

ABSTRACTS OF SIKH STUDIES

(Vol VI, Issue 1)

Jan-March 2004 / 535-36 NS

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ON SHATABDIS

There are milestones in a nation's history which turned the course of events or had a profound influence on its destiny. Living nations never forget them. Rather, their memory is perpetuated through periodical celebrations and special functions. They provide and renew the inspiration required to sustain the morale of the nation. They are also opportunities for stock-taking and assessment of achievements and failures, review of the objectives and for charting new course of action.

Sikhs have a rich and inspiring history of struggle and sacrifices for noble causes, and for freedom and upliftment of mankind, social, spiritual, economic and political. The Gurus preached and Sikhs have always sought to promote love and equality and to end discrimination and injustice. Narrow communal, social or political boundaries do not stand in their way in following the path shown by the Gurus.

Milestones abound in Sikh history. The advent of Guru Nanak was the first and indeed the most important among them. Infact, it is among the few outstanding landmarks in the entire history of mankind. In the list of milestones must be included the major events related to lives of the succeeding Gurus and the sacrifices made by them in the cause of the divine message of freedom, love and equality they preached. Sikhs, therefore, rightly celebrate their birthdays and martyrdom days as *gurpurbs* every year.

Of late, Sikhs have started observing *shatabdis* or centenaries of selected events of Sikh history. The first among the series was the 300th birthday (tercentenary) of Guru Gobind Singh in 1966. This was followed by quincentenary (500th birthday) of Guru Nanak in 1969, Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom tercentenary in 1975, Guru Amar Das' quincentenary in 1979, and tercentenary of the creation of the Khalsa in 1999. These occasions were celebrated with a lot of fanfare marked by lengthy processions, largely-attended functions, occasional

seminars, etc. No serious thought was, however, given to any of the problems facing the community in India or abroad, or to any steps to share the universal message of Sikhism with the rest of mankind. Apparently, the celebrations have already been forgotten.

The Guru Nanak Foundation at Delhi and the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation at Chandigarh, created on respective centenaries, have nothing visible to their credit, to say the least. What they are doing, or not doing, appears to be nobody's concern. The only thing that reminds one of the tercentenary of the Khalsa recently celebrated in 1999 is the incomplete building of the Khalsa Heritage Complex at Sri Anandpur Sahib, languishing for want of funds. Its control as well as that of the Anandpur Sahib Foundation appears to have become a bone of contention, which is no indication of its bright future.

Talking of the most recent of these *shatabdis*, viz, the Khalsa Tercentenary of 1999 one is reminded of the tremendous response of the masses to the call. An estimated 5 to 6 million Sikhs flocked at Sri Anandpur Sahib from all parts of India and the world to seek inspiration from the sacred place where Guru Gobind Singh had created the Khalsa army for defence of justice and righteousness. Unfortunately, the only message they received was that of disunity of the Panth. Also the energies and the hundreds of *crores* of Rupees spent on the occasion went in vain.

It is necessary to recall the above experience, and to benefit from it for planning programmes for future *shatabdis*. Decisions have already been taken to celebrate the following *shatabdis* during 2004 CE or 536 Nanakshahi :

- a) Quincentenary (5th *Shatabdi*) of Guru Angad Dev on April 18, 2004 at Khadoor Sahib.
- b) Quadricentenary (4th *Shatabdi*) of Guru Granth Sahib's installation at Amritsar on September 1, 2004.
- c) Tercentenary (3rd *shatabdi*) of martyrdom of *Sahibzadas* at Fatehgarh Sahib, on December 21-26, 2004.

We welcome the decision to celebrate these *shatabdis* and we are keen that the celebrations are organised and programmes selected confer some lasting benefits. While processions, big gatherings, seminars, and conferences are necessary to create awareness and to generate interest and enthusiasm among the masses, the celebrations should not remain limited to these popular items, and should not end with the *shatabdi* day. *Shatabdi* should be utilised as an opportunity to launch lasting programmes for propagation of Sikh values. Based on the past

experience and the present-day needs of the Panth, we venture to make some suggestions below :

