2. Right to Property

Property is a negative right in Sikhism and the Sikh Gurus condemned acquisitiveness and greed and stressed on equality of man. In fact, they always favoured the poor classes. "My stand is with the lowly. What have I to do with the rich and the vainly great?"³ However, Sikhism also recognises that property is essential for the existence of the individual and the society. But one must work hard to acquire property and it should be utilized for common development. To snatch the labour of others is a sin and acquiring wealth and property for

2. Gill, P.S. : Heritage of Sikh Culture, op.cit.,p.163.

3. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Gujri, p.504, Vol.II, p.496.

self is immoral, and a hinderance to the development of society and the nation. Sikhism believes that all the people should be given equal opportunities to acquire property. If a handful of persons possess large wealth, while the overwhelming majority is reduced to poverty, then the latter class is exploited by the former. Sikhism condemns this exploitation. It also gives equal right to all the citizens to the state property.⁴ Sikh Gurus have also instructed that one must give to the poor and help the needy within one's limits. The divine qualities of mercy and generosity have been highly commended. The service to be rendered to others should be selfless otherwise ego will make the whole endeavour fruitless. People have been forbidden by the Gurus from acquiring wealth and property through wrong means.

Sikhism recognises the right to private property, but the lust to acquire more and more wealth and property is forbidden as it is a sin.

3. Right of Expression

Man is born with a free will. The freedom of human will should be allowed to continue throughout his life. This is the true way to enable every individual to develop

4. Guru Granth Sahib, Shaloka, p. 590, Vol.2, p. 572.

5. Ibid. Rag Dhanasri, p.676, Vol.3, p.694.

his personality and establish a strong nation. Suppression of opinion in any form will prevent the development of a healthy society or a strong nation. All opinions, whether in the sphere of religion, morality or politics, should be allowed to be expressed freely. Sikh Gurus considered three main categories under this head :

- (a) Freedom of expression against political oppression.
- (b) Freedom of expression against social inequality.
- (c) Freedom of expression against religious persecution and bigotry.

(a) Freedom of expression against political oppression

Sikhism allows every citizen to express himself against political oppression. Sikh Gurus themselves exercised this right. Guru Nanak condemned the ruler and ruling class of his times. He openly denounced the tyranny of the Lodhi rulers in the following words :

"Kings are butchers
Cruelty their knife,
Dharma, or the sense of duty,
has taken wings and vanished."⁶

Guru Nanak never spared the rulers for their unrighteous deeds :

6. Guru Granth Sahib, Pauri, p. 145, Vol.1, p.137.

"Greed and sin together are
 the Raja and Mehta
 Falsehood is the Shiqdar
 Lust is the Naib to give counsel;
 They all conspire together."⁷

These lines show clearly that Guru Nanak freely and fearlessly condemned the contemporary rulers for their misrule. In the words of Gokal Chand Narang, "After centuries of subjection, Nanak was the first among the Hindus to raise his voice against tyranny and oppression."⁸

(b) Freedom of expression against social inequality

Sikhism believes that all human beings are equal without any distinction of caste, colour, creed or sex. Sikhism condemns any privileges given to any group of people in the name of caste. God has no caste.⁹ There is no caste in the next world, and caste is of no account there.¹⁰ Real honour and caste are bestowed by God.¹¹

7. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p. 468, Vol.2, p. 460.

8. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit.,p.25.

9. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Parbhathi, p.1328, Vol.4, p.1266.

10. Ibid., Rag Asa, p. 349, Vol.2, p.338.

11. Ibid., Rag Parbhathi, p. 1331, Vol.4, p.1267.

So, in Sikh society, all the members enjoy equal social rights. There is no class conflict. The position of women is considered equal to that of men. There is freedom to express oneself freely against social injustice.

(c) Freedom of expression against religious persecution

Sikhism believes that everybody should be free to choose any religion he likes. No religion should be spread forcibly by the state or by any other agency. Sikh Gurus did not accept Islam and opposed forcible conversion of the Hindus to Islam by the rulers. Sikhism is against religious bigotry and religious hatred.

Emperor Aurangzeb offered Guru Tegh Bahadur his freedom and great honour if he accepted Islam - death being the alternative - but the Guru remained firm. He even warned Aurangzeb that his empire would perish. Guru Tegh Bahadur was put to death. It shows the great value the Gurus attached to the freedom of conscience. Similarly, Sikh Gurus never imposed their religion on other people.

4. Political Rights

The idea of the Sikh Gurus to establish an ideal state was based on the religio-moral plane. This concept of state has transformed the Sikhs from a religious society

into a political community and a new socio-political order was created out of this ideology. So the citizens of an ideal state were granted the political rights on the basis of equality, liberty and justice without any discrimination on the grounds of creed, caste, class, race, sex and social position. Every citizen has the right to be elected to any post created by the state.

5. Freedom of Conscience

Sikhism believes that the human soul is a part of the eternal soul; therefore, freedom of human soul is essential to develop it properly. The deepest meaning of freedom is to expand and grow towards perfection by the law of one's own nature, i.e. Dharma.¹²

It is obvious that freedom of conscience is more important than anything else in life. Sikh Gurus always followed their inner voice and never supported the unrighteous actions of the rulers. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, accepted death, but did not act against the voice of his conscience. Emperor Jahangir, believing Guru Arjan Dev to be involved in political rebellion against him, summoned him to his court. Complaints against the sacred book had been received by the emperor

12. Ghosh, Aurobindo : Human Cycle, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1949, p.224.

and Guru Arjan Dev was ordered to erase all passages that were against Muslim doctrines. But the Guru refused to do so, declaring that his object was to spread the truth. He said, "If in pursuance of this object this perishable body is destroyed, I shall regard it a great good fortune."¹³ On refusing to submit, the Guru was handed over to his enemies, who subjected him to terrible tortures, but he remained firm to his last breath. He died as the result of the tortures inflicted on him.

