

ABSTRACTS OF SIKH STUDIES

(Vol XX, Issue 1)

(MAJORITARIAN INTOLERANCE & MINORITY FEARS)

Jan-March 2018 / 549-50 NS

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1. To bring the latest advances in Sikh Studies to the notice of scholars and general readers.
2. To project a correct image of Sikhism and the Sikh Community in India as well as abroad.
3. To watch, report and rebut any distortions or mis- representations of Sikh Religion and its History.
4. To serve as a living link, and provide coordination among organisations engaged in promotion of Sikh Studies.
5. To highlight problems of Sikh diaspora, and suggest solutions.
6. To arrange reviews of important publications relating to Sikhism.
7. To assist readers in framing an informed opinion on matters relating to Sikhism and Sikh Studies.
8. To give publicity to activities of various Sikh Societies around the world.
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EDITORIAL

ਗਗਨ ਦਮਾਮਾ ਬਾਜਿਓ

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going the other way.” These immortal lines from 19th century British Novelist Charles Dickens’ famous novel, *A Tale of two Cities* (1859) about the Cataclysmic French revolution and its causes and consequences can be safely substituted as expressive of our own socio-political environment in India in the present times. The signs are ominous. While the chaotic, violent French revolution (1789) had thrown up the existing contemporary monarchy and ended up in Napoleonic dictatorship, the presently ruling ultra-nationalist-right-wing dispensation, the Hindutva ideological dispensation, in India, with its aggressive majoritarian intolerance and expected brute majority in the country’s twin central legislatures, may ultimately end up in the subversion of India’s constitution. The impatience, haste and aggressive postures of this ruling combine and its half a dozen religious outfits are symptomatic of their intentional and calculated designs of converting the secular, democratic Indian republic into a theocratic Hindu Rashtra and converting the existing parliamentary system into a Presidential system of governance. Its repulsive maligning and ostracizing of the biggest minority from the mainstream social fabric, attempts at assimilating the Sikh minority within the fold of Hinduism and marginalizing the other smaller minorities and ignoring the sizeable dalit sections of society are dangerous portents and do not augur well for the health of the emerging Indian democratic modern society. Minority bashing,

brandishing of majoritarian fascism through words, speech and overt and covert actions of its fanatical/ sectarian outfits, selective elimination of rationalist scholars and investigative journalists, suppressing of dissent, systematic tampering with school and university curricula, replacing and substituting the established, reputed scholars of country's prominent academic, social and cultural Institutions with Hindutva ideologues, muzzling the freedom of press and spitting venom on social media day in and day out – all these offensive activities are hurting the sensitivities of even a sizeable enlightened section among the majority community as well. Speaking on the event of Human Rights Day on December 10, 2017, R M Lodha, the former Chief Justice of India said, “In the name of cow protection, human beings are slaughtered, cow vigilantes are mushrooming everywhere, sedition charges are being invoked against activists cartoonists, actresses and students.” Referring to inter-religious marriages, he asked “should religion be a factor when two adults fall in love.”... People have been killed in the name of Love Jihad. There is laxity in police action. **The question is shaking me everyday**... Despite adequate laws, constitutional safeguards and strong judiciary, we are not able to achieve the goal of protection of human rights... Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has become a toothless tiger.” He called for a robust mechanism to protect human rights in the country. (*Indian Express*, December 11, 2017)

Moreover, like the citizens of a majority community in a free, democratic country like India, the members of the minority communities too have dreams and aspirations about their individual as well as community's growth and their active participation in national affairs. The raw power of the majoritarian intolerance being displayed by its cadres under the nose of the unresponsive authorities is a sinful crucifixion of the minority communities' spiritual moorings and a gross violation of constitutional guarantees given to each Indian citizen. Here one is reminded of the desperate cry of the archetypal, iconic character (Aedh) against a similar act of sin and injustice in one of W. B. Yeats' poem: “But, I being poor, have only my dreams, I have spread my dreams under your feet, tread softly because you tread on my dreams.” – Aedh Wishes For The Cloths of Heaven”(1899). India has

been a multicultural and pluralistic society throughout the ages and some of its peers have been giving a message of peaceful co-existence. Swami Vivekanand in one of his letters to his friend Mohd Sarafranz wrote on June 10, 1898, "Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. For our own motherland, a junction of the two great systems Hinduism and Islam - Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope..... **the future perfect India.**" The Majority Must Keep this sacred trust intact (*The Tribune*, July 5, 2017)

Mahatma Gandhi in his prayer meetings in 1947 repeatedly stated, "In the words of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, I would say that Hindus and Muslims are the two eyes of Mother India. Just as the trouble in one eye affects the other too, similarly the whole of India suffers when either Hindus or Muslims suffer. You want only the Hindus to remain in India and say that none else should be left behind. You may kill Muslims today, but what will you do tomorrow? What will happen to the Parsis and the Christians... At present we have some Muslims in our midst who belong to us. If we are ready to kill them, **let me tell you that I am not for it.** (*The Tribune*, October 4, 2017).

The same message has been reiterated in the last address to the nation by the recently retired Honourable President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, wherein he stated, "The soul of India resides in pluralism and tolerance. India is not just a geographical entity. It carries a history of ideas, philosophy, intellect, industrial genius, craft, innovation and experience. Plurality of our society has come about through assimilation of ideas over centuries. The multiplicity in culture, faith and language is what makes India special. We derive our strength from tolerance. It has been part of our collective consciousness for centuries.... There are divergent strands in public discourse. We may argue, we may agree or we may not agree. But we cannot deny the essential prevalence of multiplicity of opinion. Otherwise, a fundamental character of our thought process will wither away."

Therefore, it is high time to wake up against the impending communal strife. The Sikhs being the descendants and heirs of Guru Nanak's legacy who raised his voice against the marauding forces of

16th century Afghan invader Babur from Khorasan, must join the countrywide crusade against this regressive Hindutva ideological invasion. All the religious minorities together with the Dalits and enlightened citizens of India should jointly resist and rebut this ideological onslaught. It is a war of nerves more than a battle of hands. Since intellectual hatred is the worst kind of hatred, it has to be wiped out through persuasion, arguments and exchange of ideas, debate, discussion and Indian ethos of unity-in-diversity.

II

Institute of Sikh Studies' Seminar

Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, besides being an apolitical Institution, is, nevertheless, a vigilant watchdog of Sikh interests and a spokesman of enlightened Sikh response towards the emerging Sikh minority issues in India. The present-day, socio-cultural environment being continuously vitiated and communal situation getting murkier by the day, the Institute organized a two-days Seminar on its premises on December 2-3, 2017 on *Minority Issues - Challenges and Responses - Creating Awareness about Majoritarian Intolerance and identifying Sikh Survival Strategies*. Eminent scholars from both majority and minority communities as well as Dalit community participated in the Seminar. The keynote address prepared by the Institute brought out and emphasized the multi-religious, multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual and pluralistic fabric of Indian society since times immemorial to the present times, particularly in the post-independence seven decades period of its history. Overall national integration, peace, communal co-existence has been the hallmark of India's democracy, minor aberrations notwithstanding. India has emerged as the largest secular, republic among the modern comity of nations at the international level. It is keen to maintain this status of an enlightened nation on the move. It must maintain its communal harmony and resist the forces of majoritarian intolerance.

Dr Approvanand from Delhi University stated that the entire Hindu Society is likely to be held accountable for some of the reprehensible activities being committed by these right wing Hindutva organizations on the pretext of nationalism. He further stated that the

present-day conflict being created between the majority and minority communities is as much between these two communities as between the enlightened, liberal sections and the narrow-minded sectarian sections of the Hindu society it self. He illustrated with historical evidence that Mahatma Gandhi who believed in the composite culture of Indian Society could survive for forty years during the oppressive colonial British rule but became a victim of this rabidly fanatical ideology and was assassinated within six months of India's independence. He has reiterated his anguish at this outlandish absurdity in his recent article where he wrote, "It has moved from streets to our text books to our class rooms, to our public and political discourse, to our Courts. If we want no more murders like this (of Afrazul), we would need to reverse all this. If we do not do it urgently, it would be difficult to pull ourselves out of morass which is pulling us in" (*The Tribune*, December 15, 2017)

Dr Akshay Kumar from Panjab University stated that not only minorities but the India's topmost research Institutions and Central and State universities are also suffering from the onslaughts of majoritarian ideological intolerance and its fascist dictates. As a result, the University syllabi are being tampered with and Hindutva ideologues are being planted as heads of the various administrative and faculty positions. This kind of interference is affecting the quality of research and teaching in our Universities. He illustrated his assertion by banning the staging of Gyan Peeth Awardee Mahashweta Devi's play "Draupdi" by the authorities of a Central University at Mohindergarh, Haryana, and exclusion of some of the writings of authors like Rabinderanath Tagore, Kamladas and Des Raj Kali from the syllabi of some Universities.

Dr Khalid Mohd, another faculty member from Panjab University brought out the daily vitriolic, hateful utterances of some Hindutva demagogues against the Muslim and Christian minorities and their attempted exclusion from the mainstream Indian society. He asserted that selective Muslims are being mob-lynched under the pretext of Love-Jihad, beef eating and cow slaughter and the entire Muslim community is being demonised, majority of whose citizens have been born and bred in India with their centuries-old ancestral roots in the

Indian soil. He appealed to the enlightened sections of the majority community to resist and halt this dangerous communal juggernaut from disrupting the prevailing social and cultural harmony. Prof Emmunal Nahar pointed to the discriminatory treatment of Christians in India and denial of reservation facilities to the Christian dalits in India.

Sardar Bir Devinder Singh, former Deputy Speaker of Punjab Vidhan Sabha, both in his seminar paper and Presidential remarks in one of the Semnar sessions, exhorted all the Indian minorities to realize the gravity of communal disharmony being created by the intolerant Hindutva ideologues and the aggressive Hindutva organizations with the complicit connivance and support of the majoritarian ruling combine. He pointed to the serious consequences of keeping this communal cauldron boiling, the flames from which may engulf the entire country into communal strife and damage the centuries-old multicultural, pluralistic and secular fabric of India as enshrined in India's Constitution. If this fascist and rabidly communal combine succeeds in its nefarious designs, the Indian minorities will be completely marginalized from the political governance of the country and their status of equal citizenship will be compromised. He congratulated the Institute of Sikh Studies for organizing the two-days' seminar on this important issue at this crucial moment for creating awareness about the daily rising majoritarian intolerance and the consequent apprehensions and fears of minority communities.

Dr Swaraj Singh, a Sikh scholar and political analyst of international repute and Chairman, Washington State Network for Human Rights, USA, in his presidential remarks on the papers presented in the first Session of the Seminar, endorsed the views of the participating scholars and the universal and cosmopolitan message of the Sikh scripture and its potential for creation of communal harmony in India and world peace across the globe.

Dr Madanjit Kaur, in her highly analytical and illustrative Seminar paper, summed up the present scenario prevailing in India and the need for all minorities to jointly resist the communal forces and work towards safeguarding their minority interests. The edited version of these prominent seminar papers is being published in this January issue

of the Institute of Sikh Studies' quarterly Journal which is dedicated to the Minority Issues: Challenges and Responses.

Several other eminent Sikh Scholars and Sikh activists including Bhai Ashok Singh, Jaspal Singh Sidhu, Principal Pal Singh Sangha, S Gurpreet Singh, Col Jagtar Singh Multani, Dr G S Mann (USA), Dr Dharam Singh and Sardar Jagmohan Singh Gill also presented their papers. Three new publications of the Institute of Sikh Studies consisting of the:

1. Second and revised edition of the first volume of English translation of the Sikh classic *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*;
2. *Gurdwara: Concept and Institution*; and
3. *Know Your Heritage* were released on this occasion.

The Seminar proceeding received a good press coverage in the mainstream English and vernacular newspapers. The readers can also watch the Seminar proceedings on the Youtube.

□

*In the seat of superconsciousness was struck the kettle-drum
And the weapon hit the target of the heart.
As the hero has taken the field, now is the occasion to wage battle.
The true hero is one who fights in defence of the humble.
Is cut limb after limb, and flees not the field.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1105

ਗਗਨ ਦਮਾਮਾ ਬਾਜਿਓ ਪਰਿਓ ਨੀਸਾਨੈ ਘਾਓ ॥
ਖੇਤੁ ਜੁ ਮਾਂਡਿਓ ਸੁਰਮਾ ਅਬ ਜੁਝਨ ਕੇ ਦਾਉ ॥
ਸੂਰਾ ਸੇ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਜੁ ਲਰੈ ਦੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤ ॥
ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਛਾਡੈ ਖੇਤੁ ॥

INDIAN NATION – STATE BECOMES A PRISON-HOUSE FOR MINORITIES

JASPAL SINGH SIDHU*

At the outset, we must confront a bitter fact that it was a ‘transfer of power’ in 1947 which Indian rulers celebrated as ‘freedom’ and ‘Independence’. If we use a terse coinage, it was a ‘systematic transfer of power between the colonial elites (Britishers) and the post-colonial elites (Congress). That is why, the pre-1947 imperial state mindset have been continuing to operate, however, stealthily even as post-colonial India flaunts to having a largest democracy in the world. The Indian state often turns into a ‘military state’ whenever there is a political expediency of controlling a domestic rage arising out of people’s dissents. The colonial state is still active at the administrative level which can be seen in functioning of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860 and several other archaic laws, in force till today as atrocious act of 124A, framed to dub acts of the British Indian subjects fighting for freedom as ‘seditious’, thereby, to supressing them with an iron hand. The Public Safety Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and other ‘black laws’ are on the statute in free India till date which drew their legitimacy from the British laws. Ironically, viceroy Lord Linlithgow promulgated Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance to control ‘Indian subjects’ up in revolt in 1940s, was reshaped as AFSPA in free India in 1950s to be slapped on the people of Manipur and in some other parts of north-east. The draconian law remains enforced there for past 60 years. Under AFSPA, the army is enjoying near absolute authority in Jammu and Kashmir. Punjab, particularly the Sikhs, too have experienced AFSPA in 1980s.

The colonial era completely changed rather metamorphosed the face of the earth by slapping Western style of precepts and practices

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on natives besides suppressing their cultures, reframing their histories and way of living and governance.

The Indian sub-continent too experienced two major developments following its colonization by the British Empire (the Raj) in 19th century. First, the Raj imparted a geographical unity to India that had never been achieved even under historically known big empires of Ashoka, Gupta and Akbar. Thus, the Raj provided a 'geographical area' to the 'Idea of India'. Secondly, the Raj implanted the Western-style nation-state and governance in the Indian sub-continent, beginning with setting up of an Imperial Legislative Council through an Act of 1892 to provide 'self-rule' in phases through elections to civil bodies and provincial bodies with 'partial to larger participation of locals'.

Most of Congress and League leaders involved in the struggle for Independence were English educated or studied in Europe and they had grasped the Western political system and modernization as 'panacea for all Indian ills'.

With West nationalism in mind, Nehru was not for devolution of political power from the Centre to the provincial governments. He had also rejected the Cabinet Mission of 1946 which had brought a 'confederation sort of vision' for free India.

Consequently, the subcontinent was partitioned on religious lines into India and Pakistan. Ironically, both countries became 'nations' overnight. Both states embarked onto the path of 'nation-building' which involved the homogenizing of the natives linguistically and culturally into a 'nation' yoked to the state.

Developments of 1947 were a watershed in the history of the subcontinent as its natives got severed from their past and the previous style of governance completely. The British empire had already built up public institutions, albeit partially, which facilitated India's switch-over to a democratic – set-up based on universal suffrage and capitalistic mode of economy.

The Indian rulers, however, kept their umbilical chord attached to the outgoing Raj by adopting Westminster's undiluted model for the Indian Constitution picking up 250 of the 395 articles 'word by word' from the British Government of India Act passed by the Baldwin

cabinet in 1935.

Then, the Congress elite arranged the study of election systems of England, Canada, USA and Ireland and went for the 'first-past-the post' system over the 'proportional representation' one as the former always ensured better manipulation from the top. Surely, this electoral system paid rich dividends as the Congress which ruled the country continuously for three decades with 30 to 35 per cent polled vote-share. Recently BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi's won with 31 percent votes in May 2014 Lok Sabha polls was hailed as 'resounding victory'.

The constitution-'sambidhan', in Hindi – guaranteeing equality to everybody—was hailed it as a 'sacred document of Indian unity and governance' implying that those not subscribing to the constitution are 'anti-India' or 'anti-national'. The constitution does not provide due 'safeguards' to the minorities. That is why, the Sikh members on the constituent assembly- which too was not of representative character- refused to affix their signatures as an act of their disapproval. Besides that, the constitution, under section 25 has clubbed the Sikhs with other Hindu sects thereby denying them their separate and distinct religio-social existence in India.

Euphoria of Independence could not conceal such ugly realities of the 'nation-state' model for a long period. Indian minorities, people of north-west, north-east and deep south soon became restless as they were deprived of rights even of those enshrined in the constitution. When their helplessness took the shape of dissent of various hues, the Indian state began showing its carnivorous teeth. Then Indian rulers embarked onto the campaign of centralizing the power at New Delhi asserting the state's 'legitimacy and monopoly over the violence on the people'.

Rise of 'nationalism' in second half of 19th century which helped building a 'freedom movement' took altogether different turn in post-colonial era. Nationalism came handy to the New Delhi rulers who used it as an instrument for whipping up people's sentiments against projected external enemies like Pakistan (creating the Others) to effect 'political territorialisation' of India. In the process of 'geo-bodification' of India, military and para-military along with Indian map, flag emerged

as strong symbols of India's territorial unity assiduously raised to a 'holy status'.

Internally, the 'nationalism' is being injected with a requisite dose of 'jingoism and ultra-ism' as and when it suites to the political expediency arising out of the imposition of the majority community's ethos and traditions. Already the nation-building process has involved the reinterpretation and mythification of Indian history and culture to give the 'idea of India' a concrete shape of Indian 'nation'. To the chagrin of minorities, the nation-building project backed by the state power has practically been following the dictum of 'Hindu, Hindi and Hindustan.' Herein began the predicament of minorities and people living at the periphery of Indian territory.

CONCEPT OF NATION-STATE: A FESTERING WOUND

Putting in simple words: the modern state is a system of governance with sovereign powers applicable to certain geographical area and the people inhabiting there and it acquires the people's allegiance as a prior condition for its citizenship. But nation-state is more than fixity of boundaries as it seeks to homogenize the diversity and populations with distinctions into a bigger ethno-religious and cultural identity. It purges out or suppresses those social and religious identities which affect the state's ability to remain united and, thus, it is exclusivist political process. (Istvan Hont)

Underscoring the devastating impact of the nation-state dispensation, E.J Hobsbawm writes in his book, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* that in Europe there were as many as 400 identities before 1780 but after 1880, when nation-state came into existence, only 17 identities were left. The nation-state in India too is out to smother the minorities with distinct religious-cultural identity and destroying diverse and pluralistic landscape.

During freedom struggle itself, the Congress began weaving nationalism around the Hindu majority. It is evident from the concept of nationalism elaborated by Nehru that was more emotional and of romantic variety. In his book *The Discovery of India* Nehru says that the Indian sub-continent has 'something unique' about its antiquity ... having "tremendous impress of oneness'.... making its inhabitants 'throughout the ages distinctively Indian, with the same national

heritage and same set of moral and mental qualities.... a dream of unity has occupied the mind of Indians since the dawn of civilization”. Such patriotic imagery of Nehru left a little space for pluralism and diversity which alienated the largest Muslim minority leading to an avoidable disaster – the Partition. (Perry Anderson)

Stating tersely: World over, the modern nation-state governance based on universal suffrage, invariably creates the majority and minority segments of population. It is a well-known fact that only those politicians could come in and stay in power who have a bigger vote-bank. Herein begins the pampering, nursing, nurturing and consolidation of the majority vote-bank through some concrete and populist measures. In the process, the minorities with lesser headcount (votes) are relegated to the position of second rate citizens and even reduced to ‘un-people’. It is tried practice in India that to earn goodwill of the majority, the politicians even ask the minorities either to prove their loyalty and patriotism towards Indian state or face punitive action.

INDEPENDENCE ERA AND THE SIKHS

Focussing on the Sikhs: The Sikhs were the biggest losers of the Partition as they suffered huge casualties besides losing large tracts of fertile land in canal colonies and got in lieu in east Punjab an undeveloped and lesser acreage of land . The Sikhs lost Guru Nanak’s birth place, Nanakana Sahib and other historical Sikh shrines located across the border in Pakistan.

The Sikh leaders were given a promise that “the Congress will help them to arrange east Punjab that it may become the Cultural Home to the Sikhs....”.(Kumar) Soon after Independence, the Congress leaders showed their real colour and began cold-shouldering the Sikh leaders who had joined the Indian union. The Sikh leaders, later, felt robbed and cheated.

Mountbatten himself was full of foreboding on the future of the Sikhs and penned down in February 1948: “The Sikhs as part of Pakistan would have retained a measure of political identity. But as part of Hindustan, they feared economic absorption by the Hindus; also religious absorption. In short, they feared, probably correctly, virtual extinction as a political force and survival only a rapidly

dwindling religious sect of Hinduism”. (Kumar)

Running helter-skelter for some political rectification, Sikh leaders launched an agitation for Punjabi speaking state. But the 19-year-long period of the Sikh agitation for a Punjabi suba saw denial of mother tongue by a section of non-Sikh Punjabis and main opposition from the Congress party and leaders of Arya Samaj. Even new Punjab state, created in 1966, was denied the due share in river waters, Chandigarh capital and a large expanse of Punjabi speaking areas.

Nehru’s ‘nation-state’ project coupled with mirage of socialism and planned development had an implicit requirement of a strong centre and centralized economy. Centralized Indian polity reached its pinnacle during the Indira Gandhi regime. From 1970 to 1974, nineteen provincial governments were removed, Emergency was clamped in 1975. The Akalis opposed the centralized polity and launched a ‘marcha’ against Emergency.

At this critical juncture the Akalis dished out the Anandpur Sahib resolution, their political agenda, seeking provincial autonomy through a constitutional re-look on centre-state relations. The resolution, later, became the basis of the Akali Dal agitation began in August 1982. Ruling Congress, rather, used the Akali protest as an opportunity to polarize and politicize the Hindu majority around twin goals – for consolidating vote-bank and for strengthening concept of ‘nation-state’ around the whirlpool of ‘unity and integrity’. Giving of a deliberate tilt to the Anandpur Sahib resolution as a “separatist and seditious” document, the New Delhi Establishment camouflaged its autocratic act of shedding away the shibboleth of constitutional democracy and transforming the ‘secular democratic state’ into a majoritarian rule.

This was the politics behind the military attack on the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the Sikh Vatican, in June 1984 and effecting of an organized massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and other places following assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984. Political dissent of the Sikhs rooted in their sense of distinct historical and cultural identity, thus, came into direct conflict with Indian state upholding the ‘majoritarian model of patriotism and nationalism’. Iron hand tactics unleashed by the State was symptomatic of a political design and strategy which a noted young historian Ananya Vajpeyi

describes as: “a sort of second and ‘shadow nation’ came into action against the Sikhs “functioning as a MILITARY STATE rather than an electoral democracy”.

Unearthing finer nuances of ‘nation-states’ functioning, eminent political analyst Michael Mann says, “(Empirically) Nation-state requires ethnic cleansing. Liberal democracies have also committed cleansing—amounting to Genocide... wherever democracy triumphed, it has often been tinged with ethnic cleansing as liberal democracies (find it) easy to play it out. And homogeneity and stability of these democracies was creation of violence”.

During pre-Independence period, the Sikh leaders failed to realize what the fate awaiting their tiny minority in the coming western-style democracy in which power -structure is based on the headcount. Prof Puran Singh warned the Sikh leaders that an election system which places a donkey and a horse on the same pedestal could not benefit the Sikhs. And in free India, too, Sikh intellectuals failed to comprehend the depredations of a ‘nation-state’ regime where a majority invariably rules.

Ironically, the Sikhs never tire of repeating that they are ‘distinct people’ a ‘separate political entity’ and go to the extent of saying a ‘nation without a state’ conveniently forgetting that ‘India is being built up as a ‘nation-state’ based on majority’s culture and ethos’. Facing such predicament, the Sikhs were easily branded as ‘enemies’ of India and Indians and they were treated as ‘non-citizens’ during the November 84 genocide.

Leave aside their claims to the contrary, the Sikhs have been politically marginalized, and their predicament tends to become more acute and complex as ‘majoritarian rule has come to stay’.

Only saner words of Rabindranath Tagore glimmer a faint optimism: “Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India’s troubles”.

Nation-states have extracted heavy price which human history never paid before. While it began losing its viability with the rise of Scots, Basques, Catalonians, Quebecois and Kurds, Hindutva forces in India are up in arms to raise ‘Hindu Rashtra’ an Indian version of Islamic Pakistan. It is recipe for the violence in the near future.

Against this background, the minorities and deprived people should come together to thwart the onslaught of Hindutva forces.

It is indeed creditable that Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh organized a two-day Seminar on December 2-3, 2017 on “*Minority Issues: Challenges & Responses – Creating awareness about Majoritarian Intolerance and Sikh Survival Strategies*”, where eminent scholars from both majority and minority communities spoke against the present-day majoritarian intolerance and exhorted all the minorities to raise their voice against this majoritarian nationalism.