- a) Unity is the crying need of the Panth today. All *shatabdi* programmes should, therefore, be planned and carried out unitedly, and not on political party lines. We must demonstrate to the world that Sikhs are united like one man in religious affairs. This responsibility squarely lies on the SGPC, which, forgetting party affiliations, should act purely as a non-political, religious body. All Sikh organisations should be involved in the celebrations regardless of their political leanings.
- b) Guru Angad Dev is known in history for his special interest in development of Gurmukhi script and his literacy programme. According to available statistics 31% of Punjabis, largely Sikhs, are illiterate today. A campaign for teaching Punjabi and Gurmukhi script should be launched on this occasion with the help of volunteers or teachers with nominal honorarium. Vanjaras and Sikligars and other tribal Sikhs scattered in various states of India, who are living in utter neglect and abject poverty, should be special beneficiaries of the project, which should continue until 100% literacy is achieved.
- c) Another thing that stands out in the life of Guru Angad Dev is his attention to physical development side-by-side with spiritual uplift of an individual. The Gurdwara Mal Akhara at Khadoor Sahib, where Sikhs received training in wrestling, is a living monument to the Guru's interest in sports. On his *shatabdi*, therefore, a big stadium should be built at Khadoor Sahib as a befitting tribute to his memory. Besides, all gurdwaras with sizeable income should be persuaded to set up gymnasias to attract the Sikh Youth to gurdwaras and to exploit the sport talent that abounds in Punjab, particularly among Sikhs.
- d) The *shatabdi* of Guru Granth Sahib assumes unique importance because of the Sikh doctrine of 'Shabad Guru' a major contribution of Sikhism in the development of world religious thought. This doctrine as well as teachings of the Gurus enshrined in it, need to be shared with the world, and propagated in various national and international fora, through translation of *Gurbani* in various Indian and International languages. Sikhs face identity crisis and in various countries are often confused with Arabs and terrorist elements. We need to produce popular as well specialised literature to educate the non-Sikh populations of the

world on universal aspects of our religion. In fact, Sikhism is the future religion of the world. To discharge the responsibility of projecting Sikhism in its true perspective, a World Institute of Sikhism should be set up at Chandigarh where a large number of scholars are available to take up this responsibility. A proposal to this effect is awaiting consideration of the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC. Guru Granth Sahib Shatabdi is the right moment to set up this institute.

- e) We are in the media age, and written word is not so effective as visual media. For propagation of Sikh values we have to exploit the tremendous scope that is available through movies, telefilms on Sikh history – events and heroes, etc. A TV channel exclusively under the control of the SGPC should, therefore, be launched on the occasion of these *shatabdis*.
- f) Panth is facing numerous problems, academic, social as well as political. We have repeatedly emphasized in the columns of this journal the need for an Apex Body of Sikhs. Nothing will have more lasting effect on the future of Sikhism than the setting up of a such a body, representing all Sikhs. We take this opportunity to urge the SGPC again to take an initiative in this direction on this historic occasion.
- g) Martyrdom of *Sahibzadas* has special significance for Sikh children and youth, who are going astray due to neglect on the part of the parents, educational institutions and Sikh society in general. On this *shatabdi*, therefore, special programmes should be launched to attract our youth to the great Sikh heritage, so that they feel proud of *bani* as well as *bana*.

These *shatabdis* will not come again in our lifetime. Let us not miss the great opportunities afforded to us.

❧

*Guru says, only equipoise brings forth bliss,
Without acquiring equipoise, life is a blind alley.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 68

GURU GRANTH – GURU PANTH*

KHARAK SINGH

Compilation of Gurbani in 1604 by Guru Arjun Dev and its anointment as Guru Eternal of the Sikhs represent a great leap in the development of religious thought or spiritual progress of mankind.

Rudiments of religion can be traced even in the prehistoric man in the form of worship of natural forces like winds, fire, clouds, etc., or geographical features like mountains, rivers, seas, or animals like snakes, which inspired fear or wonder. Such forms of worship have survived upto this day, and are widespread in large tribal areas of the world. Before the idea of one God as creator of the universe gained currency, religion passed through several intermediary stages represented by worship of innumerable gods believed to look after their devotees with powers attributed to them. Their statues appeared leading to idol worship which persists even today.

Then came prophets with message from God. They denounced idols as His rivals. The prophets never claimed Godhead for themselves. They were content to be His messengers. Their followers, accustomed to idol worship, however, confused / identified their prophets with God Himself and with some people God acquired a human or anthropomorphic form, to be realised through personal intervention of particular prophets in favour of their own followers alone.