The examples provided by the Sikh Gurus teach us to maintain the liberty of soul at all costs and never to submit to unrighteousness and persecution. As the human soul is a part of the eternal soul, it has been said, "Mind! Thou art the image of the Light, recognise thy essence."¹⁴ Sikhism grants the right of freedom of conscience to all the people, without any distinction whatsoever.

6. Right to Resist

Sikhism stresses on the idea that the king belongs to the state, not that the state belongs to the king. Political authorities are to provide facilities to make the life of the people comfortable and happy and not to crush their rights.

13. Dorothy Field : The Religion of the Sikhs, op.cit.,p.19

14. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.441, Vol.2, p.436.

Sikhism lays great emphasis on the character of the rulers, as also of the citizens.

J.S. Bains has given the views of Guru Gobind Singh regarding the authority of the ruler and his role, in the following words :

"Guru Gobind Singh believed in the divine origin of authority, but he had sufficiently made it clear that while the person in authority exercises this power as a mandate from God, in order that he may continue to enjoy this boon he must always act according to the dictates of God. If he does not abide by God's mandate, if he annoys the weak, if he plunders the people, if he engages in activities prejudicial to general welfare, if he puts the fulfilment of material pleasures as the prime motive of life, and if he digresses from religious and moral teachings and from the principles of abstract justice, he incurs the wrath of God who may then deprive him of his position and bestow the same on some one else."¹⁵

Sikh Gurus always wanted righteous performance by the rulers. Sikhism urges upon the citizens to stand up against the government if it is not functioning on the right lines. Sikhs have been enjoined upon to throw off unjust and unrighteous kings.

15. Bains, J.S. : Sikhism and Indian Society, Simla, p.129.

The Duties of Citizens in an Ideal State

Only ideal citizens can build an ideal state. As the state grants fundamental rights to its citizens, so, in their turn, citizens have some responsibilities towards the state, namely, to make it an ideal state and to make the nation strong. Both are correlative conceptions. Actions of the people make or mar the future of a nation. So, performance of their duties by the citizens towards the state is as essential as the granting of fundamental rights to its citizens by a state. Some important duties of citizens are as below :

(a) Service towards the Guru

In Sikh scriptures great importance has been attached to the service of the Guru. A question may be asked as to who this Guru is, whose service has been stressed so often in Sikhism. The question at first sight may seem baffling, but it will not pose any problem if we understand the concept of 'Guru' in Sikhism.

The Guru in Sikhism is not any particular living Guru, but it is held that the true Guru's 'word' is the soul of the Guru and the holy congregation is the 'body' of the Guru. Obviously, therefore, the service of the congregation is the service of the Guru.

All the members of the community have a deep

faith in the Guru. He is the spiritual guide of the community. The teaching of Sikhism binds the Guru as well as the followers to each other, as Guru Gobind Singh says :

"Hall, Gobind Singh

He is the Guru and also the disciple."

Sikhism preaches that one should struggle for a higher life and this aim can be realised only through the grace of the Guru, who is a guide in the journey of life.

When a person is imprisoned in his mind and leads his life without the guidance of the Guru, life becomes dark. It is a life of sorrow, misery, distress and death. But the grace of the Guru enlightens and transforms the soul, and joy, prosperity, freedom and immortality are earned by the persons :

"Sublime is one's state if one cultivates
the merits of God.

Yea, through the Guru's word becomes manifest
the jewel of His name.

Rid of Duality, one is attuned to God's name.

O Lord! lead me to the Guru that

I may see thy visions".¹⁶

16. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Basant, p.1170, Vol.4,p.1120.

Sikhism believes that the spirit of God binds all the human beings through the Guru :

"The Guru is God, unfathomable and mysterious;
Yea, through the Guru's service, one knows
the mysteries of the three worlds;
Yea, the beneficent Guru himself blesses
and one attains to the unfathomable and
mysterious God."¹⁷

Service to the Guru purifies the soul and encourages the mind to do right deeds in life :

"They, whom the Guru has appointed, them no
one can degrade.
For, in their hearts, they treasure the
Lord's name".¹⁸

Human wisdom is worthless, if man does not cherish the Guru. He will be found woefully deficient and will not have peace of mind.

Going to the Guru's place is the best :

"There is no other pilgrimplace like the
Guru's,
For, the Guru is the pool of contentment
and compassion".¹⁹

17. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Bhairo, p.1125, Vol.4, p.1075.

18. Ibid., Rag Sri, p.17, Vol.I, p.21.

19. Ibid., Rag Parbhati, p.1328, Vol.4, p.1265.

Through the Guru the people learn to love each other and they earn salvation :

"And meeting the Guru, he becomes as if
the philosopher's stone (to transmute others)
And his light merges in the light of God".²⁰

Sikhism believes that the Guru is appointed by God himself. The mind of the Guru has been illumined by God and he acquires God-like qualities and virtues. He gives up egocentric tendencies and adopts God-centric actions and he is linked up with an inexhaustible source of power.