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AGGRESSIVE, MAJORITARIAN DISPLAY AND ULTRA NATIONALISM: DETRIMENTAL TO THE VITAL INTERESTS OF MINORITIES IN INDIA

BIR DEVINDER SINGH*

India's distinctiveness, profundity and constitutional dignity lie in its profound exposition as a liberal democratic Nation. Of late, the dogmatic assertion of religion-based 'majoritarianism' has begun to take roots in the vital areas of our liberal and secular democracy. The fragility of the Indian constitution has also been exposed that lacks protective safeguards to protect the rights of the religious minorities when the brutal majority under the influence of communal frenzy, lets loose atrocities to repress voiceless minorities. Ever since the new right wing political dispensation has come into power at the centre, its ideological mentor organization has suddenly become super active in order to influence the policy making of the Government at the center. In pursuance of their agenda, its ideologues are selectively targeting Ministries of HRD and Culture with hawk's eye on School text books, University syllabus at different levels, with a view to inject 'Hindutava' ideology in to the mainstream academic curriculum through the medium of instruction. It is relatively easier to understand the pattern of this kind of malicious intent, when its Prime Ministerial candidate, during his public rallies before 2014 parliamentary elections publicly proclaimed himself as a 'Hindu Nationalist', with a predestined intent to 'polarize' the Indian electorates to the advantage of the BJP, with an intention to decimate the role of minorities in the democratically elected Government at the center and the States. This sinister proclamation made by its prime ministerial candidate has apparently shown its result during the Lok Sabha elections (2014) all over the

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country. In Uttar Pradesh, where this same political party categorically fragmented the electorates on communal lines, completely eliminated the representation of the Muslim minority members of Parliament from the Uttar Pradesh, despite the fact that the Muslim population comprises 19% of the total population of Uttar Pradesh. It is significant to mention that UP alone has 80 parliamentary seats, which is the largest of all States in India. It is important to mention here that none of the 80 parliamentary seats have elected a single representative belonging to the minorities, particularly the Muslims.

This religion based majoritarianism would completely diminish the role of minorities in the political system of governance in India. The unabated censorious comments of some of its leaders against the religious minorities manifest the mindset that blatantly refuses to acknowledge the centuries old pluralism of secular India. Such insinuations are undoubtedly causing a sense of deep unrest in the minds of the minorities; who have rapidly begun to lose faith in the liberal ethos of the Parliamentary democracy enshrined in the preamble of the constitution of India. Ironically, it is for the first time, that the rigidity of a particular morbid mindset began to dictate even the age old behavioral patterns of the day to day life of the members of the religious minorities. Their sinister intentions have also started interfering in the profession and practices of other religious faiths. It sounds cynical when the state decides what people should eat and what not to eat; and if you violate, you could even be lynched to death with impunity by the mobs belonging to the majority community. I have no hesitation in stating that our dignity as a liberal democratic Nation has taken a severe beating, among the comity of Nations, ever since the advent of this despicable era. To restore India's dignity as a liberal democratic Nation, India as a Nation will certainly require much responsive and tolerant attitude to do with transparent public display of its 'inclusive plurality', rather than merely the conduct of supposedly free and fair, elections. India needs to revisit and reaffirm its commitment to the fundamental values of liberal democracy. It would be incumbent upon all the stakeholders to shift the goalposts of our attention to the fundamental tenets that makes our democracy, inspirational, inclusively participative and vibrant. The overzealous

protagonists of ‘Hindutva Nationalism’ and its ideological spokespersons while appearing regularly in the debates and discussions, on the electronic media on National TV Channels with their hubristic assertions as members of the majority community, arrogantly manifest, as if the majority community is the sole arbiter of this great country’s destiny and the minority communities in India are just temporary tenants and could be evacuated, any time out of India at the whims of the majority community. This kind of fanatical doctrinaire stance of its ideologues certainly causes exasperation and sense of fear in the minds of petrified religious minorities. The preamble to the Indian Constitution declares the Indian State to be ‘Secular’ and this specific declaration has special relevance for the religious minorities in India. As a sequel to this declaration, the Government of India notified six religious communities as minority communities, viz. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains.

The Constituent Assembly of India, while adopting the Indian Constitution, envisioned India’s unity in diversity by fully recognizing and respecting the beauty of the religious and cultural plurality of India, but a few individual voices from this combine had even then expressed their serious apprehensions on the adherence to the doctrine of ‘Unity in Diversity’. Now those faintly expressed voices have become highly, vocal, intolerant and aggressive in the form of ‘Majoritarianism’. Shair-e-Mashriq (The Poet of the East) Allama Iqbal was the first to express his sagacious observation on the forms of democracy. He had tersely observed, in one of his defining couplets, as follow; *“iss baat ko ik mard-e-firangi ne keiya faash, barchand ke dana issey kbola nabin kartey, Jamburiyat wo tarz-e- hakumat hai k jis mein, bandon ko gina kartey hein tolaa nabe kartey”* (The mystery was made obvious by a European sage, though wise men endowed with sense do not unravel; that the democracy is a mode of governance where only the heads of the common men are counted, their conduct is not taken into account and evaluated) His sarcasm was not only limited to democracy he even castigated India’s secularism, in a poetic satire. He astutely observed; *“mulla ko jo hai Hind mein sajdey ki ijazat, nadaan ye samjhata hai k Islam hai aazad”* “Though Muslim cleric is allowed to prostrate and recite his Islamic prayer, the ignorant cleric comprehends as if that is

the freedom of Islam.”

Similarly Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar was equally disillusioned with their interpretation of the Constitution and had painfully observed, before he died in December 1856, “My friends tell me that I made the Constitution. But I am quite prepared to say that I shall be the first person to burn it out. I do not want it. It does not suit anybody. But whatever that may be, if our people want to carry on, they must remember that there are majorities and there are minorities; and they simply cannot ignore the minorities by saying: ‘Oh, no, to recognize you is to harm democracy’” (Dr. Ambedkar: *Life and Mission* by Dhananjay Keer, Page 449). Dr. Ambedkar felt that the democratic values enshrined in the constitution are gradually becoming subservient to religion based ‘Majoritarianism’ in complete contrast to the expectations of the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. He had scathingly observed; “If I find the constitution being misused, I shall be the first to burn it”

The creeping distortions and aberrations emerging in the social fabric of India, as a consequence of intolerance and the alarming incidences of hatred crimes targeting the minority communities in India, particularly the Muslims, are the observable indications of the dogged pursuance by the powers to be of their avowed design to change the constitutional nomenclature of India from a secular Republic to a ‘Hindu Rashtra’. This sinister intent may witness the further consolidation of aggressive majoritarian display in the general elections to Parliament (Lok Sabha) in 2019, with an aim to achieve requisite majority to change the salient objectives of the Indian Constitution. These leaders’ unrestrained jibes targeting and aiming at the Muslim minority in the recent assembly elections in UP negates the essence of the sworn declaration of the constitution of India that India is a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. The discriminatory tone of the speeches made by these leaders disparagingly impinge upon the fabrics of India’s diversity and pluralism. Minorities of the country are feeling suffocated and stupefied the way last parliamentary election has been conducted through polarized election campaign and the same rhetoric may be repeated more vehemently and venomously in the general elections in 2019. The present ruling

party has mastered the lethal art of getting greater dividends out of the polarized polity, rather than emulating the narrative of secular cohesiveness of the diversity of India. It is somewhat ambivalent hallucination of envisaging the 'Presidential form of Government' in a vertically polarized India should be taken 'very seriously' by the leadership of the minorities and also by the liberal thinkers from the majority community. Its communal mindset with its poisonous sectarian approach has already vitiated and even negated the glory of the well nurtured institutions and the exalted model of India's Parliamentary democracy. If the evil design of this combine succeeds as being manifested in pursuance of the aggressive and starkly explicit majoritarian display under the garb of pseudo Nationalism to change the form of the Government from Parliamentary Democracy to the Presidential form of Government, it would mean complete annihilation of the ethnic minorities in India. What if this 'majoritarian combine' succeeds in getting absolute majority in both central legislative bodies Lok Sabha and Raj Sabha, required for making key amendments in the constitution of India and declaring the Indian State as 'Hindu Rashtra'. Would such a situation not reduce the status of minorities in India to 'Stateless refugees' in a theocratic Hindu State? Therefore, the nuances of presidential ambition of this leadership will have not only disastrous consequences for the unity of India, but across the globe as well.

In view of the baleful designs of the 'majoritarian mindset', the Sikh minority should also review its current disposition. Although I have no hesitation to candidly admit the fact that the Sikh community as a significant minority of India is painfully disorganized and completely confused about its future existence in India with distinguishable dignity. In view of the developing state of affairs of communal frenzy propelled by the roguish cliché of 'majoritarianism', there seems to be no discernible sense of worry among the top leadership of the Sikh community. The Shiromani Akali Dal at one point of time was the sole representative political organization of the Sikhs, which had provided the meaningful leadership to the Sikh community with distinction for over decades. Unfortunately the top leadership of the Sikh community was out-manuevered by the clever cliché of the congress leadership at the helm, at the time of partition

of India. The pain of monumental deceit has not yet faded away from the psyche of the Sikhs even after the seven decades of independence of India. The question of the betrayal of Sikhs while India was partitioned must be bothering the community now, when a more ugly face of communal monsters is on display and so-called protagonists of 'majoritarianism' brandish the brand of 'Hindu Rashtra' under the garb of 'Nationalism'. What would be the status of the Sikhs in India if the political party in power decides to declare India as 'Hindu Republic' on the strength of its brute majority in Parliament? This question may sound hypothetical today but not wholly irrelevant to discuss, in view of the current political narrative. The political misfortune of the Sikh community today is that the community is represented by a leadership, which lacks vision and perspective. More so, they are in alliance with the ruling combine at the centre. They do not have the courage to speak up as leaders of the minority when members of Muslim minority are indiscriminately being butchered with brazen impunity by the mobs of cow vigilantes under the pretext of cow slaughter. The Sikh community seems to be caught in the state of seeming vacillation. If we keep silent now, then who will stand with the Sikhs, in the near future, while ethnic cleansing in India does not seem to be far away? Therefore, in view of the given scenario, there is an urgent need to consolidate the strength of the Sikh minority. All the Sikh institutions must visualize the above stated situation with great alacrity and plan accordingly for the future before it is too late.

All the educational institutions of the Sikh community must formulate specific modules for imparting education to Sikh students so that they are effectively made conscious to understand the nuances of the national political narrative. The boorish brand of sectarian nationalism impels the need of Sikh participation in the countrywide Civil Society movements. The Sikh presence should be perceptibly visible in all the forms of organized protests on social media, against the current spell of majoritarian intolerance.

There are sporadic voices of Sikh intellectuals and political thinkers among the Sikh community which understands the entire scenario discussed above. They are rightfully competent to contemplate and articulate the genesis of the aggressive majoritarian display. But,

unfortunately they are in a dismal minority and the wisdom of their thought process is not being recognized on a broader spectrum by the Sikh community. What a tragedy of the Sikh community ; those who represent the Sikhs in the legislative and religious bodies do not have the vision to see through the impish agenda of the ruling Majoritarian combine, rather seems to have surrendered to the sectarian ideology for their vested political interests, in utter disregard of the ethos of the Sikh spirit . It is high time the Sikh community wakes up to see through real and pernicious designs of the ‘Majoritarianism’ and devise survival strategies in order to maintain its legitimate presence and share in the country’s polity and society.

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EMERGING MAJORITARIAN THREAT TO INDIAN PLURALISM: A CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

DR MOHAMMED KHALID*

Land of diversities, India has endlessly witnessed a process of cultural, religious, linguistic and racial fusion over the last millennia. People with different religions and cultures entered India at various points of time and under different circumstances, interacted with local religions, cultures to enrich its pluralism and diversity. India has accommodated people from far off places and given them ideological and political space. The modern India has been nourished and developed by all such contributions. In the course of time many such influences have been absorbed and assimilated in India's social life. Some of these groups have also kept their distinct identity on religious or cultural basis making India a land of minorities. The process of assimilation has continued with its ebb and flows and will continue in future.

Upon independence, the framers of Indian constitution envisioned the country to be a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and promised to secure to all its citizens, Justice, Liberty Equality and Fraternity. In this multicultural society, the newly promulgated Constitution ensured the preservation of distinct cultural traits and patterns. Constitution recognised exclusive rights as fundamental for religious, cultural and linguistic minorities. Such rights included educational rights. This was done despite the fact that country was divided on religious lines. Muslim League had demanded and was given a separate Pakistan as a land for Muslims. Independent India was a Hindu majority country with many religious, linguistic and cultural minorities. It was viewed that the minorities shall be given the fullest

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assurance, not of jobs and of seats in assemblies, but that their culture and traditions would be safe. With its minorities, India was supposed to witness an inclusive growth cherished by a rich, varied, and larger common culture.

On the other hand, the radical Hindu nationalist forces rejected the idea of a secular India. These forces led by its ideological foundation head strongly rejected any talk of an Indian nation where Hindus and Muslims would stay as equal partners. It branded the concept of a composite Indian nation as a British conspiracy and went on to decry A O Hume (one of the founders of the Indian National Congress) for advancing the theory that Muslims were equal partners in this land of the Hindus. Importantly, *Organizer* (14 August 1947) in an editorial (titled 'Whither') on the very eve of India's independence, rejected the whole concept of a composite nation and wrote: "Let us no longer allow ourselves to be influenced by false notions of nationhood. Much of the mental confusion and the present and future troubles can be removed by the ready recognition of the simple fact that in Hindusthan only the Hindus form the nation and the national structure must be built on that safe and sound foundation...The nation itself must be built up of Hindus, on Hindu traditions, culture, ideas and aspirations."

Since country's independence, it has been working on this project. It has created a family of several, political, social and cultural Hindu nationalist organisations drawing inspiration from its ideology. These organisations which are several dozen in number are nominally independent though they project different policies and activities. Practically they are extensions of Hindutva ideology. They have spread their wings in the length and breadth of the country and in different communities including minorities – the Muslims and Sikhs. On the shoulders of this organisational strength it has been attempting to wield political power and finally in 2014 general elections it succeeded to bring its political wing – to power on its own majority in Lok Sabha and subsequently in many of the state Assemblies. After capturing power and thus controlling state apparatus, it feels it is the best time to implement its agenda of creating India as a Hindu nation. This ideological head and its affiliates are calling the shots now using state structures and power to irretrievably dismantle the secular fabric of

the country and threaten the minorities -- especially the Muslims. They are creating an intolerant society where minorities are forced to submission to the will of majority. Freedom of speech has been jeopardised and dissent is considered as anti-national.

Muslim bashing is rampant under the garb of terrorism, love jihad, ghar vapsi, triple talaq, four marriages, etc. History is sought to be reinterpreted where Muslims are shown only the traitors, all their monuments are projected to be built after destroying Hindu temples. Muslims are being demonised as the cause of all ills in the country. This is being done to consolidate the Hindu majority votes. Any political party which dares to speak for minorities is accused of appeasing the minorities. Media is playing in the hands of the ruling establishment and is constantly planting biased, half cooked one-sided stories. An army of e-experts is using social networking sites to spread hatred. Muslim targeting has become a good pastime for the electronic media. In such a situation, minorities feel suffocated and demoralised. These are harrowing times for the minorities in India not witnessed before. Today it is Muslims which constitute 15 percent of the population; tomorrow other minorities will be picked up for thrashing.

How should the minorities react to this worsening situation? How can they come forward and put up a united front? How some of self-styled minority leaders can be stopped from playing in the hands of the ruling combine? What should be done to spread political awareness among the minorities? These issues need to be pondered upon by the academia and intellectuals belonging to the minority communities in India.

India is a land of pluralities. A large country with world's second largest population, India presents endless variety of physical features, cultural patterns, linguistic groups, caste and religious divisions. The Indian population originated from three separate waves of migration from Africa, Iran and Central Asia over a period of last 50,000 years. Successive bands of foreigners --the Greeks, the Parathions, Scythians and the Turks (Kushanas)-- who came as invaders were ultimately absorbed in the vast population of India. In this process of fusion, India gradually became a mosaic of many languages and dialects. People of different religions and cultures entered India at various points of

time and under different circumstances, interacted with local religions, sects, and cultures to enrich its pluralism and this land provided them ideological and political space.

Indian pluralism, its syncretization and synthesis is prominently found in the area of its religions. Hinduism came to be known a religion during the period of epics and the Puranas which date to the Gupta period (from approximately 315 to 551 CE). Hinduism itself was not a monolithic religion, but a labyrinth, criss-crossed at different layers and at different regions. Hinduism syncretized many local religions and was termed as Hinduism by the census enumerators in 1891 onwards, when they had sought to identify the varied religious practices of India, which could not be termed Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian or Zoroastrian.¹ Jainism and Buddhism emerged during the period of the Upanishads. They posed a great challenge to Brahmanism. The teachings of Mahavira and the Buddha had a strong impact and were centered on a way of life and an inner experience. With the decline of Buddhism, Saivism and Vaisnavism emerged, reflecting the synthesis of Brahmanic and local religions. Islam, India's second largest religion, along with all its branches of Sunni, Sh'ia, and Ismailis has found home in India. One can see Islamic influence in all the spheres of Indian culture. Christianity is still recent in its growth though it is considered to have come to India through St. Thomas in 52 A.D. Sikhism is amongst the youngest of the major world religions, originated and primarily developed in the 15th-17th century and concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.² Buddhism seems to have become almost extinct in the land of its birth. Buddhists counted about 8 million according to 2001 census in India. Buddhism developed a mass appeal among Dalits, who embraced Buddhism in increasing number after 1950. In 1956, B.R. Ambedkar led the conversion of half a million Dalits to Buddhism.³

MERGING OF OTHER INDIAN RELIGIONS INTO HINDUISM

Indian religions, sometimes also termed as Dharmic religions, are the religions that originated on the Indian subcontinent; namely Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Although Indian religions are connected through history, but they were by and large regarded as revolutionary movements of their time within Hinduism. After their

emergence, they were slowly merged back to Hinduism. Jainism had many similar characteristic features, including the concepts of samsara, karma and moksha as those of Hinduism but their interpretation of these terms was different. Jains were always regarded to be an integral part of Hindu society. Though after a long legal battle Jains have achieved minority status but are still regarded as part of wider Hindu society. Buddhism like Jainism arose as a protest against the ritualism of the Hindu religion. Gautama Buddha was made to be considered as one of the avatars of Vishnu in Vaishnava Hinduism. Of the ten major Vishnu avatars, he was considered as the ninth incarnation. Thus Mahatma Buddha was made as part of the Hindu Pantheon.⁴

Sikhism was born as an independent religion. Guru Nanak was born in a Hindu family but he never adopted Hindu religion. Rather, he rejected Hinduism and its rituals. A monotheistic religion, Sikhism does not believe in superiority of any special caste, class, colour or gender. They worship only the Almighty One and praise Him only. Sikhism rejects idolatry and has no clergy system. Guru Nanak introduced the concept of one god, (Ik Onkar), one creator present in all of creation. Sikhs refer to the divine as *Wahbeguru* – the Wondrous Enlightener. Though certain Hindu ideologies practiced in Sikhism are considerably similar like those of *karma*, *moksha*, *maya* and *dharmā*. Sikh identity came to be crystalised during the time of Sikh gurus (1469-1708). All this while, the Sikh religious and cultural heritage ran parallel to, not always antagonistic with, Hinduism. Many efforts have been made by certain Hindu elements to define Sikhism as an offshoot of Hinduism because, according to them, most of the Sikhs have/had their roots in Hindu families. These efforts have been resented and rejected by the Sikhs. Sikhs remain a recognised religious minority in India.⁵

CHALLENGE OF ABRAHAMIC (SEMITIC-ORIGINATED) RELIGIONS

There are three Abrahamic religions present in India --Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Islam is the second largest religion in India, with 15 percent of the country's population. Islam first came to the western coast of India when Arab traders as early as the 7th century came to coastal Malabar and Konkan-Gujarat. In 711, Sindh (in present-day Pakistan) was conquered by an Arab army led by

Muhammad bin Qasim thus making Sindh as the easternmost province of the Umayyad Caliphate. Later centuries saw a significant integration of Hindu and Muslim cultures across India.⁶ Spread of Sufism played a decisive role in spread of Islam in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Bengal, Orissa UP and Bihar. The most obvious result of the religious impact of Islam on Hinduism is, of course, the existence of a large Muslim population in India. Islam as a religion could never merge or assimilate in Hinduism as it was already a codified religion with a different value system. Islam was a strictly monotheistic religion while Hinduism was based on idol worship. Moreover it entered India as a dominant force which subsequently subjugated the local rulers.

The Muslims ruled India for more than 700 years. Beginning with invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni and Mohammed Ghauri from central Asia and Afghanistan, India was under the rule of the Slave Dynasty, the Khilji Dynasty, the Tughlaq Dynasty, the Saiyyids, the Lodhi dynasty and the Mughal Dynasty (Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb etc.) which came to an end with dethroning of the last Mughal King Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1857. All these rulers were independent of the Ottomans caliphs. The caliphate and Muslim empires in India had Islam as their religion but these empires never had Islam as the state religion.

It is believed that Christianity was introduced to India by St. Thomas the Apostle, who supposedly landed in ancient seaport and urban center of Muziris (presently Mahodayapuram) Kerala in AD 52. There are Portuguese, Roman Catholic, Syrian Christians and a host of other Christian sub-faiths in India. During the colonial period, many Christian missionaries came to India to spread Christianity. There are about 25 million Christians in India comprising 2.3 percent of the country's population. Three main regional concentrations of Christian population exist, namely in South India, on the Konkan Coast, and among tribal people in East, Central, and North-East India with the southern state of Kerala, contributing 25 percent of the total Christian population in India.⁷

MINORITIES AND INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Indian Constitution has made references to religious as well as linguistic minorities but it does not explicitly define what a minority

is? During the Constituent Assembly debates an exhaustive discussion took place on this issue. There was an Advisory Committee on Minority Rights in the Constituent assembly which framed and finalized India's constitution to advise on minority rights including the provision for reservation for them. By and large the constituent Assembly and Advisory Committee members were not in favour of reservation for the religious minorities. This included the Christian and Muslim members barring a few exceptions. During the debate, Gobind Ballabh Pant advised the minorities saying: "Your safety lies in making yourselves an integral part of the organic whole which forms the real genuine State".⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru slammed the idea of communal quota and said, "A safeguard of this kind would have some point where there was autocratic or foreign rule, it would enable the monarch to play one community against the other." Even Muslim member Tajamul Hussain, a barrister and member from Bihar maintained: "The state in India being secular shall have no concern with any religion, creed or profession of faith, and shall observe an attitude of absolute neutrality in all matters relating to the religion of any class of its citizens or other persons in the Union."⁹ So, the religion based minorities were not given any reservation.

As to who will be the minority, Preamble of Indian constitution states that India is a Secular country. Thus, every religion is equal and religious demography will determine the minority status. Still, all minorities will enjoy the same and equal rights. Article 29 protects the interests of the minorities by making a provision that any citizen/section of citizens having a distinct language, script or culture have the right to conserve the same, and Article 30 protects the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions whether based on religion or language. In the Fundamental duties, Article 51A (e) states that, "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities." It was under the National Commission of Minorities Act, 1992 that five religious groups as minorities were notified i.e., the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians. Further the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions was set

up under the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions Act, 2004. Carving out of Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, a separate Ministry of Minority Affairs was created on 29th January 2006 to ensure a more focused approach towards issues relating to the notified minority communities namely Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Sikhs, Parsis and Jain. Ever since, the Ministry has launched various schemes for educational and economic empowerment of minorities.

PLURALITY OF INDIA

Pluralism has been the main feature of Indian society. The existence of religious pluralism depends on the existence of freedom of religion which is when different religions of a particular region possess the same rights of worship and public expression. India is a pluralistic society since its inception. Plurality is a reality as our ethos and constitution gives equal respect for all faiths or religions. While framing our constitution, the founding fathers knew the reality of the country. India's population comprised hundreds of communities belonging to different linguistic, religious, cultural and social categories. India's polity and political system recognised this pluralism and began to evolve around this notion. Mahatma Gandhi and others who chose a model of nationalism which stressed on acknowledging, cherishing and celebrating Indian diversity and not imposing a single language or religion on the others. This notion comprised the 'idea of India'.¹⁰ The democratic polity evolved and underwent transformation and change as the post independence India unfolded. Multi-party system also reflected the fabric of pluralism inherent in Indian society.

But presently ruling dispensation in India has been making all efforts to create a majoritarian Hindu nationalism at the forefront of political narrative. For them the best way has been to whim up and demonise the Muslim minority as the villain of independent India. The purpose was to divide the society and get majority Hindu support in order to win the parliamentary and state assembly elections. Their affiliates consistently and vigorously have been raising the issues such as (i) Understanding of and dealing with history, especially that of Medieval India in the context of role of Islam in India. (ii) Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura as special cases of the legacy of history (iii)

characterization of one by the other community as malecha and kafir (iv) religious processions and playing of music before mosques (v) conversions from one religion to another (vi) Vande Matram (vii) cow protection (viii) Hindu culture, national heroes and Muslims (ix) communal riots (x) the de facto status of Urdu especially in U.P. (xi) perceptions of Muslim appeasement (xii) Muslim Personal Law and Uniform civil Code (xiii) Muslims loyalty to India (xiv) perception of threat of worldwide Islamic terrorism and its linking with Indian Muslims (xv) role and education of Madarsas in India (xvi) Kashmir's full integration in India, and abolition of Article 370 (xviii) and issue of rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits, and (xviii) partition of India etc.¹³

To spread its divisive ideology down to the last person in the country, this rabidly communal combine built and strengthened several dozen of affiliated organisations.¹⁴ (collectively called the Sangh Privar). Together, the Sangh Parivar represents the Hindu nationalist movement. It includes the RSS and its affiliate organisations, whose members express their opinions over a range of topics. Nominally, these organisations run independently and have different policies and activities within the Sangh Parivar. Actually their purpose is political and they collectively work as foot soldiers of its political wing at the time of elections. These organisations category wise include:

Helping to build a majority, other factors also played a significant role helping Bringing this ideology into power in the recent past including the 2014 elections. A neo-liberal environment ensured that money power played an unprecedented role in the elections. The collapse of the Congress both on the governance and organisational fronts and the failure of the regional parties of UP and Bihar to withstand this onslaught also played their part. Curiously, the media coverage of the 2014 election started in December 2012. This heavily loaded construct, that decisive leadership is the answer to India's woes, has been propagated by the corporate sector and the urban middle class, which viewed the Congress as corrupt, dynastic, and inefficient and a reckless benefactor of the poor. This entailed a high voltage campaign to amplify anti-incumbency against the Congress led government at the centre.