It was Guru Nanak who propounded the revolutionary idea that *shabad* or God's word (of course received through a prophet) was the real 'guru', and not any individual or his body, that brought the message. He says :

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰ ਪੀਰਾ ਗਹਿਰ ਰੀਭੀਰਾ, ਬਿਨ ਸਬਦੈ ਜਗੁ ਬਉਰਾਨੰ ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 635

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 943

* Keynote address delivered in the Annual Seminar of the IOSS : *Guru Granth-Guru Panth* on November 15, 2003 at Chandigarh

This was repeated by Guru Ram Das :

ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸਾਰੇ ॥
ਗੁਰ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ ॥

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 982

Bhai Gurdas elaborates :

ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਗਟੀ ਆਇਆ ॥

Vaar 24 (25)

To stress this unique philosophy Guru Gobind Singh made it perfectly clear that no individual (including himself) was to be confused with God. He warned:

ਜੋ ਮੇ ਕਉ ਪ੍ਰਮੇਸਰ ਉਚਰਹੈ ॥
ਤੇ ਸਭ ਨਰਕ ਕੁੰਡ ਮਹਿ ਪਰਹੈ ॥

Bachittar Natak

Guru Granth

Guru Arjun Dev compiled the *bani* of Guru Nanak and his successors as *shabad* or word received from God in the Adi Granth, and installed it in Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar in 1604. Guru Arjun Dev always installed the volume at a higher level than himself. The subsequent Gurus also venerated the Granth as Guru. Later the *bani* of the 9th Nanak was added to it. Eventually the Tenth Lord, Guru Gobind Singh, anointed it as Guru Eternal of the Sikhs in a formal ceremony at Nanded in 1608 before his divine soul merged with God. His message to that effect is daily sung by *sangats* the world over as :

ਆਗਿਆ ਭਈ ਅਕਾਲ ਕੀ ਤਬੈ ਚਲਾਇਓ ਪੰਥ ॥
ਸਭ ਸਿਖਨ ਕੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ, ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨਿਓ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ॥

Guru Panth

While Guru Granth Sahib is now universally accepted as Guru of the Sikhs, the role of the Panth as Guru is not so clearly understood even among Sikhs. This role was assigned by Guru Gobind Singh himself. According to *Bhagat Ratanavli*, attributed to Bhai Mani Singh, *Sakhi* 138 records :

ਦਸਵੈ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ਬਖਸ਼ੀ ॥

Bhai Santokh Singh gives the following details in his famous epic *Gur Partap Suraj* (*Rut* 6, *Ansu* 41)

ਦਯਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਅਰੁ ਧਰਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਮਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਤੀਜੇ ਬਰ ਬੀਰ ।
ਸੰਗਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੰਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਪੰਚਮ, ਤਿਨਹੁ ਬਿਠਾਯੋ ਦੇ ਕਰਿ ਧੀਰ ।
ਗੁਰਤਾ ਅਰਪਨਿ ਲਗੇ ਖਾਲਸੇ, ਪੰਚ ਸਿੰਘ ਤਹਿ ਸੋਹਿ ਸਰੀਰ ।

ਪੰਚਹੁ ਮਹਿ ਨਿਤ ਵਰਤਿਤਿ ਮੈ ਹੋ ਪੰਚਨ ਮਿਲਹਿ ਸੇ ਪੀਰਨ ਪੀਰ ।
 ਗੁਰ ਘਰ ਕੀ ਮਿਰਜਾਦਾ ਪੰਚਹੁ ਪੰਚਹੁ ਪਾਹੁਲ ਪੂਰਬ ਪੀਨ ।
 ਹੁਇ ਤਨਖਾਹੀਆ ਬਖਸ਼ਹਿ ਪੰਚਹੁ, ਪਾਹੁਲ ਦੇ ਮਿਲ ਪੰਚ ਪ੍ਰਬੀਨ ।
 ਲਖੀ ਪੰਚ ਕੀ ਬਡ ਬਡਿਆਈ ਪੰਚ ਕਰਹਿ ਸੋ ਨਿਫਲ ਨ ਚੀਨ ।
 ਭੋਜਨ ਛਾਦਨ ਪਾਚਨ ਅਰਪਹਿ ਅਰਜ ਕਰਹਿ ਤਿਨ ਬਾਂਛਤ ਲੀਨ ।
 ਇਕ ਪਾਚਨ ਕੀ ਮਹਿਮਾ ਕਹਿਕੇ ਤੀਨ ਪ੍ਰਕ੍ਰਮਾ ਫਿਰ ਕਰ ਦੀਨ ।
 ਸਸਤ੍ਰ ਗਾਤਰੇ ਤਬ ਪਹਿਰਾਏ ਕਟ ਕਸਾਇ ਕਰ ਬਿਲਮ ਬਿਹੀਨ ।
 ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਫਤੇ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਚੀਨ ।