(b) Duty to defend the nation and Dharma

Sikhism raises the mind of man to great heights and thus refines the entire society through spiritual and moral education. But ultimately the Sikh society had to be transformed into a political entity in order to safeguard it against political and religious persecution. The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, felt it necessary to impart physical training alongwith spiritual upliftment, to enable the society to survive in a world which faces wars every day.

20. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Asa, p.421, Vol.2, p.418.

S.S. Kohli has commented :

"The king or the state should raise an army of loyal warriors which may be able to defend the country in an emergency. According to Adi Granth, that person can be called a warrior who fights for Dharma and who will not leave the battlefield, even if he is cut into bits".²¹

According to the circumstances prevalent at that time, the sixth Guru had to start imparting military training to his disciples in addition to spiritual preaching. Regarding this action of the Guru, Cunningham has commented :

"The general disposition of the martial apostle led him to rejoice in the companionship of a camp, in the danger of war and in the excitement of the chase. Nor is it improbable that the policy of the temporal Chief mingled with the feelings of an injured son and with the duties of a religious guide, so as to shape his acts to the ends of his ambition although that may not have aimed at more than a partial independence under the mild supremacy of the son of Akbar."²²

Some religions of the world did not adopt the method

21. Kohli, S.S. : Sikh Ethics, op.cit., p.58.

22. Cunningham, J.D. : The History of the Sikhs, op.cit., p.53.

of self-defence with the sword and they depended upon supernatural agencies to defend them. But Sikhism learnt a lesson from the destruction of these religions. So Guru Hargobind felt the necessity to transform the Sikh community into a militant force.

Cunningham gives an estimate of the fighting force of Guru Hargobind :

"He had a stable of eight hundred horses, and three hundred mounted followers were constantly in attendance upon him, and a guard of sixty matchlock men secured the safety of his person."²³

Guru Gobind Singh further strengthened the martial spirit amongst the people. He prayed to God :

"O, the great Lord, grant me this boon only that from noble deeds I may never turn away. I may fear not him, whom I face in fight. Certain be my victory. And this be instilled in my mind : my desire be to sing thy praises when the period of my life draws to a close. I may fight my foes valiantly and die a heroic death".

23. Cunningham, J.D. : The History of the Sikhs, op.cit., p.53.

Guru Gobind Singh encouraged the people to fight for Dharma. He even sent out his two sons from the besieged fortress of Chamkaur Sahib to the battle-field to fight the enemy and lay down their lives for Dharma and righteousness. The Sikhs, who were present there, protested and said that they would not allow the light of the Guru's house to be extinguished as long as even a single drop of blood was left in their bodies. The Guru told them that all the Sikhs were his sons. "If others could fight and die for the sake of Dharma, let my sons also die".

The idea of the Sikh Gurus was not to conquer a territory and establish a kingdom of their own. They only wanted to defend Dharma and the rights of the people.

The aim of the Khalsa was to liberate society from the tyranny of the enemies of peace. Guru Gobind Singh himself fought against the enemy and he set the highest example of courage and bravery and encouraged the people to lay down their lives for national defence.

"The Guru founded the national militia in the form of the Khalsa for the defence of the country and protection of the weak and the harmless. The Khalsa was fed on the spirit on chivalry and fearlessness and, even as an infant, was set to play not with brittle

toys but with all steel swords and muskets. Thus did the Khalsa grow and attain maturity - an all-steel and invincible soldier-saint of the immortal force. With the rising of the Khalsa, the long, dark night of ruthless persecution and inhuman treatment of the Hindus by the Mughal rulers and their officers came to an end."²⁴

The martial ideas of Guru Gobind Singh did not mean a departure from the old ideas preached by Guru Nanak and his successors. The Sikhism of Guru Gobind Singh remained in essence the same as was initiated by Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh also believed, like his predecessors, in the Almighty, the supreme creator, who was eternal and immortal. But Sikhs as a religious and social community needed the martial spirit and force to defend themselves against unrighteous forces. So Guru Gobind Singh started giving military training to the people to enable them to fight, and considered the use of weapons necessary.

The Sikh Gurus stressed that one should fight for certain principles. Gokal Chand Narang appreciates the spirit of fighting of the tenth Guru. The Guru was

24. Jaggi, Rattan Singh : Sikhism and Indian Society, p.159.

fighting for certain principles, and those who fight for principles do not measure the chances of success or failure.²⁵ The aim of the Sikh Guru was to defend democracy and human rights.

It is obvious that Sikhism considers, as the first and foremost duty of a citizen, to defend the nation. Otherwise, it is a violation of the mandate of God. Guru Nanak expressed his views about patriotism. To him, patriotism meant disinterested love, sacrifice, enlightenment, spiritualism and emancipation of one's country through the belief that the country is one's own big home and salvation of life cannot be attained without its cultivation. In the words of Prof. Harnam Dass, "Guru Nanak made patriotism or his country's love and service, respect and spiritualisation as a sacred creed of his life. He surely wanted to raise his motherland in the values of Nam, wisdom, devotion, Karamyoga, Dharma, humanism, spiritual socialism and complete national emancipation."²⁶

Sikh Gurus gave the powerful message that the use of the sword was essential to defend the independence and integrity of the nation and all the higher values of life, when all other means had failed.

25. Narang, G.C. : Transformation of Sikhism, op.cit., p.159.

26. Harnam Dass: 'Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Divine Life', quoted by Deol in his Social and Political Philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh, p.50.