Once in majority in Lok Sabha, this outfit began to show its true colours. While top political leadership kept on harping on developmental agenda and selectively kept quite on the illegal brandishings of its fringe elements, while its backed organisations and individuals began the anti-minority campaigns like love jihad, ghar vapsi, the beef ban, forcing them to sing Vande Mataram/Bharat Mata Ki Jai, etc. as part of a divisive agenda of the majority party to consolidate itself. Many states ruled by it made cow slaughter as a legal crime with stringent punishments. There were crack downs on meat shops, even fridges of Muslims household were searched by unruly communally incited mobs at many places. They became the self-appointed cow protectors. Lynch mobs were unleashed on the Muslims accusing them possessing beef. Muslim youths are provoked even mocked in trains and buses on wearing the skull caps and then attacked by their goons. Many of the majority community members considered to be involved in Samjhauta Express bombings, Mecca Masjid bombing and 2006 Malegaon blasts were released or granted bails. Any criticism of the government and its top leaders is considered as anti-national and people are trolled on social media if they question the illegal high-handedness of these fringe elements.

The most dangerous developments for the minorities of the country are decimating their symbols and obliterating history to impose the agenda of majority party. For instance, the renaming of the iconic Mughalsarai railway station in Uttar Pradesh after their ideologue Deen Dayal Upadhyay, and renaming Aurangzeb Road in Lutyens' Delhi after A P J Abdul Kalam the late President of India. Recent decision of Dyal Singh (Evening) College managing committee to rename it as Vande Mataram Mahavidyalaya is a case in point though they had to retract from this last-named decision when the Sikhs made a strong protest. This was an attempt to demolish a Sikh minority symbol from the capital of the Country. Unleashing its anti-minority agenda, central government submitted in the Supreme Court that Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Millia Islamia University are not minority educational institutions. In the case of AMU, the Attorney General argued that this is because it was set up by an act of Parliament, not by Muslims. The UGC which is now stuffed with many of its ideologues

is planning to interfere into the internal structures of the departments of AMU.¹⁵ For instance, it has been now suggested to club the separate Sunni and Shia departments under the Theology faculty into a department for comparative religion without knowing its implications. History is being distorted; syllabi are being tinkered to adjust their wishful history which is far from the reality. Its choicest ideologues or affiliated persons are being drafted to head Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and the Universities. All this is being done in the name of nationalism and correcting the historical wrongs committed by earlier governments. Since 2014, the national media has nothing else to debate except, Triple Talaq, Hindu-Muslim issues, Kashmir problem, India-Pakistan tensions, Hafiz Saeed, stone pelting on Indian Army, Uniform Civil Code, futility of Madarsa Education. They leave no stone unturned to show Indian Muslim in poor light. As if all ills of India are due to Muslims, all Muslim men are hovering around their wives with sword of Triple Talaq in their hand and all human rights violations are done in the Muslim society only. By doing these acts, the ruling dispensation is creating a majoritarian hegemony to force the minorities of the country to submission forever, so that they can rule the country according to their Hindutava ideology. By creating a fifth column among the minorities, they are scuttling the efforts of unity within in the minority communities.

WHAT SHOULD THE MINORITIES OF INDIA DO?

The minority communities of India need to contest the majoritarianism by taking a firm stand on minority rights as intrinsic features of India's democracy. India's minorities and Muslims in particular, have to overcome internal divisions and forge wider and more effective links with relevant civil society organizations in order to be heard and heeded. All minority communities must start awareness campaigns among their constituents. The situation in the country today is characterised and manifested by creeping fascism. Never before in our history have we been confronted by such a phenomenon. With government's active and passive support, This rabidly communal juggernaut is on the move, and the groundwork is being created to

declare India a Hindu Rashtra.

In such a situation, the minority communities in India need to be more engaged in the politics of the country. They need to create their enlightened cadres to construct a new discourse in which they have an honourable and dignified place in India's polity and society. They must build a cadre of well read intellectuals who can counter the majoritarian argument put forward by this combine. There is need of the time that a Pan India Joint Minority front is created to evolve strategies to protect the minorities. Minorities should create a collective security shield (all for one and one for all) where attack on one minority should be the concern of all the minorities. The minorities should galvanise their communities and teach the tact of tactical voting so that any candidate or political party with a fascist majoritarian view does not get elected down from Panchayat to the Parliament of the country. To protect India's pluralism, it is the duty of all of us to protect the values enshrined in our Constitution. It is also a fact that majority among this majority is non-majoritarian in their outlook the minorities should elicit the vocal support this enlightened majority. Minorities must remember one thing, each one of them is vulnerable today Muslims are being picked up as target.

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# NEGATIVE ROLE OF PREJUDICE IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

## – MINORITY ISSUES: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT –

DR MADAN JIT KAUR\*

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The genesis of the present syndrome of majoritarian community towards minorities in India can easily be traced to VD Swarkar's metaphysics of militant Hindu nationalism. To Swarkar, swadharam is Swaraj. The secular approach is ruled out totally. All the Hindu systems of symbolism and narcissistic reflexes are projected in his *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, which has a seminal influence on the version of nationalism being practiced by Sangh Parivar conglomerates.

The psychological, political and intellectual background of the Hindutva leaders, politicians and Parcharakas is deeply rooted in its hidden agenda of Hindu Rashtravad turning India a mono-religious, mono-ethnic entity. The aim is to establish the hegemony of majority community in India where the minorities have no role to play. This social tension is adversely affecting the psyche of the religious minorities as well as the majority group. The negative inter-group prejudice is creating inter-group conflicts, distress and animosity. The majority group is under the malaise of suspicion and ego ruling their hearts and the minorities is living under stress and fear for security of their identity. The fundamental rights granted by Indian constitution are under siege. The minority people are being reduced to second grade citizens. Their ballot box strength has been marginalized into non-entity by promoting caste based strategy of polarisation. The minorities are no longer participants in national political system and governance. The anti-Muslim hate-speeches of the ultra nationalist

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Hindutva leaders and their radical organizations have allowed the communal dominance of the majority enormously to flourish. The collective ego of the majoritarianism wishes create conflicts, social tensions and prejudices for safeguarding its interests of superior status, power, wealth and dominance in the pluralistic society.

The British encouraged Hindu-Muslim conflict following the principle of divide and rule. The same policy seems to be being followed by the present ruling power. The British divided India on communal lines - India and Pakistan. The Document of 'Transfer of Power' reveals that the British had a third nation option as well, the Sikhs for which the Sikh leaders refused. Many of the Muslims stayed back in India after partition not to leave their land of birth. Both the facts are not given due consideration by the majority community. India is a pluralistic society since ages. Its unity lies in its diversity cemented by constitution granting equal right to all citizens.

India is indeed a pluralistic society but unfortunately today diversity is synonymous with disintegration and ethnic identity of the minority is viewed as a danger to the nation.

The Hindutva culture is being imposed upon the minorities. That is why here is cow-politics, mandir-masjid dispute, brutal lynching of Muslims on suspicion of eating, beef keeping or cattle trading love-Jihad issue, interference in Muslim personal law, Teen Talaq reform, plan to divide Shia-Sunni Muslim sects, Gharwapsi plan, renaming of the minority legacy, organization of Rashtraya Sikh Sangat, attacks on Christian Missionaries and Churches. State patronage is being provided for promotion of Hindu customs, centres of pilgrimage, temples, deities, festivals, Vedic texts, practices of havans, yoga etc at the Govt expenses. The selective approach to Indian history, glorification of ancient Hindu heritage based on mythology, attempt of distortion of historical facts, deleting chapters on Turkish – Muslim period, downplaying of Congress rule in India's Independence movement, recognition of selected names as national heroes. and national leaders, and denying of any role to minorities in the development of Indian cultural history, inventing new names in the list of national heroes. The strategy of communal divide for electoral victory by hook and crook is their tool to subjugate, segregate, isolate or assimilate the

minorities in the majoritarian community. The ethnic jokes and nicknames being used as propaganda slogans during the election campaign of its leaders is a reflection of its biased mind against the minorities. The dominative racism of the culturally dominant groups' antipathy and aversion towards schedule castes has also promoted inter-caste conflicts in the Indian society. The upper castes aversion, racism, caste taboo, sects etc, is expressed in the desire to avoid contact with lower castes and suppressing them or segregating them has resulted in inhuman atrocities on the dalits. The horizontal social stratification of the Indian society based on *varna* or *jati* as legitimized by Manu Smriti (ancient Hindu text) is professed as the taboo of pollution verses purity.

The overbearing autocratic attitude of the majoritarian govt is suppressing the right of freedom of expression. Protests, resistance, demand for justice have resulted in oppression on students, rationalists, academicians, writers, journalists, social activists etc. Even the judiciary, the last hope for redressal of public grievances, is being reminded of its limitations by the ruling leaders.

The ruling power is devoid of concern for welfare of the society, moral secular values and sense of responsibility. Its sectarian approach is harming the social fabric and vitality of the nation as well as the peaceful co-existence and harmony in our pluralistic society. It is time to learn lessons from the harmful consequences of the ethnic prejudices and negative inter-group tensions. When religious feelings or belief of a minority group are hurt, it affects their socio-economic status. Discrimination leads to segregation, isolation of one group from another. In a pluralistic system, isolation of any group is dangerous and may prove threat to its social cohesion and stability. The minority reaction to majority dominance may appear in the form of secessionist or militant response which is dangerous for the integrity of the nation like that of separatists in Kashmir valley and Naxalities in Jharkhand. Today the communal divide has taken more or less deep roots which is reflected in the sliding index in the national growth. There is no agreement on common goals between majority and minority groups. No sense of responsibility to strive together for the welfare of the society is perceptible today. The objective law of social development

requires an all-round development of the common masses and framework of consciousness which may provide a motivation for meeting the challenges of the time.

Even after seventy years of independence, we are haunted by the fear of disintegration. The state has not yet given full attention to human distress, human rights, social change, economic revolution and communal integration of the pluralistic Indian society. The real issues of provision of adequate nutrition, health care, education, employment, social security for all the strata of society are being left behind in the communalization of the nation. This is a pointer to why the present history of Indian people is so full of suffering or why does failure take place in our society repeatedly. The dire need of the socio-political situation of the contemporary India requires an ideology of the desired social and political order and right action for affecting liberation from the malaise of prejudices and initiating secular and more democratic changes in the country. We have to attend urgently - how to tackle prejudice and hatred in our society.

The critical issue of communalism in our multi-religious society has to be viewed from various angles of the ethnic and socio-economic and political tensions in our society. At the fundamental level, we may begin by directing our efforts towards achieving a more cooperative and secular culture in which communal propaganda has less appearance. We need active support of persons, organizations and institutions for opinion making in the masses for secular values. Besides, political and economic powers can also be effective to transcend the line which separates majority from minority. The State must provide adequate facilities and resources where minorities can channelize their abilities, realize their aspirations and participate in programmes of common objects. Until the minorities feel secure, protected and integrated into national mainstream on terms of total equality, the threat of social tensions, breakdown of law and order situation and disintegration is equally harmful to the majority and the minorities and all other who are concerned with peace and order in the Indian sub-continent.

It is a lesson of history that perhaps all societies have to suffer the collective indignity of discovering the grave moral and ethnical

lapses in the polity. This is a serious warning to the leaders as well as voters for their destiny in future India. We are aware of the tragedy of Germans under the fascist Nazi regime resulting in second World War and disintegration of Germany that took decades to bring unity in the divided Germany.

We are living in a global society. The enblock oppression and subjugation of the minorities as desired and planned by the present ruling combine is not possible in the present times. It may have to face international criticism and warning from the international community and Amnesty International for abuse of the human rights and its failure to protect minorities and turning a blind eye to the violence of the majority worker, in the country. The oppression of minorities may result in internal turmoil and external threat by the divisive forces of internationally known fanatical and militant forces. It needs an urgent correction of its wrongs and pave way for smooth running of the democratic set up of the Indian Republic and all round development of the majority and minorities without any discrimination. We need to surmount all forms of intolerance, prejudice, hatred and ethnic bias and build national ethos and secular attitude. The verdict of history is the final judge on the evaluation of the achievements of a nation not the organized propaganda of the ruling combine.

# SIKHISM AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

DR DHARAM SINGH\*

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Religious pluralism as a fact of human existence is as old as the religious history of humankind; the founders of almost all the major world religions were born and lived in pluralistic situations. In spite of this, we can still call it a newly experienced reality because in the past people lived secure in their own tiny and isolated religious camps, unconcerned with the issue of plurality of religions and the allied theological and social problems. Today, however, the world has become physically one - what some have called a global village. In this practical situation we cannot run away from or wish away the social reality of religious pluralism and the social and theological issues arising from it. In the modern-day world we must realize that “the religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism. This is true for all of us.”<sup>1</sup>

What constitutes a pluralist society? John Furnivall calls it a “medley of peoples,” for they mix but do not combine. Each group holds by its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. This is a pluralistic society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit.<sup>2</sup>

## **NEEDED: A RELIGIOUSLY GLOBAL VILLAGE**

Unfortunately, however, in today’s pluralistic global society, each faith community is not in harmonious relationship with the others. This has been due mainly to the fact that each religious community is overly zealous in underrating the ideology and culture of the others.

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And this excessive zeal usually stems from the way leaders of each religion claim a monopoly of truth for their faith. To them, only their religion, or only their prophet, can lead people on the path to God-realization and self-realization. Other religions are declared inferior, or inauthentic, or 'Pagan'. This exclusivist attitude is doing much damage to our social fabric;<sup>3</sup> religious people and their leaders have the responsibility to address and try to rectify this problem.

What we need, I suggest, is a religiously global village. And to achieve this - to enable different faith communities to live harmoniously and peacefully - we need something like the pluralist model. In this model the value and validity of multiple religious communities are recognized. Religions, in the pluralist perspective, do share something in common, they make common reference to, or presume, a single, transcendent reality.<sup>4</sup> Still, they have genuine differences, for each religion is a different historical manifestation of that reality, and it presents visions of God, world, and humanity from a localized, historically particular perspective. In other words, it can be said that the essence of divine revelation is universal but when shared by the receiver-prophet with humankind in a mundane language in a specific historic-religio-cultural context, it acquires limitations as well as differentiation.

To affirm the fact of diverse religions as finite manifestations of one infinite is in no way to diminish the significance of any particular religion; rather, such diversity reveals the richness of eternal and infinite truth. One must try to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and practices of one's neighbor. No doubt, one cannot put one's faith in parenthesis while trying to understand and examine the faith of the other as this is witnessed to by the believer, without prejudging that faith and without abandoning one's own commitment. This, as MAC Warren reminds us, is a very delicate undertaking: "Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival."<sup>5</sup>

Religious pluralism cannot be confined to the knowledge of other religious systems and their doctrines and teachings. This would mean

trying to confront a religious truth in the abstract. Pluralism presumes the effort to know and appreciate the historical-cultural context and the people who make up other faith community. This will require no small effort, for although our earth has been transformed economically, politically and informationally into a global village, many of us still prefer to remain in our own small, individual villages. We have become neighbor with people of different races and religions, yet we still prefer to call and consider them alien.

We can lead meaningful, satisfying- and today we can add safe - lives only if we do so and also work out a more dialogical relationship with our neighbours who may not necessarily be of our own race or color or religious persuasion. We must not only live with our religiously and culturally diverse neighbours; we must also talk with, work with, and learn from them.

India encountered religious pluralism as a social reality in the ancient past; the West did so only in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. With the growing awareness of the fact of religious pluralism,<sup>6</sup> the earlier view of Christian missionaries has for several reasons undergone a sea change, leading to the reinterpretation and restating of Christian theology.<sup>7</sup> The early Muslim theological stand was that other religions are deviations of the one primordial religion, while "Islam was the full revelation and therefore the norm of all religion."<sup>8</sup> It is difficult, however, for contemporary Muslims who find themselves in minority positions in alien cultures to adhere to this view. Hinduism in the Indian context enjoys a unique position insofar as it is theoretically pluralist, but practically it has always endeavored to assimilate religions of Indian origin unto itself without conceding an independent status to any of them.

For many people today it appears more and more difficult to hold to such exclusivist or inclusivist models for understanding religious history. This history indicates, rather, that there can be no one way to the realization of God and that there are many paths and many saviors to help people in their efforts to pursue truth and meaning. Further, these many ways cannot exist in isolation from one another, and they cannot possibly remain intolerant of or indifferent toward the others. The neighbor can no longer remain a stranger. It is necessary for different

religions and faith communities to meet one another and relate to one another, the objective being not to absorb or obliterate the other but to help and learn from each other. This has become obligatory for humanity today because pluralism is no more only a text book issue; it has become a human existential problem.

### **A YOUNG AND WORLD-AFFIRMING RELIGION**

The Sikh faith is one of the youngest of the major world religions, and as such it can also be called a later stage in the history of the evolution of human religious consciousness. It originated with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) in a northwest province of India but has since spread throughout the world despite the fact that it is not a missionary faith. No doubt, the expansion of the Sikh community is mainly due to the Sikh diaspora, but dissemination of knowledge about the Sikh faith has also helped in this expansion, though in a limited way. Chronologically, the fifteenth century, when the Sikh faith originated belongs to the medieval period of Indian history. An in-depth study of the faith, however, reveals its critical attitude towards the medieval spirit and its responsiveness to modernity.

In the modern-day circumstances outlined above, the Sikh religion can play a crucial and constructive role, mainly because it has evolved an inter-religious theology. The Sikh faith accepts plurality, but this acceptance is not passive; it is, rather critical. This critical spirit is quite explicit on at least two vital points. First, the Sikh Gurus have been highly critical of any religion and tradition that sanctions and safeguards hierarchical social structures. The idea of inequality by birth among people has not been acceptable to them. There are many hymns in the Sikh scripture that criticize the spirit and philosophy of the Vedic tradition, which classifies humans into different *varna* or castes and denies many rights to those born in the lowest *varna*. In Sikh theology, all humans are equal, no matter how different they may appear externally. All human are, in essence, one with, and before, God, and that makes them equal among themselves. In one of his hymns Guru Nanak sides with the lowliest among the lowly and also states these so-called low castes and the poor are God's favorites.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the Sikh faith opposes a religion that mobilizes mass support in the name of religion in order to serve the interests of a

ruling political class. The Sikh Gurus were well aware of the danger of religion becoming an instrument of political dominance in the hands of a select few. Therefore, in their hymns they criticized the Hindu and the Muslim clergies for their role in misusing religion for the purpose of oppressing certain classes of society. Before the origin of the Sikh faith, the Hindu clergy denied the Sudras, the lowest caste in the Hindu social order, the right to enter a place of worship or to read or listen to a scripture being read; they had no right to progress in the realm of spirituality and thus attain salvation. To achieve this ultimate end of human life, they were supposed to serve the higher-caste people well during this lifetime and thus earn their next birth in a higher caste. Thus, the clergy in a way tried to retain the status quo in society and keep these Sudras in a position of perpetual subservience. The Sikh Gurus changed the very concept of religion by first denying any place in the new faith to clergy and by eradicating all distinctions of high and low between one human being and another. On the other hand, the Muslim clergy during the Muslim rule in India tried to interpret scriptures to justify even many of the unjust actions of the rulers performed by them not out of any religious obligation but out of pure political expediency.<sup>10</sup> As we said earlier, the Gurus in their professions and practice sided with the lowly, the oppressed, and the suppressed. Thus, the Sikh Gurus used religion to do away the evils of injustice, oppression, and exploitation, they used it as an instrument for social change as well.

The Sikh faith integrates the world and worldly life with the idea of divinity. It rejects asceticism, but at the same time it is also highly critical of a hedonistic way of life. Both these two extremes are rejected in Sikhism. Also, the Sikh concept of social action is marked by boundaries of morality. In Sikhism, Khalsa-Panth,<sup>11</sup> as created by Guru Gobind Singh in fulfillment of Guru Nanak's mission, is the agency to which the task of social transformation has been endowed. The Khalsa, as an individual, stands for a realized self and, in its collective sense, represents the classless and casteless social structure of the Gurus' vision. The scripture, on the other hand, renders the general framework in which the task of social transformation is to be accomplished. In other words, the scripture is a sort of constitution that lays down the

structures according to which one must live one's social and religious existence, while the Khalsa-Panth must not only live that kind of life but also create conditions conducive for that kind of life. Both the structure and the agency, however, must function in harmony to bring about peace and co-existence, love and compassion, equality and justice in society.

In Sikh belief, God both creates and permeates the entire phenomenal world. Thus understanding of God as both transcendent creator and immanent presence lends relative reality to the finite world. This world cannot be considered simply to be sinful or mere *maya* (delusion, not real) or primarily a place of suffering; it is, rather, the dwelling place of the Divine. As the residence of the Lord God, the world need not be renounced; on the contrary humans must strive to fashion the world into the kingdom of God. In this process, for Sikhs, the spiritual is socialized, and the secular and social are spiritualized. Ethics, therefore, is central to Sikh belief and practice; Sikhs are called to an active righteous participation in family and social life. The ideal religion for Sikhs calls upon people to perform concrete good deeds in this world but at the same time constantly to remember the Divine Name. "The best religion amongst all the religions is one that asks man to remember God's Name and do noble deeds," Say the Sikh scripture.<sup>12</sup>

### **RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS**

The lives of the Sikh spiritual preceptors, the message of the Sikh scripture, and Sikh tradition and history all stand witness to the constructive and positive Sikh response to interfaith relations. For example, if we look at the life of the founder of the faith, Guru Nanak, we learn that after he received the revelation, he went on four preaching odysseys in four different directions to share this divine message with the people at large.<sup>13</sup> In the south, he traveled upto Sri Lanka, in the east, he went upto Dhaka now in Bangladesh, in the west he passed through Rajasthan, Gujrat, and proceeded to Baghdad and Mecca; and in the north, he traveled deep into the Himalayas. During these odysseys he seems to have made it a point to visit any place of pilgrimage or importance to either Hindus or Muslims. At such places, he would call on the holy men who might be living there and have a

spiritual discourse with them. Instead of thrusting his view of truth on anyone, he would listen to them and also share with them the revelation he had had. The Sikh tradition does not support polemics but instead recommends a meaningful and constructive dialogue in which one must listen to the other's viewpoint and then offer one's own witness. Such a dialogical relationship with other faiths leads to a much-needed deeper understanding and appreciation of other religions.

The Sikh scripture calls for respect for all religions, tolerance for religious pluralism, and understanding and cooperation among different faith communities. It is quite explicit in its statement that revelation cannot be religion specific, region specific, or caste specific and that the claim to truth cannot be a monopoly of any one particular religion, caste, class or region. Since each expression of revelation is considered an attempt to encounter and understand the real one in a particular localized context, we must respect other religions, notwithstanding our disagreements and differentiations in regard to outward symbols and rituals. That is why the Sikh Gurus advised everybody to be true to his or her faith: a Muslim should be a true Muslim, and a Hindu should become a true Hindu. There is no instance in Sikh history or tradition of exhorting anybody to convert to Sikhism because it was, so to say, a better faith than any other. Also, Sikhism seeks to unite people belonging to different religious traditions into a broader unity. Sikh theology holds that the object of religion is not to divide humankind but to unite it; "Not to act like scissors and tear asunder the social fabric, but to act like a needle and sew it together."<sup>14</sup>

The Sikh scripture was compiled by Guru Arjan (1653-1606), the fifth spiritual preceptor of the Sikhs, in 1604.<sup>15</sup> The collection included hymns of his own and of his four predecessors, as well as hymns coming from the Hindu and Muslim traditions that had been selected on the basis of their resonance with Sikh beliefs. No change has since been made in the contents of the scripture except that Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the tenth Guru, added to it the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur, his spiritual predecessor, some time before he bestowed upon the scripture itself the office of Guru; in Sikh tradition, the Word, or more precisely the Word as contained therein and is since then revered as the living Guru or the Guru Eternal. The Word in it is

taken as the spirit-incarnate of the Gurus. As it is, all the hymns contained in the scripture are of equal significance and reverence for a Sikh. For example, a hymn of Kabir, Ravidas, or Farid is as sacred to a Sikh as that of Guru Nanak. Thus, the holy Granth Sahib provides a unique example of negating the idea that revelation is religion specific; rather, it shows respect for religious pluralism and tries to bring together the essential message of religion as communicated by holy people from different traditions.

Furthermore, these holy contributors to the scripture come not only from different religious backgrounds but also from different castes and different regions. For example, Kabir is a weaver, Ravidas is a cobbler, Namdev a calico-printer, and Dhanna a peasant. All this might sound absolutely normal to a western reader because these words stand for different professions, but in the Indian context, especially to those days, they signified the castes (*varnas*) to which these holy men belonged.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, most of these holy men belonged to the so-called low castes (Sudras) and oppressed classes (Dalits). Thus, the medieval Brahmanic view that barred this lower strata of society from religious enlightenment was soundly rejected. Sikhism discards the caste system in social relations and declares all social and religious offices open to all those who otherwise deserve them. The Sikh scripture says that one becomes a Brahmin not by being born in a Brahmin family, as the *varna* system suggested, but by reflecting on Brahman (God)<sup>17</sup> and that it is not the prerogative only of the Kshatris/Khatris to rule, but rather only the deserving should sit on the throne.<sup>18</sup> The Sikh shrines are open to all, irrespective of caste, class, or creed. All the devotees in a Gurdwara sit together on the same floor, and any true Sikh can read the scripture and say the *ardas* or prayer.<sup>19</sup> It is not one's caste or creed but the good deeds done during one's lifetime that earn one a place in the Divine Court.<sup>20</sup>

These contributors to the Sikh scripture do not belong to any particular region, rather they came from very far off and different places in India. For example, Namdev came from Maharashtra (South India), Jaidev from Bengal (East India), Kabir and Ravidas from Uttar Pradesh (North India), Farid and Dhanna from Rajasthan (West India), and the Gurus themselves belonged to Punjab in the Northwest of India. Thus,

in the Sikh viewpoint all spiritual preceptors of the world belonging to different places and countries of the world are equally holy and venerable. Again, we see that the Sikh scripture strongly affirms that truth or revelation is neither religion specific nor region specific nor caste specific.

Similarly, Sikhism also rejects the idea of only one Savior. The idea that my prophet or my spiritual teacher is the only Savior to lead humanity on the road to salvation is alien to Sikhism, which takes different religions as divine revelations made known by the prophets or spiritual preceptors at different times in different spatio-cultural contexts. It accepts each one of the prophets and the traditions founded by them as equally valid paths toward God-realization. In one of his hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Amar Das, the third spiritual preceptor of the Sikhs, declares all religious traditions equally valid as he prays to Lord:

*The world is burning in the fire of passion  
Save it, O Lord, by Thy grace;  
Save it the way Thou consider best.*<sup>21</sup>

There are several instances in the Sikh tradition where we find the Sikh Gurus advising their followers to give equal regard to the prophets and seers from all traditions. Sikhs must also not look down upon those who have a different form of worship. Such an attitude was much ahead of the times and can very easily be taken as a precursor to the modern-day pluralistic model. The oft-quoted example of this viewpoint is that of Guru Arjan, who was once visited by Bhai Gopi (a Bhardwaj Brahmin) and his companions, Bhai Vesa and Bhai Tulsia (Also Bhardwaj Brahmins) and Bhai Bhiara. They were confused by the diverse incarnations in which God was worshiped. The Guru advised them: "All forms and attributes are God's, yet He transcends them. You should, therefore, worship only the Absolute One. At the same time, you must abjure rancor toward those who have a different way of worship."<sup>22</sup>

Lest this understanding and appreciation of other religions should remain an abstract idea, Sikhism seeks to promote a dialogical relationship between different faith communities. The Sikh scripture is quite emphatic in stating that "man throughout his worldly existence

must seek to converse with others by first listening to others' viewpoint and then putting forward his own for this is the only way to attain truth."<sup>23</sup> This notions of "listening to the others' viepoint" (*kichhu suniai*) and putting forward your own viewpoint (*kichhu kabiai*) clearly urges fruitful dialogue aimed at searching for the truth. The Sikh scripture categorically rejects polemics, insisting, rather, that only after polemics have been set aside can the real search for truth begins and bear fruit.<sup>24</sup> Polemics and argumentation cause - and are also caused by - "the ego which in the Sikh scripture is referred as to a 'serious malady'",<sup>25</sup> but humility, a prerequisite for genuine listening to another, is the essence of all virtues.<sup>26</sup> There are innumerable references in Sikh scripture that stress the value of humility. Kabir humbly refers to himself as the worst and everyone else as good, and goes on to say that whoever believes in this dictum is his friend.<sup>27</sup> Sheikh Farid urges us to be as humble as grass on the pathway that is trodden under the feet of many,<sup>28</sup> while Guru Arjan teaches that those who humble themselves are to be exalted.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Sikh scripture clearly teaches that we are to cultivate humility and share our own views while we listen to the views of others, for only then can we all progress on the path to truth.

The best example of interfaith dialogue in the Sikh scripture is Guru Nanak's *Sidh Gosti*, which is a sort of spiritual dialogue on the Sikh philosophy of life vis-à-vis the philosophy of yoga. In this composition, the yogis put searching questions to Guru Nanak, who answers them with courtesy and confidence. The dialogue is held without hurting the feelings of any of the participants, ever retaining serenity and sobriety and aiming at realizing the truth. This is the basis as well as the ideal of interfaith dialogue in Sikhism. Other examples of dialogue can be found within the hymns of Sikh saints. Certain *slokas*, especially of Kabir and Farid, frequently have been held up and commented upon by the Gurus for the way they make use of dialogue rather than polemics as a means for clarifying or expanding God's message of humanity.

The vision of religious tolerance and the affirmation of religious pluralism that are found in the message of the Gurus as contained in scripture are embodied in the lives of the Gurus themselves and in Sikh tradition in general. This is evident in the way Guru Nanak was

revered not just by Sikhs but also by Hindus and Muslims. And Guru Arjan was recognized by Emperor Jahangir for the way his message and conduct brought Hindus and Muslims together to converse with him. Guru Tegh Bahadur went even further and laid down his life to protect religious freedom, offering himself for sacrifice in order to stop the Muslim ruler of his time from forcing the conversion of Hindus to Islam. It was clear that he would have done the same for Muslims had they found themselves in the same situation under Hindu rulers. When Guru Gobind Singh took up the struggle against the deceit and decadence of Hindu Rajput chiefs and against Mughal oppression, he could count many Hindus and Muslims standing at his side. One of the most moving Sikh affirmations of the value of other religions can be found in Bhai Kanahaiya, as he looked out over the slain and wounded soldiers on the battlefield of Anandpur and honored the same divine essence in all of them, no matter what their religion.<sup>30</sup> Treating all human beings as spiritually one and ethnically equal no matter what their religious beliefs is the prerequisite for maintaining harmonious relationship among different faith communities.

If we want a world free from the prevalent distrust and disharmony, oppression and violence, we must be able to see others as our brothers and sisters. This means that we have to discover how to affirm our own identity without threatening the identity of others.<sup>31</sup> And we have to recognize and feel in our religious awareness that when we revile another's religion or desecrate another community's place of worship, we revile or desecrate the Divine Presence itself.

The central message of the teaching of the Sikh faith is that if we truly believe in God's love for all beings, we must affirm and value the others in their otherness. The Sikh religion considers all religions and their revelations to be valid, While affirming other faiths, it also urges dialogue as a means of recognizing and learning from our differences. Within such dialogue Sikhs see the love of God as the energy of love of humankind; they express this love through *sewa* or voluntary service rendered unto others and other such philanthropic activities. Sikhs are in full agreement with St James's assertion that "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:20) with their ethics of creative activism, they seek to realize the Gurus' vision of a society based on

faith, love and justice. This is the need of our contemporary, threatened world - that we do not limit ourselves to words alone but try to actively to turn religious words into practice in our social lives.

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2. J.S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 304
3. For an understanding and detailed discussion of the term exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist, see Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1983). This phraseology was used by Alan Race for the first time and was subsequently supported by John Hick (*Rainbow of Faiths* [London: SMC, 1985]) It was later criticized by Ian Markham in "Creating Options: Shattering the 'Exclusivist, Inclusivist, ad Pluralist' Paradigm," and defended by Gavin D'Costa in "Creating Confusion: A Response to Markham," both in *New Blackfriars* (January 1993)
4. This is a general statement. A caveat to this claim must be entered in the case of certain traditions that tend to deny that religious language points to anything real, for example, the *sramanic* Indian traditions.
5. MAC Warren, "General Introduction," *Christian Presence series* (London: SCM, 1959)
6. This awareness came during what is called the European enlightenment in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, when there developed a realization that Christianity was part of a much larger human world. Changing patterns of mobility also shattered the old conceptions of religious history. The explosion of information in the West about the religions of the world during the twentieth century also helped change the earlier ill-informed and hostile stereotypes of other faiths. Also, the earlier exclusivist attitude had begun to poison relationships between Christian minority and other majority communities in some countries of the world. For Details, see Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*; Hick, *Rainbow of Faiths*; John Hick and Paul F Knitter, eds *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknowll, NY, Orbis Books, 1987).
7. This does not mean that all Christian theologians tend to be pluralists;

many still hold to either the exclusivist model or the inclusivist model.

8. Harold Coward, *Pluralism in the World Religions: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: One World Publication, 2000), 81.
9. Guru Granth Sahib, I, 15.
10. *Ibid.*, 1, 951.
11. The creation of Khalsa-Panth refers to a very significant development in Sikh history. Every Sikh, in growing up, is supposed to receive the baptism of the double-edged sword and thus become a member of the Khalsa-Panth. The origins of this baptismal ceremony go back to the Vaisakhi day (March 30) of AD 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikh faith, summoned a huge gathering of his followers at Anandpur. While addressing the gathering, he asked if anyone from among the gathering was ready to offer his head to the Guru. A Sikh got up and came to the Guru, who took him to the adjoining enclosure and came back with a blood-smeared sword. He repeated the demand five times and the five Sikhs thus selected became the nucleus of the Khalsa-Panth. First, the Guru administered the baptism of the double-edged sword to these five Sikhs who are known in Sikh tradition as the Five Beloved Ones. Then the Guru himself received baptism from these five, thus declaring the Khalsa equal to the Guru. The Khalsa-Panth is a casteless and classless social ideal of Sikhism.  
Also, the word Khalsa, of Arabic origin, was used for the crown lands, that is, the lands under the direct suzerainty of the King. The Khala in Sikh tradition is directly related to Guru/ God and needs no mediator. For details, see Prithipal Singh Kapur and Dharam Singh, *The Khalsa* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1999)
12. Guru Granth Sahib, V, 266.
13. For details, see the Bein episode in the janam-sakhis (the traditional life accounts of Guru Nanak ) wherein Guru Nanak, after leaving the house of Sultanpur where he was living with his sister and brother-in-law to carry out his usual morning routine of bathig in the Bein rivulet, does not return and is missing for a number of days. It is believed that during those days he remained in meditation, during which he was summoned by Nirankar (God), who offered him a cup of nectar and directed him to go into the world and spread his message.
14. *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, XXXIII.4.
15. The work on the compilation of the Sikh scripture was completed in 1604 - the same year work began on the Authorized or King James Version of the Bible.
16. The horizontal division of the Hindu social order into four *varnas* was

rather strict, and the low caste Sudras were denied any right to spirituality. Several of these holy men from Hindu tradition whose hymns find a place in the Sikh scripture, suggested that revelation is not caste specific and that no one on the basis of caste can be denied the right to become liberated.

17. Guru Granth Sahib, II, 512.
18. Ibid., I, 1088.
19. In the Sikh tradition, *ardas* is made to God in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh do so after the morning and evening services in the Gurdwaras. They also offer prayer to seek divine blessings any time they start a new venture or as thanksgiving after the successful completion of any job.
20. Guru Granth Sahib, III, 514
21. Ibid., II, 853.
22. Bhai Mani Singh, *Sikhan di Bhagat Mala* and *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, XI.20.
23. Ibid., I, 661.
24. Ibid., I, 1522.
25. Ibid., II, 466.
26. Ibid., I, 470.
27. Guru Granth Sahib, Kabir, 1364.
28. Ibid., Farid, 1378.
29. Ibid., V, 266.
30. Bhai Kanahaiya was a devotee of Guru Gobind Singh; During a battle the Guru had to fight against the Rajput hill chiefs and the Mughal imperial forces, the Bhai served water to the wounded soldiers. One day it was reported to the Guru that the Bhai served water to the wounded soldiers of the enemy camp as well. The Guru sent for him and asked him to explain. He told the Guru that he saw the same divine image in each face irrespective of the camp he belonged to. The Guru on listening to this was highly pleased and urged him to tend to the wounds of all.
31. Marcus Braybrooke, "Sikhism: A Religion for the Third Millennium," in Dharam Singh, *Perspective of Sikhism* (Patiala: Punjabi Unviersity, 2005), 15.

# MINORITIES' ISSUES: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES IN DEMOCRATIC AND SECULAR INDIA

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Hinduism (the original faith of India) is the world's oldest known religion, with its roots going back to 10,000 years and Hindu literature dating back to 7000 BCE. It is very broad and embraces and respects a wide spectrum of beliefs and objects. Parents, Teachers, Environment, Animals, the 9 Planets and the whole Eco-System are quite rightly considered as gods and women are also treated as goddesses. With its origins rooted in antiquity, Hinduism has no known founder, and it is thus a way of life (as given in the Indian Constitution).

It is because of this accommodative and tolerant nature which is profoundly rooted in Hindu society that the country was able to absorb, adapt and assimilate some of the external influences exerted on it by various foreign conquering races with different cultures and religions during its historical past. It made these cultural influences an integral part of its own heritage and culture and thus enriched itself. Post independence, India emerged as a secular, democratic and tolerant state. The fundamental human rights and dignity are deeply enshrined in its constitution and zealously guarded.

Ostensibly India is a multicultural, multilingual and multi-religious country. The preamble to the Indian constitution reads as follows:

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among

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them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

With all this given in black and white there is hardly any scope for any kind of religious intolerance or other malpractices on religious minorities or Dalits by design or default. This appears very good on paper. But everything is subject to change with time and so was it in this case. Things are far different in practice from what they are in theory.

Hindutva (“Hinduness”), a term popularised by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923, is the predominant form of Hindu nationalism in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) adopted it as its official ideology in 1989. It is championed by the Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliate organisations, notably the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Many Indian social scientists have described the Hindutva movement as fascist, adhering to the concept of homogenised majority and cultural hegemony.

The RSS, which was once shunned and treated like a pariah for many decades after independence, is now reveling in its ascendancy at the top of the political structure. They have their men right from the top (president and vice-president) to the bottom. Soon the bureaucracy will be made to submit to its cadres. Its Chief Executive is now treated as a superman looming over a dwarfed and diminutive cabinet which feeds into his bloated ego. He is now the message and the medium to ensure that this dispensation wins elections, as it did in Uttar Pradesh recently.

What is happening in India today is nothing new, only the degree, form and intensity have changed. Since this nationalist party came to power, Hindutva is being thrust down the throat of the citizens of the country in a more violent form. Somewhat militant organizations are spreading across the length and breadth of the nation to forcefully enforce their ideology. All this is leading to an aggressive display of narrow nationalism, sectarian brand of patriotism and finally the intolerance of minority cultures by the majority. The Indian pluralism of culture, language and religion is being destroyed. The minorities

and dalits are being forcibly submerged in the vast ocean of Hinduism.

The dream of the founding fathers of the constitution did not last long, India's composite culture and the much hyped phrase of 'unity in diversity' became a farce. If there was an iota of unity left then the 1984 pogrom of the Sikhs and the Godhra massacre of February 2002 and its fallout of horrific violence would never have occurred had the police would have done their job and the culprits would have been brought to book. But the fact is that the police are incompetent, communal and controlled by the politicians. Thirty-three years after the anti-Sikh riots, not even one of the accused leaders has been convicted for this monumental bloodshed of the Sikhs.

India happens to be a country where vote bank politics and corruption is rampant. In order to garner votes parties and politicians can go to any extent and stoop very low. The politicians, bureaucracy, police, judiciary, medical and education system are all corrupt. So practically nothing remains that is clean and above board. It is a pity; because they are all supposed to be public servants. The police are not independent and are controlled by the politicians because they know that the day they make the police independent they would all be behind bars. And the police in turn serve only the politicians and the common man for whom they are meant is in the lurch. A country that has vote bank politics and where corruption rules the roost is on its way to doom.

It is at the insistence of the ideological fountainhead of the ruling combine that full time *pracharaks* (preachers) with zero administrative experience are being placed at crucial positions in top jobs and positions in the government such as CMs. It is their firm belief that a full time religious *pracharak* can do any political and administrative job with absolute competence. They are being protected by the powers to be irrespective of the consequences, but the country is paying a heavy price. Their polarizing personality and track record of criminal cases and hate speeches, suits the ruling class for the big fight of 2019 elections. Its political head expects the muscle-flexing and disenfranchising the Muslims (they comprise 19% of UP electorate) will result in a record haul of votes that will consequently be converted to seats.

The minorities and Dalit sections of society are being marginalized under the pretext of cow protection and opposition to eating habits of certain sections of society. The economic interests and livelihood of millions of Indians primarily belonging to minority communities and Dalit sections of society engaged in dairy farming, cattle trade and leather industry are being harmed through the passage of legislation against cruelty to animals and their transportation etc.

Going back in time, Jainism and Buddhism arose as protest movements against Brahmanical ritualism and superstition. Hinduism had almost been extinguished from Indian soil, when practically the whole of India came under Buddhist sway. The country is heading towards such a transformation once again, because history repeats itself. Hinduism was brought back to the country, after the overthrow and expulsion of Buddhism from India by the astute and powerful Brahmins. All learning was in the hands of the priesthood, and this led to serious abuses. The priestly class kept exploiting the ignorant masses. Priestcraft, hypocrisy and idolatry came to stay. This again led to degradation and exploitation of the masses and foreign invasions.

During the era of Islamic invasions, what Will Durant called the bloodiest period in the history of mankind, many Hindus gallantly resisted, knowing full well that defeat would mean a choice of economic discrimination via the jaziya tax on non- Muslims, forced conversion, or death. It is no wonder that the residents of Chittor, and countless other people over the length and breadth of Bharat, from present-day Afghanistan to present-day Bangladesh, thought it better to die gloriously rather than face cold-blooded slaughter. Though many Hindus adopted during that period the faith of the Arabian prophet, as the result of force or with a view to worldly advantage. Hindus never forgot the repeated destruction of the Somnath Temple, the massacre of Buddhists at Nalanda, or the pogroms of the Mughals. Now in the present day they want to take revenge and make up for the past. The Babri Masjid is a live example of this. This is absolutely absurd and ludicrous. Any solution to the Babri Masjid issue will not suit the politicians, for it will disturb their political games and the neatly balanced apple cart of the treasure trove of their vote banks.

Here is what the Sikhs can do to offset the impending dilution of

distinct Sikh ethos and Sikh identity through subtle attempts at inclusion and absorption of Sikhism and Sikhs into the Mainstream Hinduism.

1. There should be a concerted thrust on the education of the Sikh masses. Already the Khalsa has achieved world-wide renown in the matter of bravery. In the matter of religion, too, the name of the Khalsa will shine resplendently when the glorious deeds of our illustrious ancestors/forefathers in the moral and religious world are made known far and wide.
2. This education should be holistic, besides other subjects and skills the Sikh children and masses should be told about their great religion. The Sikh children, specially, need to be told about the glorious past of their religion and the splendid deeds of our forefathers. After the second World War, the Jews, who survived the genocide of the German Nazis assembled at Amsterdam in order to decide their future course of action. Among the important resolutions passed in the meeting, an important decision was that their children should be made aware of their religious and cultural heritage. We too need the same thing, because it is only through education and propaganda that the Sikh people and the generation to come can learn about their great religion.
3. There is an acute need to consolidate the existing Sikh minority educational institutions for providing better education and empowerment of Sikh students and better propagation of Sikh religious ethos among them. The need of the day is more Sikh schools, colleges, universities and hospitals rather than gurdwaras.
4. The Sikh religion has no priestly order and no sacraments and denounces priestcraft, hypocrisy and idolatry; it preaches simplicity, egalitarianism, democracy, liberalism and secularism. The Sikhs have to be freed from the clutches of blind faith, greed, hypocrisy, caste superiority and ritualism and brought back to its glorious past. These negative traits can be suppressed only through the true spirit of Sikhism. The Sikhs have to be taught their own religion and told about their glorious past. Perhaps another Singh Sabha Movement is required.
5. Another malady bugging the Sikh community is the system of dowry. The giving and taking of dowry is absolutely forbidden by

the Sikh religion. Good and hard earned money accumulated over a large number of years is flushed down the drain in a day or two. This money if given to the newly married couple will come in handy, during an emergency or difficult and hard times. The majority of Sikh people can ill-afford this kind of wasteful expenditure. A simple ceremony with a small decent feast is being made more and more complicated by the Sikhs in order to keep up their social status. Little or no emphasis is paid to the marriage ceremony (Anand Karaj) and all the stress is on other needless paraphernalia. The Sikhs have to free themselves from the shackles of their origins and the dominance of Hindu customs and practices, especially those which are in direct contravention to the teachings of their gurus. There has to be a mass Sikh movement against such social evils. Eminent Sikhs and Sikh intelligentsia must come forward and put an end to such social evils.

6. The Sikhs are being depicted in a grossly wrong sense in the Hindi cinema. This is against their ethos and religion. They are being made a laughing stock in the Hindi films. An immediate stop must be put to this wrong image of the Sikhs. This cinematic invasion on the distinct Sikh identity can be stopped only if all the progressive and right thinking Sikhs get together and agitate against such mal-depictions. These wrong practices should end forthwith otherwise things can get worse and out of hand. In order to project the Sikh image in the right perspective, the Sikhs can and should make their own films and even start their own film industry. In fact a Punjabi film industry does exist.
7. The Sikh identity is the most important aspect in the Sikh resistance to being absorbed by Hinduism. It is due to this identity that the Sikhs became mighty warriors and were able to carve out a kingdom for themselves. They have fought all over the world to maintain their identity. This is the most important factor in the self-preservation of Sikhs. It has been aptly and very strongly proved a number of times that the sense of belonging to the Sikh community requires both the belief in the teachings of the Adi Granth and the observance in the Khalsa tradition initiated by Guru Gobind Singh; and that there is no such thing as a clean-

shaven Sikh - he is simply a Hindu believing in Sikhism. Earlier Sahajdhari Sikhism was the halfway house to Khalsa Sikhism, but today the process is reversed, and it has become a halfway house to Hinduism. The case of the Sahajdhari Hindus of Sindh is an illustrative example.

8. Wherever Sikhs are scattered among other people, the attachment to tradition declines and the rate of apostasy rises. The next factor is that religious sentiment is a poor argument against economic benefit. There is also a close connection between the Punjabi language and Sikhism. Thus we can conclude that for the survival of Sikhism, the Sikhs must live in compact groups; they must be educated and economically progressive and Punjabi language must be promoted and patronized by all Sikhs.
9. With the resurgence of Hinduism, the official commitment to secularism is being reduced to a meaningless clause in the constitution. The emphasis on Sanskrit and Hindi, study of Aryan classics, insertion of cow protection as a directive clause of the constitution, the increase in the number of cow-protection societies, the growth of Hindu political groups such as the Bharatiya Janta Party (now in power at the centre) and the militant R.S.S., and the suspicion other minorities have come to be regarded are but some indications of the way the wind is blowing. Hindus, who form 80 percent of the population, will in due course make Hinduism the state religion of India. The answer to this sordid situation is that the only chance of survival of the Sikhs as a separate community is to create distinct areas where they can form compact groups, where the teaching of Gurmukhi and the Sikh religion is compulsory, and where there is an atmosphere of respect for the traditions of their Khalsa forefathers.
10. Lastly all the minorities (Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Janis and Parses) must join hands to form a united front against resurgent Hinduism. There is also a need for increased Sikh participation in countrywide Civil Society movements and protests on social media against the current spell of majoritarian intolerance and narrow, sectarian brand of nationalism.  
Sikhs are certainly a minority in India, but it is a strong minority

with a lot of resilience and their religion is a modern religion with a lot of inbuilt safeguards and a universal appeal. People flocked to the Sikh fold, because it was simple and practical, it appealed to them, it fired their imagination and the downtrodden came at par with the upper classes.

The Sikh faith has very close affinity with Hinduism which explains many of the present day contradictions and complexities. The dividing line between the Sikhs and Hindus is very thin. The Hindus regard Sikhism as another branch of Hinduism and look upon it as the spearhead or militant wing of Hinduism. All said and done - to the majority of Hindus, Sikhs were and are a kind of Hindu, however separate, casteless and dissenting.

Ostensibly the Sikhs feel threatened in a vast ocean of Hinduism. They have the feeling of being discriminated; they fear the disappearance of their separate identity and their absorption in the Hindu fold. They fear religious and economic absorption, in short they fear virtual extinction as a political force; and survival as a rapidly dwindling religious sect of Hinduism. With all this and the subtle attempts being made, it is easy for the Sikhs to relapse into the Hindu fold unless they know about their religion and its glorious past. A renaissance and perhaps another Singh Sabha Movement is required.

The survival, strength, progress and prosperity of the Sikhs lies in education, economic empowerment, tolerance, harmony and peaceful co-existence as taught by their religion. In this respect there is much that they can learn and emulate from the Jews and Parses.

Until the lions have their own historians, the history  
of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.

– Chinua Achebe

# MINORITY OUT OF MINORITIES

COL JAGTAR SINGH\*

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The Minority can be defined as a group numerically lower than the rest of the population of a state which possesses and wishes to preserve its stable ethnic religious or linguistic traditions. In the word of Chief Justice of India the technique of arithmetic tabulation is that the minority means a community which is numerically less than 50% of the total population.

As per the National Commission for Minority Act 1992, those are the only minorities which are notified as such by the Central Govt. Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Budhists & Parsis Community are minorities for the purpose of the act. The Jain Community has also now been included under this act

The Constitution of India uses the word 'minority' or its plural form in some Articles viz Article 20 to 30 and 350 A to 350 B, but does not define the word 'minority'. The Motilal Nehru Report (1928) showed a prominent desire to afford protection to minorities, but did not define the expression. In pursuance of the Constitutional provisions, the government is committed to the well being of the minorities- whether linguistic or religious.

According to the Census 2011, of the total population of 121 crore, the Hindus make up 79.8 percent. Muslim constitutes 14.2, Christians 2.3, Sikh 1.7, Buddhists 0.7 and Jains 0.4 per cent. 'Other religious persuasions' and 'religion not stated' constitute 0.9 and 0.1 percent respectively.

The Census 2011 data indicated that Hinduism is professed by the majority of the population in India. The Hindu is majority in most States and UTs except in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Lakshadweep, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

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As regards religious minorities at the national level, all those who profess a religion other than Hinduism are considered minorities. The Muslims are the largest religious minority followed by Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jain and Parsis.

## **PROBLEMS**

Some of the main problems faced by minorities in India are as follows: 1. Problem of Identity 2. Problem of Security 3. Problem Relating to Equality.

### **1. PROBLEM OF IDENTITY:**

Because of the differences in socio-cultural practices, history and backgrounds, minorities have to grapple with the issue of identity everywhere which gives rise to the problem of adjustment with the majority community.

### **2. PROBLEM OF SECURITY:**

Different identity of some minority community members and their small number relative to the rest of the society develops feeling of insecurity about their life, assets and well-being. This sense of insecurity may get accentuated at times when relations between the majority and the minority communities in a society are strained or not so cordial.

### **3. PROBLEM RELATING TO EQUALITY:**

The minority community in a society may remain deprived of the benefit of opportunities of development as a result of discrimination. Because of the difference in identity, the minority community develops the perception of the sense of inequality.

So far as the problems of Muslims are concerned, which is the largest minority community in India, they fall into three categories:

- (a) Problems those are common to all poor people.
- (b) Problems those are common to all minorities.
- (c) Problems those are specific to Muslims only.

## **EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF MINORITIES-**

1. 'Education is the single most important instrument for social and economic transformation. A well educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be

inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which growth will provide." (Para 10.1 of the Approach to the XIIth Five Year Plan). The Ministry of Human Resource Development has focused on an inclusive agenda, with a vision of realizing India's human resource potential to its fullest, with equity and excellence.