(c) Service of Humanity

Sikhism lays great emphasis on the service of mankind. Such service inspires a sense of fellowship and oneness in society, and creates love for all.

Service can be of different types, e.g. serving the poor and the needy, giving money in charity, helping a person in distress, or saving some one in danger. The Guru ordained the Sikhs to help the needy, contribute to the free kitchen so that the poor are fed, serve food, and clean utensils in the Langar, dust the shoes of the Sangat, and contribute to the fund maintained for the welfare of the community. The spirit of service produces humility. It makes men forget their social status and they cease to think in terms of high or low, rich or poor.

The service of humanity is considered in Sikhism above everything else. "If we want to get a seat in the court of God, we should dedicate ourselves to the service of the people in this world."²⁸

28. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.26, Vol.I, p.29.

CHAPTER VI

Contribution of Sikhism to National Polity

The fundamental principles of Sikh religion are freedom and fraternity. Sikhism provides equality to all human beings without distinction of caste, creed, class or sex. It provides a dynamic gospel for the people to develop an ideal state and teaches the lesson of nationalism. Even above nationalism, it teaches universal brotherhood. With this spirit Sikhism exhorts the citizens to have a strong and ideal state on this earth.

Society is the soul of the state. Only a developed society can form a strong state - a society which is above the considerations and narrow divisions of castes, religions and economic classes. There is need of harmony in society. An ideal state is the friend of the people, and provides equal opportunities to all citizens to develop themselves to the maximum. Sikhism believes that human life has a definite purpose on this earth. The purpose of this life is to attune it to the universal spirit. Man has a free will, but generally he remains busy in materialistic pursuits as per his free will. But Sikhism takes him towards higher levels. His free will is inferior to the universal will of the Creator. The

universal will puts man on the right path. Sikhism urges people to submit to the universal will and stresses that all the citizens should work collectively for the progress of mankind as a whole and not act according to their individual wills.

Sikhism strengthens the moral character of the people. It believes that without moral character man cannot travel on the path of righteousness or Dharma. The activities of citizens should not be confined to physical pleasures only. As the state is the handiwork of God on the earth, so our object should be to elevate the state morally. Morality is linked with the beauty of the soul as it is said that God is Truth, Beauty, Consciousness and Bliss. Sikhism stresses certain points to encourage national integration in an ideal state, and educates the citizens to do their best for the state. In the words of Deol, "Guru Nanak not only condemns imperialism in various fields, but also gives out his own scheme for national emancipation, which can be summarised as under :

1. Unity of Hindus and Muslims and others.
2. Emancipation and betterment of women.
3. Removal of untouchability and caste-system.
4. Replacing the system of capitalism and imperialism by spiritualism, communism and democratic socialism.

5. Village-uplift work.
6. Vigorous dissemination of knowledge and spread of education.
7. Removal of poverty and unemployment.
8. Elevation of the fallen and the downtrodden to freedom and humanism.
9. Emphasis on the dignity of labour.
10. Contemplation of the 'Name of God' and sewa (service) on national and mass scale.
11. Making the creed of the saint-soldiers as the national faith of India.
12. Stress on the practical belief of Fatherhood of God, Brotherhood of Man and Motherhood of Nature.
13. Removal of rituals, superstitions , evil manners and prejudices.
14. Removal of religious hypocrisy, political dishonesty, social injustice and economic exploitation.
15. Building of sound health and physical vigour.
16. Equal opportunity for all on spiritual basis.
17. Propagation of divine life on universal basis.
18. Contribute in a practical manner to the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth".¹

All the peace-loving countries and political thinkers with advance thinking endorse the above ideas of Guru Nanak in the modern world. These are similar to

1. Deol, G.S. : Social and Political Philosophy of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

the Directive Principles of the state policy incorporated in the Constitution of India for the healthy development of our society and our country. We find following features in Sikhism to bring about national integration :

- I. Creation of a casteless society.
- II. Creation of a classless society.

I. Casteless Society

In Sikhism all the human beings are considered equal without any distinction of caste, creed or class. Sikhism preaches that God is the father of the entire mankind and all the people of the world are bound to each other by the ties of universal brotherhood.

(a) Oneness of God

"He, the only potter, has made all vessels from His light, the light of the three worlds".² All the citizens in the state should have equal status. All should work for national integration and development. Divisive and separatist forces have no place in an ideal state. All the citizens should feel bound to obey the Lord collectively. Sikhism tries to develop the general will of the people towards a strong, constructive and healthy public opinion aimed at the development of the state without creating any

2. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.62, Vol.I., p.58.

sort of friction based on difference of views, creeds etc. So, all the citizens should have firm faith in the oneness of God.

Dr. Hari Ram Gupta comments :

"Nanak's religion consisted in the love of God, love of man, and love of godly living. Nanak's God was the true lord, creator, unborn, self-existent, immortal, omnipresent. He is an ocean of mercy, the friend of man, the healer of sinners, cherisher of the poor and the destroyer of sorrows. He is wise, generous, beautiful and bountiful. He is the father and the mother of all human beings and takes care of them. To Nanak, this relationship appeared as between husband and wife. A son cannot be the constant companion of his father, but a faithful wife cannot remain away from her spouse. This position also raised the status of women. True devotion, complete surrender of self and thought, constant repetition of the 'Name' as opposed to mechanical ritualism, would enable an individual to realise God. God can be attained by repeating His name continuously. Without Satnam (The True Name) nobody can get salvation. Name signified worship and devotion to God and feeling and realising His presence at all places and at all times. Nanak thus established deep spiritual unity between man and God."³

3. Gupta, H.R. : 'Guru Nanak' (Article) quoted by Deol, G.S., in his Social and Political Philosophy of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh, op.cit., p.19.