2. "All minorities...shall have the right to establish and administer education institutions of their own" This is the mandate, as per Article 30(1) of the Constitution. Government is committed to address the existing backwardness in education of minorities, especially the Muslims, constituting the major chunk of the minorities. Therefore, the Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme, inter-alia, aims to enhance opportunities for education of minorities ensuring an equitable share in economic activities and employment. (Link to Ministry of Minority Affairs (MOMA))

### ***SCHEDULE CASTES (DALITS)***

The caste system is a strict hierarchical social system based on underlying notions of purity and pollution. Brahmins are on the top of the hierarchy and Shudras or Dalits constitute the bottom of the hierarchy. The marginalization of Dalits influences all spheres of their life, violating basic human rights such as civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. A major proportion of the lower castes and Dalits are still dependent on others for their livelihood. Dalits does not refer to a caste, but suggests a group who are in a state of oppression, social disability and who are helpless and poor.

Caste based marginalization is one of the most serious human rights issue in the world today, adversely affecting more than 260 million people mostly residing in India. Caste-based discrimination entails social and economic exclusion, segregation in housing, denial and restrictions of access to public and private services and employment, and enforcement of certain types of jobs on Dalits, resulting in a system of modern day slavery or bonded labour. However, in recent years due to affirmative action and legal protection, the intensity of caste based marginalization is reducing.

### ***SCHEDULED TRIBES –***

The Scheduled Tribes like the Scheduled Castes face structural discrimination within the Indian society. Unlike the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are a product of marginalization based on ethnicity. In India, the Scheduled Tribes population is around 84.3 million and is considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Their percentages in the population and numbers however vary from State to State. They are mainly landless with little control over resources such as land, forest and water. They constitute a large proportion of agricultural laborers, casual laborers, plantation laborers, industrial laborers etc. This has resulted in poverty among them, low levels of education, poor health and reduced access to healthcare services. They belong to the poorest strata of the society and have severe health problems.

### **SOCIAL ISSUES AND IDENTITY THREAT OF THE SIKH MINORITY COMMUNITY**

Now I attempt to present the social issues and fading identity problem faced by the Sikh community. Past studies show that there are no significant researches done specifically to identify the negative elements of the community issues. Several studies done mainly focussing the Sikh identity and language issues without relating to the social problems faced by the minority community. Through a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) three main issues were identified. The issues of language, fading identity threat and mixed marriages are found to be the major problems faced by the Sikh community. Thus, the findings of this study hope to unveil the real problems of the minority community and would be addressed by the Sikh religious institutions and organizations. The Sikh organizations must also engage with the government agencies as equal partners to eradicate the social problems. The outcome shows that the Punjabi language is on the threat as dominated by other major languages namely English and Hindi.

1. There are about 900 Khalsa schools and 150 Khalsa colleges in Punjab and their share of top positions and merit lists for last three years is much below the other non-Sikh institutions. Most of them with a few exceptions have below average academic standards. Only a few of them are conscious of their role and

identity as a Sikh institution. Most of them seem to be interested only in the number of students and the amount of money collected as fees. There is no specific system of accountability of teachers other than the pass percentage in the Board or the University results. These criteria in most cases leads to use of unfair means. Only a few institutions try to identify their meritorious students for giving them special coaching and guidance to compete for admission to top state or national institutions. Number of Sikh students joining specialized courses even in GND University and Punjabi University is negligible. Their number in Postgraduate classes also shows a steep decline, which is already reflected in rising share of non-Sikh teachers in Khalsa colleges.

2. As far our schools are concerned, the situation seems to be more serious. The number of students joining the top medical, engineering and IIT institutions is almost negligible. The share of Sikh students in Punjab merit lists is about 10 percent as compared to our population percentage of 60% in Punjab.
3. Khalsa schools and colleges must prepare their meritorious and outstanding students for admission to higher competitive courses at national and state levels. There is urgent need to combine teaching with special guidance and extra coaching as a part of daily timetable.
4. While we are talking about higher scales of employment at National or State levels, it is necessary to train the Sikh students also for other jobs in Defense, Police, Railways, Banks, Road transport, Govt. and business offices.
5. Good efforts made by SGPC and Chief Khalsa Diwan by opening schools under their own education directorates are still in the process of their academic growth and their number is too small.
6. 80% of Sikh population lives in rural areas and about 70% Sikh students from rural areas study in government schools where the standards of teaching and learning are very low. Most of the students passing out of these schools become semiliterate unemployables and prone to use of drugs. Special efforts will have to be made improve the quality of teaching in our rural schools.
7. The falling academic standards of our colleges affiliated to various

universities of Punjab are also a cause of great concern. A comparative study of results and merit lists made on the basis of their academic record and university merit lists shows a falling share of merit positions at graduate and post graduate level. Most of our colleges are the last choice of students at the time of admissions as seen from the cut off stage of various colleges, which further worsens the situation. A close study of last two decades of their academic record shows a rapidly falling graph except a few of them. Their above average or even the top positions in sports and extracurricular activities may be encouraging news but cannot compensate for falling academic standards. The position of some of our Sikh institutions is encouraging for last three years but unstable over a period of time. The most important reason for falling or unstable academic position in our Khalsa institutions is due to the absence of a sustainable system of academic management, although we have better infrastructure and buildings. The academic contribution of the hundreds of schools and colleges opened by Sikhs at a cost of billions of rupees needs to be properly assessed.

8. In addition to quality education, the object of these institutions was to propagate Sikh religion and turn out graduates committed to Sikh values and Khalsa discipline, so that some of them could devote themselves to the service of community and share the Gurus' lofty message with others. The actual situation is entirely reverse. Even a casual walk through Khalsa institutions is enough to note the absence of students in Sikh form. Our teachers and managements are indifferent to this situation. There is no provision for religious and moral instructions in most of our schools and colleges. No worthwhile effort is being made to encourage the Sikh way of life. It is our duty to guide and inspire them to be proud of their historic heritage and distinct identity. We cannot blame our children alone, as we have failed in providing the desired Sikh environment in our homes and institutions. Instead of taking pride in their distinct Sikh identity, our students have developed an inferiority complex and are becoming clean-shaven. These institutions which were created to produce ideal Sikhs have

become the centre of apostasy.

9. We have at present two Sikh universities, one known as Eternal (Akal) University at Baru Sahib and another World Sikh University of Guru Granth Sahib at Fatehgarh Sahib. Akal academy schools in Punjab and other parts of India are well known for their religious fervor and quality education. We are yet to see the level of their academic performance at the university level. Sri Guru Granth Sahib University at Fatehgarh Sahib is still in its initial formative stages. The idea of the Sikh community to have their own universities is an age old dream. The most formidable difficulty in making these universities as centers of academic excellence will be in recruitment of excellent faculty. There is lack of top level scholars in our colleges and universities. Even the present universities of Punjab are unable to fill the vacancies of their special chairs because of lack availability of high level scholars in Sikh religion and history. Many of the existing private or deemed universities are facing acute problems of faculty recruitment. The main reason is lack of upcoming of scholarly student from the schools.
10. Nishan-e-Sikhi project at Khadoor Sahib is the new hope for the Sikhs under the dynamic leadership of Baba Sewa Singh. After completing the eight story majestic building they have started guidance and coaching center for preparing the students for All India competitions not only for Medical and Engineering, but also for IAS, IPS, NDA and other services in Defense forces, BSF, Police, Railways and Banks etc. The entire expenditure on this project is being financed by Nishan-e-Sikhi Trust. We earnestly hope that their career guidance project will be a great success. They will face the difficulty of coaching faculty being in rural area, which they will be able to overcome with financial backup of Nishan-e-Sikhi Trust. Their example must be followed by SGPC, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Sikh Universities and top college managements of the Sikh Institutions.

Before we move further to find a way out and prescribe the measures and methods for improving the quality of teaching and guidance in our schools, it is necessary to have an overview of the

academic data regarding school education for the year 2009-10 as available from Director General of education.

There are about 29,700 government and affiliated schools in Punjab out of which there are only 900 Khalsa schools which is only 3% of the total. The approximate number of students in Khalsa schools is about 1,90,000 as against about 40 lakhs in Government and affiliated schools. The share of Khalsa schools is less than 5%.

Only hope of light we can see and admire is that Punjab has been ranked among the top ten Indian states in the report improving its position from 19th in 2009, 13th in 2012 to 6th in 2013. Four major indicators of school education- Access Index , Teachers Index, Infrastructure Index and Outcome Index.

This was the result of ISC's and its associate organization's intensive hardwork in implementing Prime Minister's 15 point programme for scholarships and admission to higher classes for Sikh minorities, Coaching Centers in rural areas and a number of seminars held in Sikh Educational Institutions.

There is lot to be done in higher education, employment oriented curriculums and training at school and colleges level. The first and the fore most job of veterans, teachers and so called Baba's is to create "will to work & learn" in students and younger generation.

# SIKH MINORITY ISSUES

NANAK SINGH NISHTAR\*

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## PREFACE

There is famous couplet, *Bin mangey, moti milye. Mangey, milye na bheekh*. This means, without asking you get the pearls. But even after asking you don't get the alms. Such is the position of the Sikhs in India. Even after several repeated demands for justice of Sikh Genocide during seventies and eighties and discrimination against the Sikhs after the so-called independence, the unshorn Sikhs are still treated as undesirable people. But every Sikh is entitled for Scholarships and other benefits in one or other category with different income slabs, provided he/she applies. Nobody can dare to either stop you from getting nor anybody is going to pour it in your mouth unless ask for it. Learn from the babies how to get the goodies? There is a age old proverb, "No mother feeds the baby, unless it cries."

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Institute for choosing the subject, "Minorities' Issues: Challenges and Responses Creating Awareness about Present Day Majoritarian Intolerance and attempts at Minority exclusion and assimilation in India Identifying areas of Sikh vulnerability and Sikh Survival strategies". Most humbly, I would like to submit that, this problem is not a new challenge; we are facing it since centuries. We have been not only surviving but flourishing since Shri Guru Nanak Sahib refused to wear *Janeu* (Hindu sacred thread) in his childhood. Then onwards we are targeted by friends and foes. Due to lack of time and space, I would confine my paper on a specific theme of "Sikh Minority Issues", which requires our sincere working on it with deep and thorough study and plans to face the challenges and sincerely work to spread the information and

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make our people avail the benefits.

At the outset, I would like to request you to stop financially helping any Sikh, by doing so you are encouraging begging. Cultivate their habit instead, to avail and snatch share in the developmental schemes. In case you are not able to engage Sikh volunteers, please appoint other paid workers to serve your people. By whatever means, arrange to serve your people through government schemes. If the subsidies are not sufficient to meet their requirements, then extend help to meet the shortfalls to compete with the peers.

### SIKH PSYCHOLOGY & FAILURES

Dr, Sir Mohammad Iqbal says in a couplet:-

**ਕੌਮ ਕਿਆ ਚੀਜ਼ ਹੈ, ਕੌਮੋਂ ਕੀ ਇਮਾਮਤ ਕਿਆ ਹੈ?  
ਇਸ ਕੇ ਕਿਆ ਜਾਨੇਂਗੇ, ਬਿਚਾਰੇ ਇਹ ਦੇ ਰਕਤ ਕੇ ਇਮਾਮ.**

It means, “*What these Imam know about Nation and how to lead it, whose vision is confined just to lead the prayers in the Mosques?*”

On the contrary, Sikh Nation is being lead by the professional preachers and leaders, who have the expertise of extortion of money and use it for their personal interest and projection. They do not have an iota of knowledge and vision for the future of the Guru Panth. They cleverly set up the mindset of the community towards exorbitant celebrations and pomp and show, and grab for their own benefits. Nobody cares in the least for serving the community. Whereas in other communities, people give a helping hand to their deserving fellows, serve to bring them up to become at par with themselves and merge them into their folds.

I am ashamed to confess that the Sikh intelligentsia has totally ignored and utterly failed to fulfill their responsibilities of collecting and spreading the information about the welfare schemes freely available and are badly needed for development of the community. We are not bothered to disperse the information and guide and serve the Panth. We have miserably failed in our responsibility and left the field open for the ignorant. Instead of producing workers and social scientists who could be of help to some fellow beings, we are in a mad race of following and running after the leaders indulging in projection of themselves with egocentric attitude, with no vision or agenda for development of the community.

Once a philosopher was asked, "Is there any curse bigger than blindness"? He replied, yes. "The loss of vision is greater curse than the loss of eyesight". Presently, we the Sikhs are going through this curse. History has produced a very successful blind Home Minister of United Kingdom (U.K.) Mr. David Blunkett (born 1947), and several famous Ragis of Gurbani Kirtan. But unfortunately we have not tried to produce field workers in our community. Nobody is prepared to work for uplift of the deserving people among us.

### GURDWARAS - USE & MISUSE

Shri Guru Nanak Sahib clarifies the purpose of Gurdwaras that is the door of the Guru (then the assembly was called Sangat) on page 730

ਗੁਰੂ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਹੋਇ ਸੋਝੀ ਪਾਇ ਸੀ॥  
ਏਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਧੋਇ ਹਛਾ ਹੋਇ ਸੀ॥ (ਮ:੧ - ਅੰਗ ੨੩੦)

This means, "You should learn from the Guru, at this place your evil thoughts will vanish." That is how Sangat and later Gurdwaras were made the centre of learning.

Unfortunately, we are the culprits of misusing Gurdwaras for all other purposes except learning. Now stop blaming the misuse of Gurdwaras, and start to use its platform for propagating and projecting the Government and social schemes for betterment of the community. See the pattern of worships in the Mosques. In every congregational Friday prayers i.e., *Nimaz* is prayed in Arabic, but they give a Khutba (lecture in local language) and awake their masses. What is required for the development and what are the facilities freely available from different sources?

Bible is in Hebrew language but translated in more than one thousand languages and their preachers speak and explain in the language which could be understood by the audience. This motivates them to change the mind of the listener and attract towards their faith. Every church is meant to use one particular local language, hence in one city the Churches are classified on the basis of different languages that are being used for Sunday Service (prayers), and also educate their people about the current affairs as Muslims do.

Unfortunately, our *Ragis* and *Pracharaks* (preachers) distract the Sangat by all permissible means to keep them away from learning from

the Gurbani. They plead for repetition of Name or any particular portion of Bani, which does not have sanction from any Guru Sahib. No doubt this will get its fruits, but you can never be benefitted unless you read Gurbani, understand and learn yourself and practice the wisdom in life.

Generally they are crazy for Punjabi language and speak only in Punjabi, which the new generation does not understand. Actually speaking, Gurbani is written in Gurmukhi script but in different spoken easy dialects, to be understood by one and all. But they communicate in such a language which is not understandable to masses. And the tragedy is most of them do not know its essence and the do's & don'ts of Sikhism, and are just singers with melodious voice with art of attracting the audience.

Please allow me to share my recent experience. I was invited to address on the occasion of Gurburab Pehla Prakash Utsav of Shri Guru Granth Sahib by the Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Sonari, Jamsheed Pur, Jhar Khand, on 2 & 3 September 2017. In all of my four lectures I spoke in Hindi, and stressed upon the quotations of Gurbani and philosophy of Sikhism as a guide to lead a better life utilizing the freely provided and available facilities. I was surprised to get unexpected, tremendous and profound appreciations from the Sangat. One clean shaven gentleman approached and told me that recently a school going Sikh girl embraced Christianity, as her widow mother could not pay her school fees and nobody came forward to help them.

In Punjab the situation is worst. In spite of our spending crores of rupees annually on the so-called Gurmat programmes everywhere round the year, the number of youth leaving Sikhism is increasing. Apart from others, I am quoting just 2 instances from fountainhead of Sikhism. In the month of November 2008, 35 young Sikhs from Fatehghadh Sahib, Sarhind, where 7 & 9 years infants of Shri Guru Gobind Singh ji were bricked live for not changing their religion and in March 2012, another batch of 40 Sikh youth embraced Christianity from a village Dhotian in Tarn Taran district. There are 31 Gurdwaras in this village and Langar is served daily in the village's large Gurdwara. Strange thing is that after change of religion, the Christians will be

losing the Government facilities of scholarships and reservations etc., which are available for the Sikhs as listed in the Scheduled Castes. But they were attracted by the people of that community who come forward by alluring and holding hands. It is found that a helping hand is better than hundred praying hands.

### **BELOW POVERTY LINE**

In India, all welfare schemes are designed in such a way as to uplift the people of Below Poverty Line (BPL), in order to reap electoral benefits. All those living Below the Poverty Line are nurtured as Vote Banks. All community groups are working to educate and make available the Welfare Schemes to their people, but Sikhs divert their financial and other sources for others neglecting our own people.

In the Presidential Order list of SC/ST 1950, only Hindu members were listed in SC/ST categories, leaving out all other religions. Under the leadership of Master Tara Singh, after a determined campaign for 6 long years, by launching a Morcha, the Scheduled Caste Sikhs also got their due constitutional rights in 1956 and were included in the list. Some of the Hindu Communities, Christians and Muslims are still struggling hard to get the reservations in almost all the states - one after another.

In the year 2005, “The 61st Round Survey of the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO - organization in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation of the Government of India) found that almost one-third of the Sikhs in India belonged to the notified Scheduled Castes of the constitution.” (The number of Backward Classes is not taken into account in this survey). I wonder if the self-righteous sections of Sikhs who continue to live in ivory towers are even aware of this and when such awareness dawns on them, are they prepared to change their thinking, mend their ways to plan and work for the ignored and marginalized sections. Let us realize the data of the literacy rate increased from 2001 to 2011, presented in Lok Sabha on July 21, 2016. Among the Muslims showed the largest increase of 9.4 %, followed by 8.6 % by Biddhists and Sikhs by 6%. At least now, resolve to work for educating our people.

### **OUR DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Each and every Sikh is entitled to get government benefits in one or other above mentioned categories, below certain income limit for each level. The question is, “How can we benefit a student from Class I to Ph.D.?” For that purpose, naturally, we have to make a formal application at the beginning of the academic year in the prescribed Application Form to the head of the institution. The government schemes are like a perennial river, starting from Himalayan Mountains which never dries throughout the year, as its source is not dependent on the rain water but also benefits from the melting snow in the hot summer. Remember, all rivers running and flooding with rain water dry up in summer. The Government sources are till the completion of the chosen course depending upon the student.

The process of availing government benefits is very simple. Never approach with bulk of applications, you will be refused and discouraged, apply one after the other. The procedure for getting the income, caste certificate etc., you have to approach the Tehsildar or district Social Welfare Officer of your area, enquire from the concerned clerk the formalities to complete for making application and do it accordingly. At several offices, you may be the first Sikh person to approach them. They may be surprised and not aware of the privileges and rights for which Sikhs are also eligible. Don't get disheartened and argue. Prepare yourself to follow up constantly. For getting the work done, catch hold of the local leader of your area – irrespective of the party he or she belongs, convince them that you are his voter (even if you are not).

The local leader will invariably help you, as he requires your support at all elections. For honourable survival and progress in Indian democracy, the only way is to increase the strength of your vote, by enrolling in large numbers in the voters list, ensuring the casting of votes en bloc and to be seen standing at queues at polling booths. Once you make the leader realise your potential, support will automatically follow. In 2009, you have witnessed your strength of vote in Haryana, where the government was forced to declare Punjabi as the second official language of the State, after struggling 44 long years for this demand. Strangely, after carving of Haryana from Punjab, Telugu of the south was declared as second official language just to

humiliate the Sikhs and to eradicate Punjabi from their land.

### **DASWANDH - USE & MISUSE**

Tithe (tenth part of income) and Zakath (fortieth part of savings) are the religious taxes mandatory to be paid by the Christians and Muslims respectively only for the well being of the community. That cannot be spent for the buildings and salaries. Similarly, Sikhs have to pay the *Daswandh* (tenth part), modified for meeting the prevailing challenges for the community. This cannot be used to boost your personal image or self projection and spent at your will and wish. This has to be paid into the Guru's treasury and to be spent according to the Guru's instructions, for uplifting and serving the Sikhs.

Initially, this fund was used for *langar*, as started by Shri Guru Nanak Sahib for doing *Sachcha Souda*, for feeding the hungry saints (sadhus). Subsequently, it was used for meeting the community needs. Such as for establishing townships, digging of water resources, even for construction of Mosque for Muslims at Hargobind Pur of Gurdaspur district, forts, maintaining army etc. It was also extended for financial assistance to the Sikhs for business and trade etc. Now the need of the community has been drastically changed to compete with the world for honourable flourishing. We cannot survive in spending only on such schools, colleges, hospitals and langar for *Sarbat Da Bhala*, neglecting our own less fortunate people. Initially these schemes were introduced to attract people for introducing the new faith, but now situation is changed. First save your own home from the burning flames and then extend help to others. While travelling in the flights, we are cautiously advised that, "In case of emergency first protect yourself by using the life saving methods before helping others." If you neglect your own dependents, none will come to their rescue.

### **OUR PRIORITIES**

The priorities of the last century were Food, Clothing and Shelter. Gradually the focus was shifted to literacy through school education. All state governments and the Union government are committed to providing school education free of cost. Instead of availing government facilities, we are spending the *Daswandh* funds for the general education which is already funded by the government. Now the needs of the

present day have changed and become most competitive. The thrust has to be given on equipping the present generation with purposeful technical or higher education. Through coaching, counseling, training and re-training for excellence in all pursuits is the need of the hour. Let us resolve to avail all government facilities for providing basic health, housing, sanitation, education and all other benefits. And spend your *Daswandh* money only on the Sikhs individually or collectively for their expensive and advanced needs to compete with the prevailing society in all respects, and later do the *Sarbat da Bhala* with the surplus funds as described in *Ardas* at the last. Please don't forget that the members of your family and your dependent deserve the first charge for looking after them. Then comes the turn of your community people, if not you who will come for their help? Serving others should be your last option, as described in *Ardas*.

In the end, I congratulate the IOSS for organizing the Seminar on *Minority Issues: Challenges and Responses* and alerting all members of the Indian minorities including the Sikhs about the ominous designs of presently ruling ideological combine hostile to the minorities.

# MAJORITARIANISM

ALEEM AFTAB\*

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Majoritarianism is an issue prevalent in many parts of the world. Oppression on minorities on the basis of colour, language, social class and other factors exists in many countries. But when it comes to religious majoritarianism, the issue acquires an even more uglier face.

Brothers and sisters! In the context of majoritarianism, the early history of Islam can be divided into two parts. Firstly, when Islam was a minority and was targeted by the majority. Secondly, when Islam gained strength and became the ruling power of Arabia.

In the initial years, Islam was subject to majoritarianism. Muslims were often abused and severely persecuted. No stone was left unturned by the oppressors in their effort to annihilate Islam by either killing the Muslims or forcing them to return to their previous faith.

But despite these, Islam continued to spread and people continued to get attracted to the golden principles of Islam. Gradually, Islam gained power and took over the control of Arabia. Now this was when Islam manifested its real beauty to the world. Although Muslims were tolerant and patient right from the beginning, but as the famous Arabic proverb goes: the real tolerance and real forgiveness is when you have the power to take revenge.

Thus, history bears witness when Muslims took over Mecca, the holy Prophet of Islam manifested the most exemplary standards of forgiveness and set all those free, who, earlier, had not let go any of the opportunities to hurt Muslims in general and Prophet's person in particular. Despite having the power to take revenge, the holy Prophet (pbuh) even forgave the man who murdered his beloved daughter along with the baby she had in her womb. This is the real Islam. This is the standard of tolerance and forgiveness Islam demands from its followers.

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It would be foolish to think that majoritarianism can co-exist with tolerance of such standard. I pity those who think Islam was unjust and cruel towards the non-Muslim population under its rule.\*

Under the Islamic rule, the non-Muslims were to be treated with utmost kindness and all care was to be taken that they are not being oppressed. The holy Prophet (pbuh) states:

O Ye Muslims! Listen well! I shall seek justice on behalf of such a non-Muslim on the day of resurrection before God, who is in a covenant with the Islamic state, if he is wronged by another Muslim, caused any harm, or given a responsibility or burden beyond his power, or deprived of something without his pleasure and consent

Hadrat Umar (ra) would remain so concerned for the rights, ease, and comfort of the non-Muslim citizens in the Islamic State that he would continue stressing upon his Governors to take special care of the *Dhimmi*s, and he would also directly inquire from them himself as to whether they were suffering from any hardship. On one occasion, when a delegation of *Dhimmi*s presented themselves before Hadrat Umar (ra), the very first question he asked them was, “*Are you being treated well by the Muslims?*” They responded by saying: *We have witnessed nothing but loyalty and good treatment from the Muslims.*

In the Islamic State, poor and helpless non-Muslim citizens were also provided financial support. On one occasion, when Hadrat ‘Umar (ra) noticed an old Jewish man begging, he asked him, “*What is the matter?*” He responded, “*I have become old and since my eyesight has fallen weak I cannot work; I also owe Jizyah.*” Upon hearing this, Hadrat Umar (ra) became restless and immediately took the man to his home and gave him an appropriate amount of aid. Then, he summoned the concerned Officer and said, “*What a grave injustice is it that Jizyah is being levied upon such people! We have been ordered to help the poor, not burden them with tax.*” After this, a general order was instituted that such people would be exempt from Jizyah, and, deserving people of this nature would receive a regular stipend.

It would not be out of place here to explain and refute some

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\* These are the views of the author, but the injustice and oppression under the Mughal rule in India tells a different story. Sikh history is replete with instances of injustice and cruelty at the hands of Mughal ruling class. – Editor.

misconceptions regarding Jizyah, the tax that was levied upon the non-Muslims living under Islamic rule. This appears to be objectionable in the sight of some, although these funds were spent to safeguard the rights of the non-Muslims and arrange for their ease, comfort and welfare, and make armies available for the protection of their lives and wealth.

Furthermore, this minor tax was not applicable to the entire non-Muslim population. All those who have devoted their lives to the service of religion, women, children, elderly, blind or disabled people and all those who are poor and needy and are financially not in a condition to afford this tax were made exempt from this. Moreover, with regards to the collection of Jizyah, it was strictly instructed that there should be no harsh treatment, whereas force was applicable in the collection of Zakat, the tax specific to Muslims. Does any nation give such privileges to another in this day and age? Indeed it is totally unfair if someone still thinks that Islam oppresses people under its rule.