(b) No low and no high

Sikhism considers that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. No one is high or low. Even kings are ordinary beings in this universe. All the citizens are equal in the state. All have equal rights and duties. Greatness does not come by having a high post in some government office, but one can be great by rendering service to the people. Kings and high officials in the state are punished by God for their bad performance. Gurbani says :

"The kings indulge in pleasures and gather nothing
but the poison of Maya,
and they crave for more and more,
and usurp what is not their due.
They trust not even their sons and women,
Such is their love".⁴

According to Sikhism, all the citizens, whether of low or high status, are equal before the law. All must perform their duties toward the state based on morality.

(c) No caste-distinction

Sikhism condemns the caste system. In an ideal state people of all castes should have one and the same

4. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sarang, p.1245, Vol.4, p.1190.

motto of life, namely to perform good deeds. People of all castes must work jointly for the development of the state.

"What merit is in caste? Know thou the truth:
Of whatever caste one may be, who tastes
the poison will die".

Caste has no role to play in the state. All citizens have one caste, which is humanity. The nation should be the first and foremost for all citizens. God never rewards men on caste basis but deeds are more important :

"God minds not our caste or birth,
So one must find the House of Truth".⁵

Sikhism never makes any distinction between citizens on the basis of high or low castes. The centuries-old institution of caste was rooted out and it was preached that the state belonged to every citizen - whether he was of a high caste or a low caste.

We give below an example of democratic principle amongst the Sikhs. In the thick of a battle being fought by Guru Gobind Singh against the Mughal army, one of his

5. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Parbhati, p.1330, Vol.4, p.1266.

followers, Bhai Kanhaiya, had gone forth serving water and giving aid to the wounded. A complaint was made to the Guru against him by a newcomer that he was serving water to friends and foes alike. The Guru called Bhai Kanhaiya to his presence and enquired about the charge. Bhai Kanhaiya bowed to the Master and said, "Lord! ever since I touched thy lotus feet, I do not differentiate between man and man. All men are equal in the sight of God. Thou hast so enlightened my eyes that I see no other but the all-pervading Divine Spirit everywhere and in all. I serve no other but thee. I give water to none but thee, O Master".

Sikhism is the religion of the people, for the people, and by the people. This religion is based entirely on the principles of democracy. These principles are the core of religion and they should be followed by the citizens of the state. Sikh Gurus fought for these principles. They never fought against any religion but they fought to liberate humanity from oppression and tyranny. In view of this, Sikhism always opposes hinderance created by distinctions of high and low castes. Sikhism gives the message of national integration.

II. Classless Society

Economics is the greatest single factor in the world for creating class-conflicts amongst the people.

The world is divided on the basis of haves and have-nots. Communism has banned the right to private property, in view of the fact that it leads to class-conflict and provides the ground for the exploitation of the weaker sections by the stronger sections of society. Socialism stands for collective organisation of the community in the interest of the mass of the people through common ownership and collective control of the means of production and exchange. Western countries believe in capitalism. They allow acquisition of private property without any limit.

However, Sikhism offers a better deal to the people. In Sikhism, private property is not disallowed. But all the property belongs to all the citizens equally. One must earn as much as one can with honesty. But to snatch the fruits of the labour of others is strictly prohibited by the Sikh Gurus, and collecting of unlimited wealth is also prohibited by them.

"The wealth belongeth to all commonly,
God's benevolence is great and is
beyond description. He is the great
giver who gives all and counts nothing".⁶

6. Guru Granth Sahib, Japji, p.5, Vol.1, p.7.

Sikhism does not approve of domination of one class by another :

"Foolish and unwise are they who seek to rule over the others".⁷

Sikhism stresses that worldly lust is harmful and leads to distress in life. "If one is not content, and makes for more, then the mercurial mind wastes us away, for greed is a dark prison-house, and sins are the fetters round one's feet".⁸

Sikhism enjoins that all the property should be utilized collectively by all the citizens and used collectively for the benefit of mankind :

"He alone, O Nanak, knows the way,
Who earns with the sweat of his brow,
And shares it with the others".⁹

Sikhism exhorts that people must be patriots and they should love their nation. They should spare no effort in rendering service to humanity. They should be

7. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Basant, p.1169, Vol.4, p.1119.

8. Ibid., Rag Basant Hindol, p. 1190.Vol.4, p. 1141.

9. Ibid., Rag Sarang, p. 1245, Vol.4, p.1191.

lovers of justice and righteousness. Class system is a threat to society. Sikhism upholds and works on the principles of economic democracy.

Sikhism stresses that life on this earth is real and it is not an illusion. Sikhism gives moral education and high ideas for the development of the individual and the society and the whole of mankind.

The thoughts contained in the Gurbani are logical and their real meanings can be understood without any difficulty by an awakened soul. The message that comes to the mind is "Anhad Shabd". The Sikh Gurus uttered their Bani in a state of meditation. The Bani removes the desire for sensual pleasures and urges man to think rightly and do rightly. One overcomes attachment with worldly things and is urged to think in terms of development of the entire human race. He rises above personal feelings. In the following stanza there is powerful perception of life and it urges man to be detached from the materialistic world and makes him a righteous thinker and do good deeds towards society, state and community, and not merely live an egoist life :

"He, whose plants are we, He, whose garden
is (this world),
Names He (also) the trees according to
their fruit.