Brothers and sisters! As for the question of how to live under a tyrannical government or how to respond to the oppression of a ruler, I would briefly address this issue in the light of Islamic teachings. Islam instructs its people to never rebel against their leader or government, even if their rights are being usurped. Under no circumstances should any individual take the law into his own hands.

Brothers and sisters! These are the golden principles of Islam. A person free of bias cannot deny the fact that acting upon these principles can guarantee peace and harmony in a nation. I pray that the world comes to realize these golden principles and act upon them so that this world can really become a haven of peace. With these words, I conclude.

# LANDMARK VIGNETTES OF SIKH HERITAGE RECOVERING THE LOST SIKH HERITAGE

– NANAK-PANTHIS AND THEIR SANGATS –

JAGMOHAN SINGH GILL\*

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With many developments taking place in the Sikh world, the issue of thousands of old shrines, mainly of various Nanak-Panthi Udassin Sampradays established more than four centuries ago, needs the attention of the entire fraternity. This should be brought to the limelight in the current scenario. Most of these places have been lying abandoned after massive exodus of the Nanak-Panthis in the past one hundred years. Property worth thousands of crores of rupees is going waste and no one seems to be concerned about this as Mahants and Udasis in the past and now some Pujaris or laymen have turned these Deras subservient to their own vested interests. Left neglected for years, these places have become vulnerable to the greed of a bunch of self-seekers. Through this paper I am trying to focus on relatively unknown area of Sikh studies. I have been visiting Sikh settlements including Sangats and Gurdwaras of the Nanak-Panthis across the country, especially in eastern region. ‘Dera’ means encampment in Punjabi. From the tenth century we hear of sages like Gorakhnath who would come and set up Dera near a village and people would go to him for spiritual guidance. Nanak-Panthi Deras, generally known as Sangats (in East India the term Sangat is used instead of Dera) came into existence from the time of Baba Sri-Chand, the elder son of Guru Nanak onwards under the eyes of those who believed in Guru Granth Sahib and Akalpurkh (form-less, invisible God) but had made some

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vital deviations from mainstream Sikhism. They followed Sikhism with a distinct difference as well as similarities in many respects. Their way of offerings was different. Much as people believing in Gorakhnath were called Gorakhpantis, the followers of Kabir the Kabir-Pantis and those following Dadu as the Dadu-Pantis, the Udasi Mahants propagated Guru Granth Sahib throughout India and their mass followers were known as Nanak-Pantis more often called Nanak-Shahis in eastern part of country. No wonder then that the leaders of syncretic Deras emerged from a broad Sikh tradition.

The Nanak-Pantis were widely spread in Sind, Rajasthan, Kashmir, Leh and Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and in the southern provinces of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and the interiors of many other States. But the early Mahants who were regularly visited and blessed by our successive Gurus spoke in simple language, and helped break the stranglehold of the Brahmins, who claimed to have exclusive access to God. Thus they carried the message of love and equality handed down to them by Guru Nanak five hundred years ago. Guru Nanak rejected and challenged the caste (jati) system that defined hierarchy in India. A new religion came into being called Sikhism. It was institutionalised in different phases. Nanak-Panti is a saga of devotion spanning centuries down to late-nineteenth century. It is an amalgam of philosophy, history, mythology and fantasy, and throws up some unanswered and haunting questions about this (Nanak-Panti) tradition.

### **SIKH SHRINES: A HAPPY HUNTING GROUND OF LAND SHARKS**

Many places across India including Eastern India's Patna, Gaya, Rajauli, Akbarpur, Rajgir, Bihar Sharif, Chapra, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Purnia, Katihar, Bhagalpur, Rajmahal, Shahabad, Murshidabad, Dumka, Latehar, Lohardaga, Chatra, Bishnupur, Kolkata, Puri, Cuttack and many others had innumerable sites of Nanak-Panti settlements. It is difficult to ascertain the exact figures. But it is safe to assume that there was a very big number of Nanak-Panti Sangats (followers of Guru Nanak) and their places of worship and congregation also called Sangat. Only some Sangats have survived the passage of time. But no prayers have been offered there since

long. For many decades there has been no one to pray. As we visit many such places, especially in Bihar, we can see abandoned Sangats, some of them still striking in their lonely splendour.

Some large Sangats face challenges and their fragile perimeters are steadily being gobbled up by local toughs, unscrupulous people and also by the government. The history of Sikhism in Bihar continues to intrigue both Sikh historians and common Sikhs. Even today people have not forgotten its multi-facetedness. The ruins of Nanak-Shahi Sangats or Gurdwaras (as they are known locally) are the reminder of the glorious past of these areas when the concept of Nanak-Panthei was at its zenith. In spite of the occasional strain among its communities and sects, they followed the dialects in which their holy scripture Guru Granth Sahib is written. We also explored the world of mysticism which attracted the normal Sikh gentry. Every corner has its own bit of history. Still today some of them have preserved old heritage carefully with a sense of great local pride. These are the great memories from the past which is alarmingly threatened with effacement. A century back, it was home to many Deras of Nanak-Shahi Udassis which are now untraceable. The fluidity and dynamism that characterised Nanakpanthei is not visible any more.

As I undertook a series of journeys for last many years to these regions, important history related to the earlier growth of Sikhism in almost every town and many villages of these places unfolded before me. History abounds, as the cliché goes, beneath the dilapidated or collapsed structures in the mounds of earth. I approached these places by walking through very congested and narrow lanes and bye-lanes. A bit of mystery and romance was added to our travel when we saw so many 'Living Samadhis' (one of the essential characters of Nanak-Shahi Sangat). After the death of any great Mahant, he would be buried in a sitting posture or 'asana' usually termed as 'Jeevant Samadhi' in each Sangat which talks about past. There are innumerable exciting stories and touching scenes which I feel impelled to share with you. The spiritual tradition of the early Mahants of the Nanakpanthei tradition can be integrated into the fabric of unity and strength of Sikhism.

A walk around the Sangats is nothing short of pilgrimage. Built about more than three hundred years ago, the ramparts and turrets

hide many secrets. Guru Nanak was the part of the existence of these early great Pracharaks and gave impetus to the movement that stood rock solid against all challenges of that time. Guru Granth Sahib was the lifeline of every Sangat. They were legatees of great Guru Nanak, down to other Sikh Gurus, in upholding the living Guru Granth Sahib and knew that Sikhism always stood for an open embrace of diversity and pluralism. Sikhism emphasises respect for all - every path to God is valid. Many lands were donated in the name of great Guru Granth Sahib with different Mahants as its Sewadars or caretakers as per their standing, spiritually and socially.

My fascination with these forgotten places had taken root about more than a decade ago when I chanced upon these heritage places while surveying old Sikh settlements. I used to visit these places, shrouded in mystery and hemmed in on all sides with shops, houses or rivers and roads passing by. Most were occupied in an unauthorised manner. They were in ruins, with broken walls, debris and with an overall eerie feeling. Between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, these were bustling places. A cyclone like thing struck and wiped out everything, including a large number of followers of the Nanak-Panth. All such places are now dysfunctional and are not common on the maps of religious sites of Sikhs.

### **THE RELATION OF THIS REGION WITH GURUS AND UDASSI PRACHARAKS OF SIKHISM**

India is home to the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Jains and the Buddhists as well as the Muslims and the Christians. It has a legacy of more than two thousand years of history of our country's great religious traditions propounded by famous philosophers, seers and saints.

Guru Nanak visited various places while travelling through every nook and corner of our country and other parts of globe. During his first Udasi while going from Benaras to Patna he halted at Gaya, telling people to light a lamp of knowledge of the Divine Name to achieve true liberation. Later on, the Ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, visited these places. After a month-long stay at Allahabad, Guru Tegh Bahadur moved on to Benaras, Sasaram, Gaya and then Patna just before the rainy season in 1666. There are many Gurdwaras which were earlier controlled by the Udasis, called Sangats or Nanak-Shahi

Sangats as said earlier, to commemorate the famous visit of both the Gurus to this place. The building of Gaya shrine was built by a very prominent and famous Udasi Pracharak, Baba Almast. He was the head preacher of one of the main Dhuan (hearths) established by Baba Gurdita ji, the eldest son of the Sixth Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Hargobind Ji, successor of Baba Sri Chand ji, the founder of the Udasi order. Some early and renowned Sikhs helped it to function. Thousands of Sangats named as Bari, Choti, Kachi, Pakki, Nayi, Purani, Nichi, Uchi, Taksal etc exist as per their chronological, physical and demographic variations.

As we travel through this region we find numerous Udasi-Deras even in the most remote parts. These were sponsored by rich people of early centuries who believed in Sikhism or had deep respect for the Gurus. They had attached huge properties to such Sangats so that those could function properly and meet the costs of day-to-day requirements. Patna and Gaya and its surroundings were most important. The Udasis preached the message of Guru Nanak and recited the *bani* of the Gurus, but they retained their separate identity. The famous Bhagat Bhagwan was conferred blessings, called *bakhshishes*, (bounties) by the Seventh Sikh Guru, Guru Har Rai ji. This Udasi saint is remembered with high esteem in the Sikh tradition and history. His family name was Bhagwan Giri. It is said that he was born in a Brahmin family at Bodh Gaya and became a sannyasi at an early age. In search of peace, as he was moving from one place to another, he heard the great teachings of Guru Nanak and visited Guru Har Rai Ji, the seventh successor of Guru Nanak at Kiratpur Sahib. Guru Har Rai ji blessed him as a Sikh and renamed him as Bhagat Bhagwan. Here Guru Ji enjoined upon him to propagate Sikhism which he did in East India and set up Udasi Deras or monasteries at several places. His disciples and successors spread Sikhism in entire Bihar and other places of eastern India and in the west moved up to Sind now in Pakistan. About three hundred sixty such important Deras came in to existence in the Magadha region of Bihar from where Sikhism spread further towards the interiors of the eastern parts of our country and were generally called Nanak Shahi Sangats. These 'Deras' existed extensively in most of the old important pilgrimage centres and

important trading and historical places.

Here, according to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, 'Akhara' means 'band of the Udasi or Nirmala sects in particular going out as religious preachers'. Bands of these Sikh Sadhus often faced difficulty in finding residence and food during fairs at the pilgrimage centres. Mahant Pritam Das Nirban, one of the early founders of Dakhini Pangat, took the initiative and persuaded some very rich Sikhs of those days including Rai Nanak Ram, head of customs department of the Nizam of Hyderabad, to donate money for the 'Akhara' (Rai Nanak Ram was the uncle of famous Diwan Maharaja Chandu Lal (1766-1845), who started his career under his uncle Rai Nanak Ram as Peshkar and then rose to be the prime minister of the Nizam and served in that position for thirty five years. He was highly regarded by the British nobleman including eminent lawyer Sir Henry Russell who later on became Chief Justice of Bengal). Rai Nanak Ram donated Rupees Seven lakh for the formation of Panchayati Akhara. Given that five maunds of rice would cost just a rupee at that time, one can imagine how large this amount was when the Panchayati Central Akhara was set up in Prayag, Allahabad in 1779, with branches at several other pilgrimage centres like Hardwar, Gaya, Puri and many other places. I met many aged Mahants in different areas. They revealed that it was very much compulsory to learn Gurmukhi script from the early Mahants. Maintenance of these 'Deras' and expenses of Mahants come from rent and other sources. Many families of the Nanak Shah Panthis are still having links with these Deras or Sangats and visit them on different occasions and during religious festivals.

It is generally seen that the most of the Sangats were having huge chunks of agricultural and commercial lands to help these Deras to function properly. Many villages and mohallas are in the name of Nanakshahi Mahant (like village Mahanta Maniyari in Muzaffarpur district), Sangat (like villages of Phtapur Sangat in Sultanpur district or Karah Milik Sangat in Katihar district or Noor Sarai Sangat in Nalanda district), Purani Sangat (Sohsari, Nalanda), Bari Sangat Mouza in Jahanabad etc. Such names as Sangat-Par or the area around the Sangat, numerous Sangat Tollas, Tolla Nanak Shahi (village Sangwadih, Gopalganj district), names of roads and lanes like Sangat Road, Sangat

Galli, Mohalla Sri Chand and those of many schools and colleges show the influence of Nanakpanthis. Many markets were built in the heart of those towns so that regular rent income could be generated. Most of the Deras were built under the patronage of local landlords, feudal lords, Amils, Rajas, Maharajas, Nawabs and big businessmen. They were from Bhabans or Bhumiards, Rajputs, Khattris, Brahmins, Kayasthas, Yadavs, Koeris, Kushwahas, Sonars and many other castes, specially the Bania castes like Mahoori, Barnwal, Agrahari, Shaw and Kalwars among Hindus. The Shahi surname in Bihar, used by section of Bhumihars, was actually Nanak-Shahi, now only Shahi is used. Muslims too had respect and gave support in the development of Nanak-Panthis in this entire region. The message of the Gurus took deep roots and, for that reason Sangats were always accessible to the common folks. These were the places where people of all faiths would come whether in joy or in sorrow, and during the time of auspicious occasions. Messages of humanity, universality, equality, fraternity, fight for human rights and values were preached from Guru Granth Sahib and its uniqueness explained. It started way back from the time of travel of Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, Baba Gurdita, down to Almast to Bhagat Bhagwan Giri who had propagated Sikhism in entire eastern India. This was adopted by local people en masse, irrespective of their original caste, creed or religion.

Some dilution was witnessed after the time of Guru Govind Singh Ji. During the visit of the Ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, there was no basic difference between the Dera, the Sangats or the Gurdwaras. All were synonymous. According to the early European chroniclers, the main Nanak-Shahi Udasi Mahant of Patna Akhara was Govind Das Ji (the Sangat in Rekabganj of Didar-Ganj area situated in the eastern part of Patna City still exists and has with it beautiful handwritten Guru Granth Sahib, but without any Mahant) who was the head of Udasis and the followers were called Kholasa in those days. We find that the both Khalsa and Kholasa used to read Guru Granth Sahib and obey its tenets. There was no idol worship. They worshipped a formless God known as Akalpurkh, distributed Karah Parshad after the sermons were over and believed in the concept of Sangat (congregation) and Pangat. But some differences were also

seen. The question of supremacy emerged especially among Mahants. Though some differences surfaced, the entire Sangat used to pay homage to Takht Sri Harimandir Ji, Patna, as well as other important places of Sikhism. Symbolic differences created a big gap later on. Also some type of negligence was found among the Khalsa Sikhs towards them. This is not an isolated case. The problems raised its head at many places.

### **IGNORANCE**

Many hurdles and misunderstandings may come in our way but nothing can perturb us, if we set out on a mission to reach our goal with a conviction from the core of our heart. Till now the Guru Granth Sahib is preserved as the holy book in a very respectful manner in many of the places we visited. The new generation is totally ignorant of the early Nanak-Panthi culture with emphasis on purity. Still nowhere any disrespect for the Guru Granth Sahib was found. Beside the abandoned Sangats some new temples of other deities have been constructed, indicating serious dilution of the faith. I continuously request the authorities of Sangats not to give the Guru Granth Sahib to agencies that may come to take in lieu of holding sanctum. They have taken away many copies of century old and beautifully hand-written Granth Sahib, thus removing our old proofs of inheritance. These Guru Granth Sahib manuscript copies on the altar of worship are the biggest proof of these Sangat having belonged to Sikhs. They are our heritage and no attempt should be made to take these away. We will lose our golden past if this happens. Mere crying or shedding crocodile tears won't make the situation easier. If people are really pained at such decay they should come and stay here for longer period to restore the old values. These places started crumbling when the centre of Sikhism got disturbed and we lost our individual as well as collective consciousness and sentiments. The Sikh masses should be enlightened with teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. One current example is that of Baba Ajaib Singh Lalton who almost single-handedly fought the battle with the land mafia and many other bad characters to retain a few places like Rajgir and Bihar Sharif from the clutches of land-grabbers. Now the Sikh-Sangat visiting Patna Sahib also comes to Rajgir. The same model can be repeated in different Sangats if we really want

to restore the old glory without disturbing peace of the local area. Slowly, the local people, whose ancestors were affiliated to Sikhism, may join us if our motto is really based on truth. By propagation of Guru Granth Sahib we will stand on our feet firmly and work to the benefit of the whole mankind and thus, bring back our old lost glory.

I had long conversations with the people who either abided by or were inclined towards teachings of Guru Nanak. It appears that there is an urge among such people to know more about the faith they have followed. But my treasure hunting dream started to fade a bit at seeing that some people who, though bearing Sikh identity and preaching some of the tenets of Guru Nanak although mixed with some other traditions, are cashing in on faith in cahoots with some vested interests in abject deviation from Sikhism in these places. But this distracted me only for a moment, as I mustered energy to receive boundless blessings of great Guru Nanak to carry on with my zealous mission of exploring new vistas. We should not waste time regretting and stay focused on resolving these complicated issues. The house of the Sikhs seems to have started splitting almost irreversibly. This great decline is what I bemoan. We should seek help from like-minded support groups interested in resolving the issue through a clear sense of the perspective. This situation depicts the dilemma of an important part of ours who have lost the language and the culture of our great Gurus. We are pained at the erosion of true Nanak-Shahi culture, language (Gurmukhi) and its ethos. They are now mostly integrated with the local ethos and religion. Gurbani literature seems have become extinct, though the story of these Udasi Sangats is intricately entwined with local life. Just as the story of these Nanak-Shahi Udasis began with the blessing of the Gurus, it need be continuously told and retold.

## **CONTRIBUTION**

The Nanak-Shahi Udasi had contributed much to local societies as well as for propagation of Guru Granth Sahib. They nurtured and developed man's profound spiritual dimension to death-defying inspiration to seek essential secularism through sacred creativity. Spiritualism and creativity are inseparable in this great Guru Granth Sahib, worshiped as 'the Living Guru' by the people. Every Sangat

had a Guru Granth Sahib. This showed the multi-faceted creative genius of the great holy men of yester-years spreading the message of sublime ethical values. They built sprawling Sangats where travellers of every variety, ranging from monks to traders with caravan and other groups of people got free Langar and safe lodging in some of the most far-flung and dreaded areas. The Sangats also used to operate like 'dharamshalas', a rare example in those days. The masses, irrespective of caste and creed, were attached with these Sangats, where spirituality was the most important component of one's self-development and service to society. The people joining en masse to the great house of Sikhism were known as Nanak-Panthis and preachers as the Nanak-Shahi Mahants.

### **NEED OF LAW FOR PRESERVATION AND MAINTAINANCE OF SIKH SHRINES**

There should be proper legislation introduced by Government of India directing State governments for a 'Sikh Shrines Preservation and Maintenance Act' to enable them to carry on with their old tradition of propagating the tenets of Guru Granth Sahib. The legislation may also be made through a Bill like All India Sikh Shrines and Religious places Bill in which institutional mechanism to protect Sikh shrines, akharas, temples, ashrams, mutts, endowments, as well as both movable and immovable religious and shrine property should be incorporated. At many places there is no record or inventory of such properties. Even more regrettably, we have seen Government agencies illegally occupying large tract of lands belonging to these Sangats. Maximum land has of course been encroached by locals. At some places, the most shocking things included the sale of Gurdwara land were witnessed. Land titles were transferred under false power of attorney, or fabricated lease deeds or other fraudulent ways.

Due to lack of trustees, caretakers, patrons and devotees these places are in a sad state of disrepair. Some of the shrines are historically very important (Puri, Rajgiri, Patna, Chapra and innumerable such others), but no effort had been made to preserve them. Nothing is being done to restore them. Of the thousands of Sangats many have ceased to exist. Most of the existing ones have Guru Granth Sahib, in hand-written or rock-printed script in some cases while at many places

the holy Granth appears in modern printed forms.

The source of funding for maintenance, restoration is another matter of concern. But if the thousands of acres of agriculture and commercial land once owned by the Sangats are restored to them by forming a government appointed committee, the money can come easily from these sources. Initially the Government should provide basic legal and infrastructural support so that land can be retrieved from encroachers. Thousands of litigations are pending in the court. Those should be expedited. Marking of properties should be made as per entry of these vast properties in early survey records made more than a hundred years ago. We need custodians to supervise all these to give us our ancient and sacred legacies.

### **DEVIATIONS FROM THE SIKH WAY OF LIFE AND SOLUTIONS**

The deviations from the Sikh way of life are rather stark among the people living in and around the Sangat. Sikh values seem to have vanished. An initiative to revive the Sangats will greatly help the people who have been living for centuries in this region. This community of Nanak-Panthis has lost its identity over time. As I wandered about in every possible place where such Sangats existed I received the warmth of the local people. At many places people tried to guide me through history in spite of having a very hazy notion about the Nanak-Panthis. The Kholasas, had a strong belief in teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib. It should be rededicated to its great Mahants who were Pracharaks of the teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Granth Sahib for the people of India. This is a very painstaking job. It should be attempted through collaboration of Nanakshahi Udassi headquarters, Nanak-Panthis Sangat along with the patronage of well organised supreme bodies of Sikhs, various State and Central Governments. The abject failure of the Nanak-Shahi Mahants in the country to ignite the minds of the masses during the last one hundred years has been one the most unfortunate realities.

### **THE ROAD MAP TO MOVE AHEAD**

A road map for a unique collaborative project should be made to delve deep into country's rich past, specifically its Sikh traditions and connections. Its main aim should be to restore the nearly five-hundred-

year old symbols of closeness and to digitise all available remains. It should have a formally-established umbrella body to guard the vast properties from the prying eyes of land sharks and the mafia. We should be careful to bring back its authentic old Indo-Persian architecture with old domes, campaniles of the fort shaped Deras and to get back its old glory. The structures still endure. Heritage status should be given to these great places. If these great pieces of architecture are restored, it would showcase the very important role that Sikhism played in the earlier centuries as a religion. Meticulous attention need to be paid during restoration so as to preserve the old copies of Guru Granth Sahib in the 'Sangat'. I was very fortunate to have seen these places which created a sense of vastness in me. Many agencies are trying to rubbish these great facts of history. But history is not fantasy; it is based on rational analysis. It is a sad commentary of history that the guardians of these Sangats have turned predators. It is an apt case of "The fence is eating the crop."

### **HOW TO BRIDGE THE GAP**

A huge chasm has been created by the passage of time. Bridging the gap is very tough but not impossible. First of all we should come closer and forget the past differences without any personal axe to grind. The features which were common between us should become the main pillars of unity. For this we should make continuous efforts if we are to claim ourselves 'big brothers', as, it were, to these people away from the main stream. It may take from years to generations, but the process should be carried out without break. Perceptions are not always true. We should not become victims of imperfect perceptions and get swayed away. There are many insensitive groups amongst us who spend their days and nights abusing each other. If we have to work on this front we have to work in a different manner altogether. Over the centuries the philosophies of our great Gurus inspired the Nanakpanthi society. The preachers and the Mahants were welcomed with warmth and respect. The locals were proud of their Nanak-Shahi heritage in which the Mahants were the bridge between the societies they came from and those they were destined to serve. The dwindling and residual Nanak-Shahi population should be preserved. Emphasis should be

given so that they get special Minority rights from Government.

## CONCLUSION

Sikhs across the globe as well as our supreme bodies should look into this matter with the seriousness it deserves. For the Sikhs all these places are very important historically because of presence of the sacred seats of Sikhism like Takht Sri Harmandir Ji, Patna Sahib, Takht Sri Sachkhand Sahib, Nanded (Maharashtra) and most of the five 'Piaras' (beloved Sikhs) who came from outside of Punjab. This fact is mentioned in most of the early historical researches. My study shows how great influence of Sikhism was in these parts even a couple of hundred years ago.

As most of these sites are standing neglected, the community should take care of their maintenance and restoration. Very few are left to tell the tales with the memory of oral history fading. We should succeed in retaining part of them as Sikh heritage from the little remains and save these structures. We need more and more people to come together to campaign for the preservation and restoration of this heritage. A pilgrimage circuit has to be planned for visiting these places. Signposts are to be placed which can remind one of the collective history of these Sangats. Sikh pilgrims are advised to keep the social and cultural sensitivities of the locals in mind. This will definitely strengthen us in the long run. The recitation of Guru Granth Sahib might have fallen silent in many of these places, but the fascinating stories around them will always be there to cherish. The diversity will gradually turn to oneness and will be following the great message of Guru Nanak and other Gurus and the holy people who are equally represented in exceptional Guru Granth Sahib. Many more explorations can be made with many more tales emerging from the deep collective memory. We can know much more about each other while respecting the differences of cultures and respecting diversity. Culture gives coherence to our lives and gives us the resources to make sense of the world and stabilises our personality. All cultures are products of a specific space and milieu and in consonance with the limits of cultural homogeneity and diversity. It is more like discovering treasure within our mind. It is likely that a mass of treasures in the form of an eclectic culture steeped in the teachings of our Gurus can be found here. At

the end of these tours I could visualise this as a dream worth dreaming. As I live in the eastern parts of the country which was important for Sikhism in those times I find it all the more worthwhile.

For those who are interested in searching Sikhism of the olden days this can be a journey of romance, nostalgia and a search for legacy. There was a deliberate attempt to erase the medieval history of flourishing Sikhism and contribution of Nanak-Panthi propagators by the British colonial regime too. That was the reason of the downfall of the tradition from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. We have unanswered questions like why the great script is still un-deciphered and what the truth was behind the decline of the mighty philosophy. We have to find answers very seriously on a priority basis so that we can stop further loss and try to begin by picking up little pieces slowly and with utmost patience. A long-term and foolproof roadmap has to be drawn. Then these places would become more beautiful, breathing history and providing moral and spiritual strength. A more introspective look into the life and aesthetics of the bygone era would be a boost to re-discover Sikhism for re-propagation and become a source of great creative energy for the entire diaspora. We can and must revive these traditions. I have tried to raise some socio-cultural issues and leave it up to the brotherhood to take a closer look for appropriate action for revival of Sangats and Nanak-Shahi brotherhood. Otherwise, we will fail in our duty to let our people know how Sikhism had spread through the length and breadth of the country. Our Sikh brothers are big hearted; hope my fellow brethren will follow a call for unity that is true to our philosophy of serving all mankind regardless some basic differences. Let's take the pledge as followers of great Guru Nanak whose five hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary is to be celebrated in a big way globally to reconnect ourselves with our faraway brethren with spiritual affinity but ethnic diversity.