So does a man flow as his mind be
and so does he get the fruit, as is his destiny.
What he sows, he also reaps."¹⁰

Further, Sikhism enlightens the human mind with the perception of the universal spirit and man gives up arrogance and pride, self-aggrandisement and conflict. He follows the central ideal of oneness of God. The hymns of Sikh Gurus are a source of joy, and they strengthen the human soul. Man develops the moral sense and the mind acts on moral principles. Sikhism gives the message of universal love, service to mankind, equality of all human beings and high moral and ethical principles - with God constantly in his mind.

10. Guru Granth Sahib, Rag Sri, p.26, Vol.I, p.29.

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

The Sikh spirit that moved the Indian society for about 240 years, worked as a redeemer and gave humanitarian and idealist direction to the Indian society. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, and his successors gave the message, through precept and practice, that the Lord resides in every heart and every human soul is a part of the eternal soul. They preached that 'Nam-simran' is enormously more valuable to provide moral and spiritual courage to man in his troubles and adversities throughout his life.

Sikhism undertook to regenerate a downtrodden society which was facing grave social exploitation, religious persecution and political atrocities and further to develop it into a political community that could enjoy liberty of conscience, thought, expression and worship, and could exist as an independent political entity. The development of the community was completed in two phases.

In the first phase, Sikhism reformed the society and reorganised it on the basis of equality of all human beings. It condemned the concept of low and high in society. The authority of kings as divine authority was not accepted and kings were declared ordinary creations of God as everybody else in the universe. Sikhism

preached the doctrine that in the temple of God everyone was equal. In the second phase Sikhism transformed the community that was fully developed on the social level into a political and militant entity. The community that had been facing religious persecution and political oppression stood up to face its persecutors and save itself from total destruction.

Social Reform

The teachings of the Sikh Gurus continuously inspired the people and encouraged them to oppose political and religious tyranny, and undertook to raise the moral and spiritual levels of man's consciousness and open the path of spiritual evolution. The people were exhorted that moral and religious consciousness was necessary for social development and morality was the basis of spiritual advancement.

The first doctrine of Sikhism relating to individual human life is that human life is created with some purpose and that it is not merely accidental. Man should lead a life free from 'haume' (i.e. ego). Man should perform good deeds, as bad deeds degrade him from the human order, and such a person finds no place in the court of the Lord. A true man purifies his heart and his soul enjoys bliss when he worships God with love in his heart and the

attachment to worldly pleasures is ultimately wiped out. This teaching has exercised tremendous influence on the conduct of man in society. It has helped man to develop fine virtues in him and these virtues have helped him to grow and fulfil his mission. These virtues are : contentment, humility, restraint on passions, mercy on living beings, purity of mind and body, search for the self and higher soul, equality of man and woman, and service of humanity. Every man was enabled to lead his life in society as its equal member as well as an equal member of humanity.

Chapter two deals with the emancipation of women. Females who constitute half the portion of humanity were assigned an inferior position by the male section in the middle ages. The Sikh Gurus stressed that man is incomplete without woman, our birth is from woman and human race will end without woman. Women are an equal part of humanity and next to God we are indebted to woman for our existence. Man is attached to the world through her only. So the shackles binding Indian women were broken and women were placed on an equal footing with men in all spheres - domestic, social, political, religious, etc.

According to chapter three, the Sikh Gurus presented to mankind a practical religion. Through the Adi Granth they preached universalism. They rejected the authority

of the Vedas, Shastras and Puranas and laid greater emphasis on the oneness of God. They reformed the society by abolishing rites, rituals and customs and the worship of thousands of gods and goddesses. Under the inspiration of the preachings of the Gurus, the people shook off the torpor of ages and a tremendous amount of zeal and enthusiasm was generated. A new society was established which was free from castes and ritualism. This new society was both humanitarian and idealistic. But this reformed society was only spiritually developed, and it did not achieve the heroic spirit to fight against the tyranny and bigotry of cruel and unjust rulers.

As per Chapter four the 10th Guru felt that the absence of moral courage would lead to chaos and ruin. The Mughal political system was corrupt and it proved a great curse and caused moral degradation of society. People became morally weak as a result of the tyranny and injustice practised by Mughal imperialism. The society created by Sikhism was numerically incompetent to face the unrighteous rule of the mighty Mughals. This courage was provided by Guru Gobind Singh who created a new society called the Khalsa, and a new spirit was planted in the hearts of the ordinary people. Even a small group could face a mighty power with physical, moral and spiritual courage. The downtrodden people were

tired of life due to the tyranny of the Mughal rulers. They were inspired and awakened by this newly created spirit in Khalsa society. The Sikhs exhibited boldness of spirit by refusing to submit to a powerful but tyrannical government. The aim of raising the Khalsa society was to bring about the spiritual evolution of mankind, and to evolve a humanitarian religion in universal terms, and human beings were endowed with an amazing capacity to bear untold sufferings and to be ready to make supreme sacrifices by wielding the sword against the aggressor, howsoever powerful the enemy might be. The songs of the Gurus stirred higher emotions and opened the minds to the reverberations of dynamic, mystic life, and the people became fearless. It was a great miracle. The community was transformed into a new nation. The spirit of heroism spread and the nation was transformed into a flashing sword. The dead soul of the nation revived and Guru Gobind Singh brought to culmination the process of regeneration which had been started by the founder of Sikhism and pursued by his successors. The nation became unsurpassed in deeds of heroism and unexcelled in acts of chivalry.

According to Chapter five Sikhism condemned the life of an ascetic and preached that the householder was the pivot of society. He gets opportunities for social, mental

and spiritual growth. Devotion to God was not incompatible with the performance of worldly duties. This preaching of the Gurus gave peace of mind to worldly people and they rose to spiritual heights. The half dead was transformed into life, matter into spirit. The worldly people were told to follow the path of the Gurus and they were rescued from frustration and fear. The people started making efforts to lead a better life as householders rather than adopt the life of an ascetic for attaining emancipation.

Thus, in the first part of this thesis, it has been shown that the Sikh Gurus established a unique kind of society that was based upon high moral and ethical principles. This society believes in oneness of God and considers all religions as different paths leading to one and the same ultimate destination. But the Sikh Gurus considered that the community would remain incomplete until and unless it was liberated from foreign rule and to fulfil this object it was necessary to transform the society into a political and militant force. In view of this the Gurus developed the spirit to have political freedom. They wanted to create an egalitarian society which could fight against oppression of all kinds. This society was to be organised on democratic principles. The first few Gurus planted the germs of

nationalism in order to create a community of self-respecting people out of a down-trodden society.

Political Development

The Sikh Gurus gave due consideration to different psychological and sociological facts of the people's life. However, their emphasis on ethics was based on political considerations. To implement their teachings the Gurus underwent all sorts of sufferings. But all this was aimed at the liberation of man from all kinds of oppression and injustice.

The political thoughts of the Sikh Gurus show the process of how the religious society of the Sikhs was transfigured into a political community. The founder of Sikhism preached a particular way of life based on the doctrine of oneness of God and equality of all human beings. On this principle the first primary unit established was Sangat. This was further developed with the establishment of the system of 'Langar' (the common kitchen). This gave the inspiration to people to work on the basis of cooperation to achieve a common goal. It taught the lesson of equality to all the members. It brought about a great change in the thoughts of the people. It generated a democratic way of life at that infant stage of Sikh society.

Sikhism aimed at creating an ideal state based on equality of rights for all without distinction of castes, creeds, classes, birth, sex and religion.

Sikhism preached that God had created this universe and the state is the handiwork of God. All authority, whether secular or spiritual, emanated from God. The democratic thoughts of the Gurus are related more to economic democracy. All the people, whether rich or poor, were provided with an equal opportunity to develop economically. According to Sikhism, there was no place in society for classes based on economic factors. The representatives elected by a Sangat could be from the poorest classes. They were elected wholly on the basis of merit. Democracy was advocated not only in religious matters but in social and political matters also. The political thinking, that was concealed in the teachings of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, was further developed gradually by his successors who transformed the society into a democratic form of community. The spirit of democracy kindled the flame of love and life in the hearts of the people. The whole society came to have a living faith and national spirit. The sovereignty of the nation was vested in the nation itself. Guru Gobind Singh was widely acknowledged as a social reformer and spiritual teacher who insisted on the eradication of superstition and ignorance from man's mind.

The democratic way of life saved the people from three types of brutalities - first, the brutality arising out of fanaticism of religious states; second, brutality of capitalism; and third, brutality of despotic rule. Guru Nanak had advised the rulers to remain free from deceit, hypocrisy and other bad traits. Fundamental spiritual norms must be incorporated in politics to develop a healthy society in the state.

The democratic principles of Sikhism gave new inspiration to society which was transformed into a socio-political entity and a new spirit of nationhood was awakened in them. The people fought on a common front and forgot the distinctions of caste and creed and antagonistic religious and sectarian feelings. The religious society turned into a national community, which ultimately found a legitimate base to function as a state. It developed egalitarianism and patriotism.

Sikhism played a major role and gave a finishing touch to its political objective by infusing in the hearts of citizens of the ideal state high spiritual and moral ideas which would enable them to play an appropriate part in the affairs of the state. Citizens are to pay greater attention to their duties than to their rights. The citizens should be ready to sacrifice their life for the sake of higher values of life. The ideal man leads a

liberal life and excels in acts of chivalry which lead society on the path of culture, unity and emotional emancipation and ultimately to spiritual heights.

The fundamental rights granted to the citizens by Sikhism include freedom of conscience, expression, thoughts and belief. The right to property is negative. Sikhism also recognises the right of the people to resist a ruler when he does not fulfil his duties of a just ruler. It allows the people even to throw out by force an unjust and willful ruler, if he ignores the mandate of God and engages himself in earthly pleasures and indulges in selfishness and greed.

We may conclude that the Sikh Gurus wanted to create a new society out of the downtrodden and totally dejected Indian society which was hopelessly divided into innumerable castes and sub-castes and in which a large section of the people were regarded as untouchables and treated as sub-humans, and in which half of humanity, namely women, were treated as worse than slaves with no social, religious or political rights whatsoever. The Gurus wanted to create a classless and casteless society whose members (including women) would enjoy equal rights in every field of human activity and which would be free from distinctions of caste, class, creed, colour or sex. This new society would act according to high

ethical and moral principles with faith in one God as its religious base. The people had been enslaved by the priestly class to hundreds of superstitions, rituals, rites and customs which were presented as the sum and substance of religion but which, according to Sikhism, were meaningless and a mockery of true religion. The new society which the Sikh Gurus wanted to create was to enjoy the basic human freedoms of conscience, thought, expression and belief, and freedom from all kinds of oppression, degradation, exploitation and injustice. The people should be able to enjoy self-respect and lead an honourable life, enjoying liberty and human rights.