# RETAINING IDENTITY AND REAFFIRMING FAITH AMONG SIKH YOUTH UNDER THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION

GURDEEP KAUR\*

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This paper argues that under the impact of all-pervasive global culture, Sikh youth are deviating from the path shown by our Gurus and fail to abide by and adhere to the principles of Sikhism. And it is imperative to re-affirm faith among the disenchanted youth and that the youth must not be understood as a problem group but as a potential group whose energies and capacities are to be carefully and prudently channelised. So, the disenchantment among this potential group can be addressed by the active involvement of all people and has to be adopted as a continuous process. A humble attempt is made to investigate the impact of globalisation on the youths in general and Sikh youth in particular who are increasingly being affected by globalisation and to suggest viable measures that can be taken to re-affirm the faith of the Sikh youths in the religion and take pride in the rich historical past of their religion and the uniqueness it holds for the outstanding contributions that the Sikhs have made to up keep the legacy of the great Gurus.

One of ironies of life in the 21st century world, which of course is quite saddening, is that despite an unparalleled degree of freedom of religion, the majority of people seem to be opting for freedom from religion. In today's society, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Sikh youth to harmonize values deemed important to the 'West' with those deemed central to Sikhism. But I believe that the young are not to be blamed because they are born and brought up in the world that values materialism and tangible benefits. It henceforth becomes imperative

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that the adults, parents, grandparents, school teachers and community leaders work towards instilling the right values among the youth, educate them and in fact be their role models. But this actually is not happening.

### **SOME ISSUES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Gurudwaras are a centre of spiritual learning where Sikhs and others come to learn the powerful teachings of the Gurus, to become humble and to forfeit attachment to socio-religious rituals but it is disappointing to say that the gurudwaras, our most sacred places, have become cesspool of controversy and political feud. Having failed to establish an environment of spiritual bliss, harmony and love we cannot expect the young to learn the right values. Coming to the gurudwaras with the expectation that one would find solace, peace and tranquillity amidst the environment of competition, hatred and animosity, the dream gets shattered when a similar environment of blame game, mud flinging is experienced and this disenchants the youth.

The unfortunate focus on money, personal affairs and insignificant issues among today's Sikh leadership sets a poor example for youth - the leaders of tomorrow. It is the duty of the adults – be it leaders, parents, family members or teachers – to educate young people and expose them to the basic values of our religion like modesty, humility, wisdom, discipline, courage, patience, perseverance, philanthropy and truth by not just preaching but also by inculcating in their behaviour and way of life in order that the youth develop a passionate and sincere interest in becoming a true Sikh.

It is important that the youth are encouraged to live the Reht, or way of life, that the Gurus have taught and the training for this should begin at the tender age. Parents and grand-parents need to take up this responsibility to encourage young ones to regularly visit gurudwara and participate in the routine prayers and also be taught to recite the prayers. Thankfully, now our committees, realising the exigency, are holding regular Shabad gurbani, competitions to award the achievers and good performers and this indeed to a certain extent is encouraging the young to learn about Sikhism and the associated values and also the Sikh practices. However, by and large it has not been successful to instil an un-dwindled faith in the religion. This means that the adults

need to understand that living in the age where the young have an over exposure to consumer culture, media, materialism, the responsibility of adults increases manifold. Regular guidance, motivation and encouragement is to be given to the youth. There should be no forceful imposition of values on the young but they should be affectionately handled and sensitivity must be shown by the adults while dealing with the disenchanted youths. Adequate attention and respect are necessary for their growth as individuals and community members; open dialogue, two way communication, one to one relation can pave way for healthy understanding and an explosive situation can be timely and appropriately addressed.

Given the age to which the youth belongs, it indeed is difficult to ignore the social and emotional pressure and especially when they are 24x7 in an environment in which resisting to the materialistic consumer culture becomes difficult, so are plagued by attraction and engage in wasteful exercises. They fail to realise that in pursuit of materialistic goals, they are spending their energy, time and resources for happiness that is short-lived. In such a situation, parents need to guide their children to maintain a balance, cope with peer related stress and to make them understand the need of making the selective utilisation of information and technological developments. Above all, parents need to be empathetic towards the needs of young children, should be the role models of young, must have the routine of getting up early morning reciting Nitnem, must not keep themselves hooked to television, technology or other such things and inculcate the values of a true Gursikh so that they are imbibed by the children. I really do not hesitate mentioning that the impact of globalisation, technological advances on parents is no less. It is quite observable that their behaviour and way of life is not in conformity with the path shown by our Gurus and they too have a strong urge for social acceptability and end up accumulating materialistic benefits and have an inclination to worldly pursuits more than mental, spiritual and emotional well-being. The foundation of Sikh principles are first laid at home from where the child right from his early age observes the religious norms being considered as sacrosanct and then imbibes the same. It is a must for the parents to understand that our religion is not guided by stringent

dogmatic narrow-minded rules. It is painful to mention that in the present times many parents take protection/ escape from maintaining outwardly Sikh identity under the guise of clichés, such as: "the Sikh form is too cumbersome/too elaborate/too time consuming, fail to up-keep the Sikh values and articles of faith and often make modifications like trimming of beard and wearing a ready made turban or a headgear. With such frivolous or baseless excuses youngsters can never be encouraged to inculcate the right values rather they would get more confused about their identity and especially about the religion. The significance of the 5 K's in our daily lives, their basis, and their contributions to the fulfilment of our religious goals must be clearly delineated without any modification and simplification. Amidst the environment which is demanding in terms of social recognition and acceptance to which the young are exposed to and overwhelming peer pressure can be best withstood if parenting is good. The parents must make efforts to instil the sense of pride for Sikhism and respect for articles of faith and establish a deep connection to tradition, history and the divine teachings of the Gurus, and this can be done if and only if parents do not adorn Sikhism superficially.

It is important that the adults – be it family members, teachers, leaders – have deep knowledge about Sikhism and the articles of faith. This knowledge should be beyond rhetoric and platitudes so that the queries and curiosity of the youth are satisfied with meaningful relevant and insightful answers. Some programs and workshops for adults to become true Gur Sikhs must also be organised.

Further, it is worthwhile to mention that the present-day youth is immensely under the influence of media especially electronic media including the social media. It henceforth becomes important that Sikhism related information is disseminated to the youth, they are acquainted with the rich historical past, the contributions of the Sikh Gurus in amelioration of the society, the sacrifices made by young Sikhs to liberate the country from the yolk of Imperial power. The rich, vibrant Sikh culture, the rhythmic Punjabi beats that are borrowed by the pop musicians, (all courtesy globalisation), folk lore, literature should make every young Sikh feel proud of, and this can be done if the Sikh cultural heritage is faithfully preserved and transmitted through

modes of mass communication. It is imperative for religious organisations to promote the Sikh philosophy through media and various outreach programmes and also ensure that the principles are not only philosophised but are put in to practice.

The entire responsibility to inculcate the right values among the youth lies not only with parents, teachers, leaders or guardians, the youth also needs to be responsible enough to initiate change and develop curiosity to learn more about the religion and the faith. Make themselves a part of the events like *gurmat smagam*, literary festivals, Sikhism related workshops that would provide them with the opportunity to connect with the other people, discuss issues, share ideas and feel pride to be a member of the community that has a rich historical past.

Last but not the least the role of educational institutions to re-affirm faith among Sikh youth is very important. The minority institutions of course have to keep abreast with the latest developments and update their curriculum in accordance with the global changes but at the same time imparting knowledge about Sikhism and keep the young minds motivated to learn about Sikhism is the responsibility of the institutions. Extra efforts to train the staff, holding workshops, seminars, holding competition and rewarding the outstanding performers of events like Gatka competition (that has a special significance in Sikhism), *shabad gurbani* etc can keep the spirit of youth elated and motivate others as well to take pride in bringing to practice the core aspects of religion and henceforth have a balanced approach in life. Minority Sikh institutions should call upon eminent Sikh personalities who have made a place for themselves in fast globalising World without making a compromise with their Sikh identity. There are doctors, technocrats, CEO's, sports persons etc who abide by Sikh values and principles and adhere to Sikh faith. Such people can inspire the youth and can definitely be their role models. Those who are invited to lecture must keep their discussions short, crisp, meaningful and must strike the chord with the young

It is an undeniable fact that almost everywhere, the transition of the individual from youth to adulthood intersects with the transition of the world toward a more integrated, more interdependent, more

globalized society. Youth today are in transition not just from childhood to adulthood but in transition between two different ways of life. Sikh youth are growing up in a world much different than the one their parents and grandparents entered a generation or two ago. And since neither any part of the world nor any culture, religion or community is left unaffected by globalisation, it is henceforth important to curb the growing tendencies of disenchantment among Sikh youth and dispel alienation. Endeavours have to be made by all of us to preserve our religious identity while becoming part of the broader fabric of present-day society.

I give below names of some of the Sikh youth working in forums like Sikh Aid serving humanity across the globe during natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, communal riots and large scale displacement of populations like the exodus of Muslim Rhongiya population from Myanmar to India and Bangladesh etc., who have also made achievements in life:

- Sikh Boy Navdeep Singh with full Sikh identity from Muktsar (Punjab) standing first in NEET 2017
- A baptised Sikh, Sardar Harjit Singh Sajjan serving as Defence Minister in Canada.
- Sardar Jagmeet Singh, a Sikh politician, is the first ethnic minority to lead a major party in Canada.
- Sikh youth serving in US Army with full articles of Sikh faith.
- Several others can also be presented as Sikh icons and role models for the Sikh youth to inspire them to imbibe and cultivate the ethos of this distinct religious heritage.

# **BABA CULTURE – CHALLENGES FOR SIKHISM**

## **– WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE –**

**BALJEET SINGH\***

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It is an established norm in India that unless and until there is a major catastrophe, neither the society nor the government is moved or awakened. The awakening if any is also short-lived till such time there is another catastrophe, to make headlines and to sell the news.

No one talks of anti-corruption crusade of Anna Hazare or the Nirbhaya gang rape case or Baba Asaram's case or Baba Rampal's case or the death of hundreds of infants in UP due to non-availability of oxygen or the issue of Rohingya Muslims. These don't make news and these news can't be sold now.

The conviction and arrest of Baba Ram Rahim and the large scale violence and arson that followed it is another such incident. In another few months it would no longer make a news.

A lot has been discussed, both in electronic as well as in print media about Baba culture prevalent in entire India. In Punjab and Haryana, the impact of Baba culture is deep and wide-spread.

How it all started? When and Why?

We have to ponder over the issue. In a nation of 1.3 billion people, with diverse cultures; deep rooted and blind faith in religion based on superstitions and rituals; lack of modern education; extremely strong caste basis which has divided the society; approximately more than 50% population economically, socially and educationally marginalised and deprived; the conditions are highly conducive for evolving and sustaining complex problems. The emergence of Baba culture is one such malady which has evolved under the existing circumstances.

Casteism in India is deep-rooted having general acceptance of the society and it is as old as Indian civilisation itself. The division of

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the so-called upper and lower castes helps to maintain dominance of upper castes. The system suits the so called 'Brahmin class'. The system also suits the present political setup of the country. In Punjab and Haryana, entire land ownership is with the upper caste 'Jats'. The lower castes have remained labourers, deprived socially, educationally and economically; used as vote banks by politicians of all the parties for the last about 70 years.

The deprived section of the society remained deprived at religious places as well. They were not welcome at Hindu temples, rather not allowed at many temples. At village Gurudwaras also they were not welcome and faced discrimination. The situation in city Gurudwaras and historical Gurudwaras was definitely better, but the control and management of these Gurudwaras remained with upper caste Sikhs only. Historical Gurudwaras in Punjab and Haryana, being managed by SGPC, a political body mainly of Jat and upper caste Sikhs. The so-called lower caste Sikhs having no role in SGPC, even though there are SC members, but only for namesake, to fulfil legal compliance and face saving. Similarly the non-historic city Gurudwaras having local committees, comprised mainly of rich and upper caste Sikhs. The condition in Hindu temples is worst. The priest can only be a Brahmin and the management is of either Brahmins or upper caste Hindus. There is no place for so-called lower castes in these temples. This exclusionary practice being adopted by Sikhs and Hindus, since long, has created a big vacuum in the society.

The rising aspirations of lower castes were not met, even partially, at these religious institutions. After independence, the benefit of economic growth started reaching these lower castes and the deprived sections of the society. There has also been substantial migration from lower castes to various countries, particularly from Punjab, raising their economic level and the exposure which further increased their aspirations. However, the scenario at religious institutions didn't change with time to meet these rising aspirations. Under these circumstances people started looking at other avenues to fill this religious vacuum.

Thus, come into the picture these Deras, headed by Babas. Everyone is welcome, irrespective of caste or creed or economic status.

No one talks of that. Babas talk in simple language and give sermons having religious and social significance. These Babas listen to your problems and give solutions with their blessings. Babas' taking pledge for not taking alcohol or drugs, suited everyone. The followers get a feeling of security and belongingness at these Deras. Then these Babas involving themselves in various social activities, such as marriage of poor girls without dowry, organising blood donation camps, establishing old age homes, schools for poor children, tree plantation drives etc etc. These initiatives have further boosted the credibility, acceptance and market of these Babas. It also helped in further enhancing their base and membership. It is estimated that approximately more than 80% of followers at these Deras are from lower castes and deprived sections of the society.

The more the upper caste people are inclined towards exclusionary practices adopted by them, the growth of followers of these Deras is increasing.

The politicians are too happy to help these Deras on the promise of vote banks and in return gave them all types of subsidies such as legal protection, immunities of all sorts and help in acquiring land by illegal means. The vote bank politics of India has always encouraged anti-social elements to help them win elections; the sole objective of all political parties is to win elections and Nation's interest has been side-lined, rather crushed. Eventually, these Deras are being encouraged, protected and supported by political leadership of the country.

Thus, all the prominent Deras of Punjab and Haryana, viz, Sacha Sauda, Nirankari, Radha Soami, Noormahal, Ravidasia, Divyajyoti, Bhaniarewala etc etc, became powerful and rich over a period of time, with political blessings.

Now, with the large follower base, so many branches, large land holdings, financial strength and political backing, these Deras have a larger role in the society. Even though with Asaram, Narainswami, Rampal and Ram Rahim in jail and criminal cases against various Babas, the setback in all probability would be a temporary one in view of the complex socio-economic and religio-political scenario of the Indian society. A small percentage of followers of Ram Rahim may desert

him, but may tilt to Radha Soami or Nirankari or for that matter any other Dera. Loss to one Dera is a gain of another Dera. It sounds strange but it is the harsh reality of Dera culture.

In addition, there are thousands of small or village Deras in Punjab. Most of them are headed by Sikhs and by & large following Sikh Maryada, repeat by & large. Number of followers of these Deras vary from a few hundred to thousands, but most of them having local influence. There may be certain contradictions at these Deras but it would not be appropriate to touch that issue at this juncture as it would defeat the very purpose of the fight with the evil. Moreover, we should not forget that there are certain aberrations at various Sikh institutions and historical Gurudwaras also. Thus, the real issue should not be diluted by opening all the fronts.

But now where do we go from here? What options Sikh society is having at this juncture? Would it be possible to check the degeneration?

Yes, a beginning has to be made now. We need not be pessimistic, as it is too late or the problem is a complex and wide spread with political backing. We fortunately have large number of institutions, an intellectual class and committed workers along with well established platforms having credibility, which can make a difference.

First and the foremost important task is that SGPC has to change. We have to collectively persuade them to change and to rectify the errors committed by them in the last several decades. The changes in outlook and working of SGPC should not be merely a cosmetic one, but revolutionary changes need to be made for the overall wellbeing of the community. A genuine transformation is required. This apex body has to send a clear-cut and unambiguous message that it is sincere and will allow active participation of all sections of Sikhs at all levels, management and preaching. The large number of Gurudwaras all over the Northern India is an added advantage. This base needs to be used to spread the Guru's message that we do not discriminate on grounds of caste and economic status of people in Sikhism. Here all are equal and welcome.

This message is to go down the line in a proper manner, particularly through the village Gurudwaras. All this needs to be monitored by SGPC by creating a special cell, which should operate actively, with

participation of local committees of the Gurudwaras. It may sound big, but it is not difficult, only there has to be a 'Will'.

If we can organise langars in extremely tough situations in Nepal, Uttrakhand, Burma or even in USA, why can't we take it as a challenge. If we can make a beginning now, we can clean the system in the next say – 10 years. It will drastically change the scenario with general acceptance and respect of Sikhism increasing manifold. But at the same time, if we do not make a beginning now and start cleaning the system, the coming generations will never forgive us. We may never get this opportunity again.

Let us do an introspection. Involve all Sikh religious and social organisations, shed our ego, persuade SGPC, DSGMC, Nanded and Patna Sahib boards, to join hands, accept it as a challenge and check Baba and Dera culture. Let us spread the true message of our Gurus as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

# ON THE ISC FRONT

LT GEN KARTAR SINGH\*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is sad to read our newspaper reports clearly depicting that Punjab is continuously facing the dreaded drug menace. Claims by the Government about an improvement in the situation are not convincing at all. Youth of this sturdy province must be urgently saved and protected from this continuing in-flux of drugs from neighboring countries and also interstate. We still don't see a genuine set of war-like measures instituted to crush the criminals who are openly, without fear, drawing in more and more youth in schools, colleges, social gathering and sadly even in many rural areas in the interior of our province. Let us all citizens go out of the way to help our Government eradicate this evil in their area of responsibility.

## HAS OUR EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT DRIVE HELPED

Most certainly we feel happy to tell our readers that we, in our areas of education uplift have diverted the attention of many young students away from non-serious aimless teaching in rural school and colleges. Parents are our simultaneous target. The story of Mukandpur in Nawanshehr District of Punjab is now a fairy tale. Within 6-8 years, it has risen like a phantom out of the woods, to roll its staff and students of the school and college on to producing elite results in the 10+2 classes each year after year. We have set up a Coaching Centre approved by the University as a partnership. Results of both college and school are brilliant. Three more centers in Akaljot Public School (Patiala Distt.) Guru Harkrishan Public School (Hoshiarpur Distt.) Guru Nanak Public School (Moga Distt) are following a similar path. It is just glorious to see Punjab's children grabbing honors by the dozens.

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These Students will compete for jobs and get them. We certify that Punjab may have improved its position in all round education from 19<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> amongst our 35 states as per recent HRD Ministry official grading, but we are far from satisfied. South India has set records that we need to chase.

### **SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME BY THE CENTRAL GOVT**

The previous Prime Minister's 10 Point Programme for Minorities has been brilliant. We are happy to state that, after initial hiccups, it is till now ongoing. However applications now have to be submitted online for even junior classes right from class-I without warning. This did cause real problems for these junior kids and also clogging of computers at all levels, but jointly the Education Department and ISC co-operated to come out on top. After some extensions in last dates of application our joint effort bore fruit and readers will be glad to know that we beat many states in claiming scholarships much larger than our share—all due to The ISC helping students apply earlier than many other states.

### **THE HYDRABAD AREA SIKLIGAR SCHEME**

We talked about the Kindergarten School inaugurated in Hyderabad City on 24<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2017 mainly for the large Sikligar population in and around Hyderabad. The “Happy Learning Play School” is now progressing rapidly forward but is hungry for more funds to pay teachers and ancillary staff. We appeal to all readers and supporters to share the load with the ISC and its devoted members. At present we have spent nearly 10 lacs alone on staff pay plus other expenditure. A strong appeal has gone out to SGPC as well, moved personally by a strong ISC Contingent of Officers guided by our Amritsar representative, meeting the Chief Secretary. Col. JS Multani, Brig Gurinderjit Singh and Sardar Jatinder Singh pushed our case with rare vigor and we have been promised help based on the clearcut paper presented by HQ ISC. We shall follow this up rapidly and soon raise it to Middle School.

### **USA VISIT – COL. J.S. MULTANI**

During September 2017 Col. J.S. Multani visited USA and had meetings with Diaspora members in San Francisco, Virginia, Chicago

and New York. Dr. Sukhmander Singh and Shri Vikramjeet Singh had healthy discussion regarding future plans of the ISC and promised to work more actively to achieve our aims of Education and Skill Development to facilitate employment rapidly. In Virginia S. Balwant Singh Multani and S. Gulzar Singh Multani appreciated ISC for our Sikligarh Vanjara Project of Education, Dharm Parchar and opening of school. They have promised to help financially. In New York The President and members of the Managing Committee of Baba Makhan Shah Lobana Gurdawara honoured Col. Multani on 01 Oct. 2017 as Gen. Secretary of ISC. He addressed the *sangat* and spoke about the latest activities of ISC with special reference to Education and employment in Punjab and Hyderabad.

ISC had conducted a seminar on uplift of neglected Sikh societies in 2015 alongwith the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, where ISC was unanimously selected to lead and document various NGO's/ Institutions and Gurdawaras working for the welfare of Sikligars, Vanjaras, Satnamias and Nanak Nam Leva masses.

In pursuance, a meeting was organized in Red Cross Bhawan Ludhiana on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017 by S. Sukhdev Singh Laj and was presided over by Col JS Multani, Gen Secretary, ISC, Chandigarh. Meeting was attended by Brig Gurinderjit Singh ISC, Chandigarh S. Gurcharan Singh Canada, S. Bakshish Singh USA, S. Amolak Singh USA, S. Darshan Singh Palahi, S. Gurmel Singh Dhani, S. Taranjit Singh Sandhar New Zealand, S. Jagdeep Singh and Bhai Ranjeet Singh Journalist.

The matter regarding ongoing works for the welfare of Sikligars, Vanjaras and Nanakpanthis were highlighted and further plans were discussed. In addition, the 550<sup>th</sup> birthday of Guru Nanak falling in the year 2019 would be dedicated to the **“Education of the downtrodden”** and for this an organized attempt by all NGO's to be taken up under ISC's association and lead.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

In our last article in this magazine we talked about plans to devise methods of imparting essential know-how regarding Career Planning to 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> class students in our schools. The first phase was brilliantly executed by our composite team consisting of Col JS Multani, Brig Gurinderjit Singh and Vishwas Sharma lead by me. We visited

both Mukandpur and Patiala Distts Coaching Centre students are now thirsting for more. Details of each career are ready and approved in our last very strongly attended Executive Committee Meeting consisting of 34 members from all over Punjab and Delhi. This project is bound to uplift the career planning and quality output of 'Rural students' especially to recognizable and lucrative levels.

### **OPENING UP THE SKILLS ROUTE TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

We now have completed a comprehensive tour of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Hoshiarpur districts to select Rural Student Volunteers for select Skills Training and quick employment in our province in lucrative skills. Our Polytechnic Institute Mohali has very kindly agreed to expand their well run unit to accommodate our candidates after suitable vetting. Brig Gurinderjit, an expert and experienced soldier, in this direction, along with Col JS Multani moved out and spent days in the field recently. We had been planning this and a visit to Darbar Sahib for sometime. Both Missions were a total success. Joined by ever active S. Jatinder Singh, our Amritsar ISC leader, they also met and convinced the Secretary SGPC, S. Roop Singh, about our future plans to help educate, as well as, train youth Sikligars and Vanjaras. Our concrete plan has already begun to be implemented forgone and implemented by the ISC, and is expected to receive appropriate future funds from the SGPC. Even our Religious Teaching camps, at various places, will receive financial support and now see a bright future for the uplift of these neglected brethren.

### **TRAINING SELECTED STUDENTS FOR NATIONAL AND STATE COMPETITIONS**

We are now ready to implement Dr Sardara Singh Johal, our dear Convenor's persistent desire to fully help rural students shine in above selections. A philanthropist from Delhi S. Gurminder Singh Matharu has personally visited ISC HQ and assured us and our full team that he will finance the project. He has already helped a few individual students selected by us. We are going to speed this up and start this earliest as we have it on our waiting list since years.

### **MEMBERS AND FRIENDS FORUM**

You have all been so very special and large hearted in uplifting

the ISC to heights of performance. Why have you all slowed down in your donations? We are not officially allowed to receive foreign funds hence we have to fund all the above vital projects ourselves. You have been very liberal so far and we appeal for donations given liberally. We in the HQ are contributing from our earnings readily and will continue to do so. Our accounts are open for visitors. We hereby send out a huge appeal to all – **“Contribute to uplift the poor but very eager and talented”** students of our dear homeland, wonderful Punjab, basically residing in our **“Crisis Ridden Rural Areas.”**

### CONCLUSION

I feel deeply disappointed not to have attended the excellent seminar recently held by the Institute of Sikh Studies. It was unavoidable due to ill health and hospitalization. May I congratulate the whole team, which, I learn from my colleagues was a brilliant success. May the GURU lead you to greater heights in uplifting the Institute of Studies to its past glory in representing our faith, with fervor and elan, unitedly in the coming days. May the Guru's benevolence be showered on you all.

# SURAJ DI AKH

PRINCIPAL PAL SINGH SANGHA\*

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*Author: Baldev Singh (Saraknama)*

*Publisher: Lokgeet Parkashan*

*Pages: 598*

*Price: Rs 595/-*

*Suraj Di Akh*, a historical novel written by Baldev Singh (Saraknama), a Sahitya Academy Awardee on the life and accomplishments of Maharaja Ranjit Singh has kicked off an unfortunate row, maybe because of some avoidable details about Maharaja's private life which enhanced my curiosity to read it. Owing to the controversy the book had disappeared from the market. I had already read a few of his remarkable literary works including two historical novels on the life and contribution of two Sikh heroes, i.e., Bhai Jaita and Banda Singh Bahadur under the captions *Panjvan Sahibzada* and *Mahabali Sura* respectively, as well as anthology of episodic essays on the wide spectrum of the life of truck and taxi drivers, which earned him the sobriquet of Baldev Singh Saraknama. For the first time the author of these episodic essays has transformed the perception of the general public towards the profession of drivers of commercial vehicles from being apathetic to empathetic readers.

*Suraj Di Akh* is a perfect synthesis of history and fiction. A slightest tampering with either of the two would make it a dull and drab chronological arrangement of historical events or a mere fantasy devoid of actualities. Author's frequent usage of colloquial dialects, anecdotes enhances its literary flavour. The theatrical skill with which the flashes the past and future events of Ranjit Singh's life are juxtaposed, the

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author retains the readers' interest till the curtain falls. Before embarking upon the gigantic and risky project of historical novel, the author delved deep into the available sources of history of Ranjit Singh's period. In order to avoid any unnecessary controversies, he has very carefully and cautiously gathered the opinions of the foreign as well as Indian historians on the public and private life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The author himself, being a Sikh and familiar with the Sikh psyche has very shrewdly and cautiously contrived an inimitable technique to describe the sleazy and unseemly side of Ranjit Singh's life. For this, he uses the prop of a real or imaginary character 'Prof. Kautki', who keeps on reviewing the script at regular intervals and goads the author to incorporate some revelatory and stark truths about the private and public life of Ranjit Singh and some other characters which the author would not have dared to express on his own.

Dark complexioned, five feet three inches tall, Ranjit Singh who, at the age of three years had lost his left eye to an attack of small pox which had disfigured his face with pock marks was called upon at this tender age of eleven to administer the vast estate around Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) after the untimely death of his father Mahan Singh at the very young age of 27 years only. Mahan Singh and his father Charat Singh, the chief of Shukarchakiya confederacy (Misl) had captured a huge territory around Gujranwala with the might of his sword and fire power.

Along with the estate, young Ranjit Singh had inherited the envy and rivalry of some of the chiefs of the Khalsa confederacies. Their designs to usurp the estates of young Ranjit Singh were blunted by the wisdom of his sagacious mother Raj Kaur who involved Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, the widely respected and the 16th descendant of Guru Nanak, by reaching an understanding among the warring factions of the Sikh Misls to unitedly fight against the foreign invaders under the command of young Ranjit Singh. Here the author gives the advantage of young age and dynamic personality to Ranjit Singh over other chiefs who were fairly old at that time.

The author divides the novel into small sated and informative chapters while giving the account of the eventful life and untiring heroic deeds of Ranjit Singh which struck terror in the hearts of the

adversaries. The very awe of 'Asia's most powerful Khalsa Army' made many rulers submit before it without any skirmish or fight.

Both Ranjit Singh's might and cunningness established his supremacy over the Sikh misals with the exception of trans-Satluj Phulkia rulers who frustrated Ranjit Singh's ambitions to expand the boundary of his empire to the Jamna river. The author seems to blame the Malwa rulers for stopping the otherwise unstoppable Ranjit Singh from conquering the British and hoisting the Khalsa flag on the Red Fort. Thereafter, Ranjit Singh could extend the boundaries of his empire towards North-west frontier and he did that.

The author gives pictorial views of moving columns of Khalsa army scaling mountains, crossing rivers, negotiating snow laden peaks and fighting pitch battles even in the torrential rains under the command of legendary generals like Hari Singh Nalwa, Akali Phoola Singh and others. To keep the morale of his army high, Ranjit Singh himself led them from the front while ransacking the forts and palaces of the enemies. In order to project a balanced view of Ranjit Singh, the author accommodates the views of foreign as well as Indian historians. While some of British historians accused him of debauchery, treachery and avarice, some others compared him to Napoleon for his administrative and organisational skills. But all of them acknowledged that he was loved by his people. Indian historians lavishly praise Maharaja Ranjit Singh for his being a devout and humble Sikh, kind and considerate King, secular, philanthropist, astute diplomat, hard bargainer, willy statesman, formidable warrior, and admirer of beauty and achiever of his targets.

As a true Sikh of the Gurus, after his coronation ceremony in 1801, he neither sat on the throne nor wore the crown. He disapproved of his being addressed as 'Maharaja' and loved to be addressed as 'Singh Sahib' or 'Bhai Sahib' or at the most 'Sarkar'. His Lahore Darbar was called 'Darbar-e-Khalsa'. His "Sarkar-i-Khalsa" issued his state currency and minted its coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

He gave employment to his people and donations to the religious shrines without discrimination bias or prejudice of race, creed or colour. Ranjit Singh was way ahead of his time when he abolished death

sentence in his empire. He exempted land revenue when the crops failed owing to natural calamities. Peasants were issued grants and free seeds to compensate their losses. Raja Dhyani Singh was reprimanded for collecting revenue from the people of Kashmir following the destruction caused by excessive snow and rains. Ranjit Singh himself sent carts loaded with food grains and necessary provisions for the marooned population of Kashmir. While disapproving of Ranjit Singh's love-life that borders on biconditionals on lechery, the author seems to gloss over the pitiable void of 'True Love' that was denied to him by his first two wedded wives, 'Mehtab Kaur', daughter of Rani Sada Kaur of Khaniya missal, was a mismatch for Ranjit Singh as she was stunningly beautiful, pulsatingly youthful as compared to Ranjit Singh with his pock-marked face. Even Rani Raj Kaur, his second wife, mother of Kharak Singh, failed to win over his heart. Ultimately this void was filled by 'Moran' the court dancer who was called to perform at the celebration of Kanwar Kharak Singh's betrothal ceremony. Here the author celebrates the power of true love. Her bewitching beauty and unrestricted spontaneous passion enthralled the Maharaja. Rather than commanding her to be his mistress, Ranjit Singh wedded her as per the Muslim rites and made her 'Moran-Sarkar' or his queen. For this violation, he appeared before Akal Takhat as a true Sikh and humbly accepted the punishment and a penalty of 1.25 lakh rupees. But Ranjit Singh's subsequent actions when he strolled in the bazaars of Lahore in an inebriated condition with Moran with him on the elephant, lowers his esteem, as an emperor in the eyes of the readers. But his people loved him with all his faults and for celebrating Holi and Dusshera festivals in the unique way.

All the above feats did not deter him from launching military campaigns to quell the rebels, expand his empire, replenish his depleting treasury and enrich his harem with wives and mistresses.

In this 600 pages book, the author gives a detailed account of how Ranjit Singh accomplished the un-accomplishable objectives, conquered the un-conquerable, procured 'Kohinoor' diamond from the wily Begum of Shah Suza, captured mare Laily, a prize possession, negotiated treaties with Britishers, handled foreign visitors and delegations, displayed his military might to the visitors and celebrated

the festivals freely mixing up with his subjects, distributed largesse and earned the love and respect of his people.

The author makes the readers shed tears on the decline and eclipse of the Sun that once rose on the horizons of Khalsa empire. His patronizing the feudalistic traditions overriding the Dal Khalsa conventions, over-indulgence in carnal pleasures, his failure to groom any capable heir to succeed him and carry on his legacy, his over-dependence on the duplicitous and treacherous Dogras and his ingratitude towards friends and relatives, and distancing his own clan i.e. Jat-Sikhs from the core members of his empire paved the path for the inglorious downfall of the Khalsa Empire. It is a novel worth reading and appreciating the author's honest and realistic portrayal of a prominent Sikh historical figure. While the credulous Sikh masses have raised a hue and cry against the author even for his measured description of his novel's protagonist, romantic disposition the enlightened, judicious and discrete readers are likely to make a fair assessment of this well-documented and well-written novel. The author's invention of the title of this work "Suraj di Akh" implying the one-eyed Sikh ruler having the heat and light of the Sun in his persona is itself a tribute to this unique Sikh hero.

# GURDWARA: CONCEPT & INSTITUTION

A REVIEW BY DR PARAMVIR SINGH\*

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*Author: Gurdev Singh Sangha*

*Publisher: Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh*

*Pages: 197*

*Price: Rs. 300/-*

Gurdwara, earlier called *dharamsala*, originated with Guru Nanak as a place where *sangats* established by him at different places visited by him during his preaching odysseys used to meet and sing eulogies of God. The *dharamsala* received the nomenclature of Gurdwara (or the *dwara* (door or abode) of the Guru) during the pontificate of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru of the Sikh faith. It is a place where Guru Granth Sahib is installed and *gurbani* is recited for the benefit of every section of human society irrespective of one's caste, colour, creed and region. It is a vital institution of the Sikh faith for spiritual progression and socio-political guidance of the community: it caters to the spiritual as well as nutritional needs of the visitors through the divine Word and the community kitchen (*langar*). It is a place where one learns to shed ego, perform service for the mankind, and live in harmony with others.

There has been curiosity among people all over the world to know more about the Sikhs and their spirit of selfless service especially in the form of *langar* or providing free food to all without any discrimination. Sikh and non-Sikh scholars have highlighted different aspects of the institution of *Gurudwara* and the urge to know more about this institution is still prevalent. *Gurudwara - Concept and Institution*, a well researched endeavour of Dr. Gurdev Singh Sangha, tries to define the concept of Gurudwara, traces its institution and progression

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and discusses the challenges it faces today. The author sees the seeds of life in following the teachings of the Guru. The inspiration comes from the *Gurudwara* where every Sikh bows his head in reverence and is reminded of his duty towards the society. Author says that the *Gurudwara* is an integral part of the Sikh way of life. It satiates the spiritual craving of a seeker, fulfils nutritional needs of the needy, centre of learning for the learners, shelter for the destitute, boosts morale to combat tyranny, oppression and injustice and to defend the human rights and dignity.

Gurdwara which is not just a building attracts the *sangat* to worship God and recite *kirtan*, uplifts the seekers spiritually and morally, teaches to live a truthful life, serve humanity, live in love and harmony, create a sense of social understanding and dialogue, etc. The book discusses how the successive Sikh Gurus developed and consolidated the institution and changes took place according to the needs of the time. *Manji*, *masand* and the institution of *miri-piri* added strength to it to deal with the contemporary problems and challenges. Building of Harimandir and the installation of Guru Granth Sahib in it by Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Guru, and the construction of Akal Takht in front of it by Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Guru, was a turning point in the history of *gurdwara* institution. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, used the *gurdwara* institution to train the Sikhs, along with spirituality, to stand up and fight against the tyranny and oppression of the ruling and priestly class.

Gurdwaras passed into the hands of the *mahants* in 18th century when Sikhs were forced to seek shelter in deserts, forests and mountains. In the 19th century, when Sikhs came to power, they rebuilt their shrines and endowed them with heavy *jagirs*. These land-grants changed the life-style of the *mahants* and they fell prey to evil practices which are totally unacceptable in Sikh shrines. Sikhs started Gurdwara Reform Movement and ultimately succeeded in liberating the shrines from the *mahants*. Even the support of the British government could not save them and the shrines came under the control of the Sikhs ultimately through their elected body called the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. The author refers to certain flaws in the election system and practices becoming prevalent in *gurdwaras* under

the SGPC management which are not in keeping with the Sikh spirit.

Gurdwara is a centre for Sikh way of life which is deeply and comprehensively influenced by it. Wherever they go they prefer to build a *gurdwara* before even building their own place of residence. The author traces history of the *gurdwara* institution in the West especially in England and the North America. In the initial years of their emigration to these countries, the Sikhs used to gather together at the residence of one of them in the form of congregation read/recite *gurbani* and discuss their problems in worldly life. The author gives, supported by empirical evidences, a vivid account of discrimination they suffered at the hands of the contemporary local trade unions, religious and political leadership. The book highlights the significant role played by the *gurdwara* at such crucial times.

The book also discusses the challenges faced by the institution of *gurdwara* right from the beginning till present times. It expresses concern about the present role of *gurdwara* as he finds the managements today being lax in implementing/practicing the core principles established by the Gurus. It refers to various challenges facing the institution today, such as the establishment of *gurdwaras* coming up in the name of castes in India and abroad, youth getting alienated from it, managements' mainly interested only in grabbing the *golak*, commercialization of *gurbani* in the form of Akhand Paths especially under the very nose of the SGPC, increasing ritualism, disputes in the name of Sehajdhari and Kesadhari, debarring women from some Gurdwara services, lack of uniformity in code of conduct, emergence of *deravad*, lack of coordination among traditional preachers and modern sensibility, missing of academic orientation among the preaching class, etc. The book also expresses its concern at the corrupt practices that have entered the election process of SGPC.

Another important point the book discusses is the degeneration, under the influence of political leadership, in the functioning the institution of Sri Akal Takht. Excommunication of Prof. Gurmukh Singh, a renowned Sikh preacher, and Indian freedom fighters coming back to India on Komagata Maru and presenting the robe of honour to General Dyer, responsible for the massacre of innocent Indians in

Jallianwala Bagh, were the major blots on the institution and leadership of Sri Akal Takht in the past. Similar lapses have been committed in the recent past as well. The author feels deeply concerned at certain edicts issued by the Sri Akal Takht in recent years as all such edicts adversely affect the Sikh community worldwide. He is of the opinion that Akal Takht Jathedar should be highly enlightened, independent-minded capable of sound and balanced judgement and must not succumb to any political or other extraneous pressures.

On the whole, the book is worth reading explaining Gurdwara as a concept, narrating its history of evolution in India and abroad, challenges facing it today and the possible way out of them. It is also significant as it exhorts the reader for introspection to make the *gurdwara* system more effective in dealing with the problems emerging in the wake of expanding Sikh society.

## NEWS & VIEWS

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### **ANYBODY LIVING IN INDIA IS HINDU: RSS CHIEF BHAGWAT**

*(Courtesy: The Tribune, December 17, 2017)*

Agartala, December 17. Anybody living in India is a Hindu, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Sunday, asserting that the meaning of Hindutva is to unite all communities.

Hindutva is different from Hinduism, he told a public function at the Swami Vivekananda Maidan in the heart of Tripura's capital.

"The Muslims in India are also Hindus," the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Sarsanghchhalak said. Bhagwat, who is on a five-day tour of Tripura since Friday to review the organisational work of the RSS in the north-eastern region, said, "We have no enmity with anyone. We want welfare of all. To unite all is the meaning of Hindutva."

Maintaining that India is a land of Hindus, he said "tortured" Hindus from across the world come to the country and get shelter.

The RSS supremo said, "Hindus believe in truth, but the world respects strength. There is strength in organisation. Being organised is the natural law."

Referring to the Partition, he said parts of India got separated in 1947, leading to the weakening of the spirit of Hindutva and a decline of the "Hindu Samaj". "India was united for so long. There was unity among the Hindus," Bhagwat said.

Highlighting the rich heritage of the country, he said, "A perturbed and confused world is looking at India for a new world order that can accommodate the materialist as well as the idealist."

He urged the Hindus to get organised and trained at RSS "shakhas" (daily meetings), saying these were the only places where

one could prepare for nation-building and self-development.

The “sanatan dharma” wants to work together with everybody on board, Bhagwat said. The Left Front-ruled Tripura is scheduled to go to polls early next year and the BJP is making a serious bid to increase its footprint in the north-east. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur have BJP governments.

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MINORITIES INSECURE, SUFFOCATED: SCHOLARS

(Courtesy: The Tribune, December 4, 2017)

Chandigarh, December 3. Despite all Constitutional guarantees of India being a sovereign socialist, secular, democratic republic, the minority sections in India — Dalits, creative artists, writers, rationalists and sensitive, enlightened citizens — are all feeling suffocated, insecure and less-than-equal citizens of India since the communal ideology has come into power at the Centre and some big Indian states.

This was stated by scholars from Delhi, Panjab and Punjab varsities and representatives of minority organisations from across India during a two-day seminar which concluded at the Institute of Sikh Studies (IOSS), Chandigarh, here today.

Prof Kulwant Singh, president, IOSS, highlighted several acts of intolerance and violence by those in majority.

Prof Apoorvanand from Delhi University said: “When saffron fanaticism is being promoted under the garb of nationalism, majority of Hindus are answerable for the undesirable activities of some fringe radical, vocal elements. In fact, it is not only a struggle between majority and minority communities, but also a struggle between the enlightened and half-baked Hindutva zealots.”

Prof Khalid Mohd from Panjab University said Muslim bashing was rampant under the garb of terrorism, love jihad, ghar vapsi, triple talaq, four marriages and beef-eating, etc. “History is sought to be reinterpreted where Muslims are being exhibited only as traitors and all their monuments are projected to be built after destroying Hindu temples.”

Former Punjab Vidhan Sabha Deputy Speaker Bir Devinder Singh said the doctrine of religion-based majoritarianism should diminish in

India. “The unabated censorious comments of BJP leaders against religious minorities manifest the mindset that blatantly refuses to acknowledge the strength of plurality of secular India. Such insinuations are undoubtedly causing sense of deep unrest among minorities,” he said. He congratulated the Institute of Sikh Studies for expressing the pain and anguish of minorities against the “aggressive” majoritarianism.

Prof Emmanuel Nahar said Christians had been facing structured and symbolic violence in India. He said Christians were labelled as foreigners and treated as second-class citizens. “In fact, a majority of Christians are Dalits and face double discrimination – both for their religion and caste. Denial of reservation to lower caste Christians, ‘Ghar wapsi’ programme are among major issues being facing the Christian community,” he added.

During the occasion, the Institute of Sikh Studies released its three new publications – English translation of Sikh Classic Sri Gur Panth Parkash; Gurdwara: Concept and Institution by Dr GS Sangha; and Know Your Heritage by Dr Dharam Singh and Prof Kulwant Singh.

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FANATICISM BEING PROMOTED UNDER THE GARB OF NATIONALISM

(Courtesy: The Times of India, December 3, 2017)

Chandigarh: Regardless of various constitutional guarantees in India, religious minorities along with Dalits, creative artists, writers and rationalists are feeling threatened. It was the majority view of various scholars during the opening day of the two-day seminar held at Institute of Sikh Studies (IOSS) at Chandigarh on Saturday.

The seminar is being attended by distinguished scholars from Delhi, Punjab and various universities in Punjab and representatives of social organizations from all over India. In his keynote address IOSS president Professor Kulwant Singh highlighted several acts of majoritarian intolerance and acts of violence by violent cow vigilantes and other right wing organizations and exhorted the citizens to safeguard India's centuries old multi-religious, multi-lingual, multicultural unity

in diversity.

“Today when fanaticism is being promoted under the garb of nationalism, the vast majority of Hindus are answerable for actions of a tiny vocal minority in the name of Hinduism,” said Prof Apoorvanand of Delhi University. Prof Khalid Mohammed from Panjab University (PU) said that Muslim bashing was rampant under the garb of terrorism, love ‘jihad’, ‘ghar vapsi’ and triple talaq. He added that the history was sought to be reinterpreted where Muslims were shown only as traitors and all their monuments projected to be built after destroying Hindu temples.

Prof Emmanuel Nahar of PU said Christians had been facing structured and symbolic violence in India during the present as well as the previous government's regime. Giving an example, Nahar added that an important festival like Christmas had being trivialized as ‘Good Governance’ day by the present government.

Former deputy speaker of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha Bir Devinder Singh expressed the doctrine of religion based majoritarianism would diminish completely the role of minorities in the political system of governance in India. At the same time, Sikh scholar Swaraj Singh said diversity had always been a part of Indian ethos and according to him imposing uniformity goes against the very grain of Hinduism.

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## **GREWAL TO BE FIRST SIKH STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL IN US**

*(Courtesy: The Tribune, December 14, 2017)*

Washington, December 13, A prominent Sikh-American lawyer, who has “experienced hate and intolerance first-hand”, has been nominated to serve as the next Attorney General of the US state of New Jersey.

Gurbir S Grewal, a public prosecutor who previously served as an Assistant US Attorney in New York and New Jersey, was named by New Jersey Governor-elect Phil Murphy yesterday.

With this nomination, Grewal is set to become the first Sikh-American state Attorney General in the US.

Grewal said he decided to pursue public service to give back to a country that had given him and other immigrant families so much.

“I wanted to perhaps also show people that while I and others

like me may look different or worship differently that we too are committed to this country. As someone who has experienced hate and intolerance first-hand throughout my life, I wanted to work to ensure that we all live in a fair and just society,” Grewal said. The move has been welcomed by the South Asian Bar Association. Grewal, who has spent most of his legal career in public service, is currently the Bergen County prosecutor. Working for a most populous county in New Jersey, Grewal serves a community of almost one million with his staff of 265.

He previously served as an Assistant US Attorney in both New York (2004-2007) and New Jersey (2010-2016). He ended his tenure there as Chief of the Economic Crimes Unit where he was lead prosecutor for the largest known data breach prosecution.

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JAGMEET SINGH BECOMES FIRST NON-WHITE POLITICIAN TO LEAD MAJOR CANADIAN POLITICAL PARTY

Jagmeet Singh was elected leader of Canada's leftist New Democratic Party (NDP) Sunday, becoming the country's first non-white leader of a major political party. Capturing 53.6% of the vote, the 38-year-old Sikh will face off against current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals in the 2019 federal election, The New York Times reports.

“Thank you, New Democrats. The run for Prime Minister begins now #LoveAndCourage,” Singh tweeted Sunday. Singh claimed a decisive victory over three other candidates and will replace outgoing leader Thomas Mulcair, who has headed the party since 2012. Trudeau congratulated Singh on Twitter, writing “I look forward to speaking soon and working together for Canadians.”

Born to Indian immigrants and raised in Ontario, the former criminal defense lawyer is known for his charismatic personality and colorful turbans with great appeal to younger voters. In September, a video from a campaign event - “Jagmeet and Greet” - went viral after a woman interrupted Singh's speech, accusing him of trying to impose Shariah Law in Canada and being “in bed with the Muslim Brotherhood.” Singh, who is not a Muslim, but Sikh, was praised for

his composed response.

“You know growing up as a brown skinned, turbaned, bearded man, I've faced things like this before. It's not a problem, we can deal with it,” he said. “There's going to be obstacles we're going to face, and we're going to face them with what? Love and courage,” he said to the audience.

The NDP is Canada's third largest party in parliament and Singh was touted as someone who could reinvigorate the party after it lost 59 seats in the 2015 elections.

“To make progress on these issues, to truly make Canadians' lives better, we owe it to Canadians to form government,” Mr. Singh said in his acceptance speech. “We owe it to them.” (Courtesy: New York Time)

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BRITS WOULD HAVE LOST TO SIKHS, 'BUT FOR TREACHERY BY 2 GENS'

(Courtesy: The Tribune, December 10, 2014)

Chandigarh, December 9, Adept in Indo-British history, two leading historians today differed on what could have been the British Empire's future after the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1846, but both agreed that the East India Company-led army had almost lost the war had the Sikhs - surprisingly or prompted by the treachery of two Generals - not surrendered.

Speaking on 'Anglo-Sikh wars' at the Military Literature Festival here, London-based historian Amar Pal Sidhu argued: “The British lacked ammunition, had no water and were, thus, incapable of fighting. Then Governor General Lord Henry Hardinge was in the battlefield and he would have had to surrender. The entire British Raj could have collapsed.”

Sidhu, who has authored separate books on the first and the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49), said: "Had the Sikh army not surrendered, the British Empire's history in India would have been different. It would have been a seminal moment resembling the one at Waterloo (where Napoleon Bonaparte of France lost)."

The treachery by Generals Tej Singh and Lal Singh changed the course of history. The two owed their positions to Maharani Jindan,

one of the queens of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. "Punjab probably would have been united and would still be united," said Sidhu.

William Dalrymple, author of "Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan", accepted that the military edge in the First Anglo-Sikh War was with the Sikhs. He, however, differed on the outcome of the British Empire had they (Sikhs) won the first war. "At that point, it was easy to defeat the Company-led army, though they could have used their backup of vast resources and men," he averred.

They had resources much bigger than Punjab's. Between 1790 and the early 1800s, the company was earning hugely from Bengal. The private army of the East India Company was twice the size of the British army.

Mandeep Rai, who was moderating the session, said: "Historians have not realised that had the Sikh army not surrendered, the Lahore durbar would have survived and the state of Pakistan would not have come into being."

Dr Sukhmani Riar, Professor of history at PU, asserted that "the creation of the Dogra state (now J&K) after the First Anglo-Sikh War was still a mystery. How the Sikh kingdom collapsed within a few years of the death of Ranjit Singh (in 1839) is a matter of study".

The First Anglo-Sikh War led to signing of the "Treaty of Amritsar" (Amritsar) and carving out a separate Dogra kingdom. It meant partial subjugation. Three years later, the Second Anglo-Sikh War led to total defeat of the Sikh army and the subsequent collapse of the Sikh kingdom.

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### **US SIKHS RAISE \$210K FOR NEEDY CHILDREN**

Washington, December 8, The Sikh community here has raised \$2,10,000 for underprivileged youth pursuing higher education in Punjab. The fund was raised at an event this week by the Sikh Human Development Foundation (SHDF), featuring Bollywood actor and Punjabi comedian Gurpreet Ghuggi.

"The SHDF has so far given more than 5,000 scholarships to students. Out of them, 2,700 have already graduated and found jobs of doctors, engineers, scientists and others. Some of them are now helping other needy children," said Gajinder Singh Ahuja, chairman

of the SHDF.

The SHDF provides scholarships to bright but poor students in Punjab and surrounding areas, he said. Based in Washington, it has been giving scholarships to students since 2001 and over the years \$2 million in scholarship money has been provided.

Jasdeep Singh Juneja, an IT professional from Dallas in Texas, has been one of the recipient of the SHDF scholarship programme. He now runs a major operation for ATT. The participants donated funds for 420 scholarships with each scholarship worth \$510, a media release said.

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### **A FIRST: SIKH WOMAN ELECTED MAYOR IN US**

*(Courtesy: The Tribune, December 1, 2017)*

New York, November 30, Preet Dibal has been elected as the mayor of Yuba city in California, becoming the first Sikh woman to hold the position in the United States.

Dibal was appointed by the California city council and will be sworn in on December 5. There are other Sikh mayors across the country - Ravi Bhalla was elected earlier this month as mayor in Hoboken, New Jersey. However, Dibal is the first Sikh woman to be elected as a mayor in the country, the report said. Dibal was elected to Yuba City Council in 2014 and is currently vice mayor. She is the first in her family to graduate from college.

"Seeing someone that looks like you, that comes from the same faith as you, to be elected to a public office in this country is inspiring and exciting. And it's definitely moving," Jaydeep Singh of the Sikh Coalition said.

The Sutter-Yuba region is home to one of the largest Sikh communities in the country. On November 8, Bhalla became the first ever Sikh mayor of New Jersey's Hoboken city after a stiff competition that turned ugly when he was labelled a terrorist in slanderous flyers.

The Sikh Coalition estimates around 500,000 people who follow the Sikh faith live in the United States.

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