To enable such a society to be created and to be able to exist and continue, the Gurus felt that political power was necessary. Only political power could face religious bigotry, social discrimination and political oppression and injustice. Like an ideal society the Gurus desired to create an ideal state and a just political order. Such an order could be based on democratic principles and these principles were adopted by them for the new society. However, they realized that mere platitudes would not do and that force was needed by the state to enforce and protect higher moral, religious and political principles, equality and democracy. With this consideration they transformed, or, better still,

transfigured the Sikh society into a militant society and a political force. The spirit of defiance against all sorts of oppression and injustice practised by the alien rulers, as inculcated and preached by the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, was nurtured by his successors. Every Guru furthered that spirit and, side by side, strengthened the society according to the prevailing circumstances. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, took the campaign to its logical conclusion and established the Khalsa society - a society of saint-soldiers, who were inspired by the highest moral ideals and who were always prepared to defend those ideals and justice and basic social, religious, political and human rights even at the cost of their lives. He justified the use of the sword i.e. force, when all other means of obtaining freedom and justice failed.

Thus there was no change in the basic philosophy of all the Gurus. The seed was sown by the first Guru, the plant was nurtured by his successors, till, in the time of the last Guru, it became a mighty tree. The great force organised by the tenth Guru was a natural outcome of the spirit of defiance against oppression, injustice, inequality - social, religious and political - inculcated and spread widely by the first Guru and his successors. In other words, there was no change in the

approach of the Gurus to the problems of the people and their solutions; there was only a change in the strategy according to the exigencies of the times.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

The democratic principles of Sikhism should be incorporated in the modern structure of the government. To bring closer the people belonging to different political parties and to make them think unitedly on important national problems and to strengthen national unity and integrity, there should be a common forum like the SANGAT to consider all the national problems on a common platform. It should invite members of all political parties. Sikhism considers all the people as brothers and sisters of one and the same family, namely the human race. This forum should have a name which is agreeable to all. All political parties should be allowed to exist, but, in order to create national unity, members of all these parties should be invited to assemble on a common platform.

On the platform of this forum all problems of national interest should be discussed freely and frankly. All political parties should get guidance from this forum

and its decisions should be taken note of by the parties in case of difference. The forum should stress more on national interests than on party interests. This system of functioning of political parties implies cooperation and co-existence, tolerance and coherence, common national interest and team spirit.

2. The method of elections should be modified. Some way should be found out by which men of integrity should be elected, since the success of democracy depends on the quality of the people who run the government. Sikh Panth always elected their leaders on the basis of their qualities. The candidates of low calibre elected through party influence do not play fair and do not do justice to the nation as a whole. This creates disunity, mutual distrust and inter-sectional conflicts. This might ultimately lead to disintegration of the country.

3. Sikhism teaches that man should rise above the desires for materialistic achievements. We are facing some anti-social customs these days, such as the dowry system, etc. This is all due to lust for material gains. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus should be preached so that the people should give up their materialistic lust.

Some handicapped and other members of society beg for livelihood and lead a miserable life. The government

should establish permanent settlements of these people and special funds should be allotted to refine them morally so that they may start an active life based on morality.

There is another class of people, who are sentenced for long periods and are detained in jails. The government should try to reform them in jail with hymns of Sikh Gurus and transform criminal minds into lovers of mankind. This will create a new spirit among these members of society and they will start a new life with pious thinking towards society. People who are afflicted with a gross bias towards crimes will have opportunities to grow freely.

4. The citizens should lead a virtuous life. Sikhism preaches to develop virtues in human beings. The teaching of Sikh virtues should be imparted in all the government training institutions, colleges and schools, so that the people should perform their duties towards the nation, towards mankind and towards the state. The hymns of the Sikh Gurus and the heroic deeds performed by Sikhs to defend the nation and mankind should be published in pamphlets and distributed freely to develop courage in the people. Formalism and ritualism should be discouraged and stress should be laid on spiritual evolution. Virtues should be considered a part of moral education at all stages of human life.

Economic Equality

Sikhism is a society of workers. A Sikh has to develop his body as well as spirit. The Sikh Gurus have shown the path of economic equality. The funds collected in Gurudwaras through voluntary offerings should be utilised for common good. The poor people should be helped from this common fund. Sikhism preaches that the main principle of human life is work and worship and charity. The state should decentralise the economy of the country. Institutions should be managed by the members of the rich and poor families alike. The government should invest the lion's share of the amount, rich citizens should be asked to invest more, while the poor members of society may invest small amounts. This sort of institution may be established to run some business whose profits should be distributed equally amongst all the members without distinction of share-money since Sikhism preaches equality of mankind and division of wealth equally. Rich members should be rewarded with high national awards so as to encourage them for national development. The ultimate benefits of such institutions can be easily visualised. It will help in creating a classless society and every citizen will be saved from economic exploitation. Through this method morality will prevail and use of force to snatch the labour of

others will be abjured. This method is comparatively better since it will inculcate morality in mankind, as against dialectical materialism practised by communist states where there is no spiritual consideration. This method has vast implications - social as well as moral - and it will improve society in every way.

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