Reference to the role of Panth in the *Sarbloh Granth* is also relevant :-

ਪਾਵਨ ਪੰਥ ਖਾਲਸਹਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਯੋ ਚਾਰ ਵਰਨ ਆਸ਼੍ਰਮ ਸੁਭ ਪੰਥਾ ।
 ਇਨ ਕੇ ਦਰਸ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੋ ਦਰਸਨ, ਬੋਲਨੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥਾ ।
 ਦ੍ਰਾਦਸਿ ਰੂਪ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਏ ਕਹਿਯਤਿ ਦ੍ਰਾਦਸ ਭਾਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹਰਿ ਸੰਤਾ ।
 ਪ੍ਰਤਖਯ ਕਲਾ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਧਣੀਛੈ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਪੰਥ ਖਾਲਿਸ ਵਰਤੰਤਾ ।

- Gurmat Martand (1), Bhai Kahn Singh, p. 497

Another incontrovertible historical fact is that in 1699 on the Baisakhi day after administering *amrit* to the first five *pyaras*, Guru Gobind Singh stood before them with folded hands, and sought the boon of *amrit* for himself. This shows beyond doubt that the Guru vested his authority in the Khalsa through *panj pyaras* as representatives. Khalsa thus could take the place of the Guru. History also records that the Khalsa did exercise this authority whenever occasion arose even in the lifetime of the Guru who not only obeyed, but also expressed his happiness over the Khalsa making mature decisions.

The Twin Doctrine

The above account shows that the Granth Sahib, first known as Pothi Sahib, was anointed as the Guru of all Sikhs for all times, and that there could be no personal Gurus in corporeal form after Guru Gobind Singh. It is also clear that his authority as Guru passed on to the corporate body of the Sikhs or the Khalsa. This might appear anomalous on a superficial view. Bhai Kahn Singh explains it as follows :

“ਖਾਲਸਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਕੀ ਦੇਹ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਣੀ (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ) ਆਤਮਾ ਹੈ, ਬਾਣੀ ਦੇ ਆਧਾਰ ਵਿਹਾਰ ਪਰਮਾਰਥ ਸਿੱਧ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਪੰਥ ਪੂਰਣ ਗੁਰੂ ਰੂਪ ਹੈ । ਬਾਣੀ ਤੋਂ ਸਵਤੰਤਰ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਗੁਰ ਪਦਵੀ ਦਾ ਅਧਿਕਾਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ ।

Gurmat Martand (1), p. 336

In the twin doctrine of 'Guru Granth – Guru Panth', the two components have a complementary relationship with a distinct role assigned to each. For effective functioning of body and soul, they have to act together.

In practice the doctrine means that the body of the Panth has to take decisions on temporal matters dealing with a situation prevailing at a particular time strictly following the spiritual principles laid down in Guru Granth Sahib to carry out the will of God or *Sarbat da Bhala*.

The oft-repeated injunctions of the Guru, viz. *Puja Akal ki, parcha shabad ka, didar khalse ka* underlines the essence of the doctrine of Guru Granth – Guru Panth.

Historical Background

Late Prof Teja Singh, the well-known Sikh thinker and philosopher of the last century, briefly gives the relevant background as follows :

"The question of having a supreme Panthic body is most important. At the death of the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, when the Sikhs got spiritual home rule and, wielding the power and authority of the Panth, became masters of their own destiny, they had to dispense with the personal leadership of one man. It was inevitable that, for the exercise of corporate authority, they should create for themselves a central body, but somehow it has not been possible for them upto this day to succeed in providing themselves with this most elementary necessity. In the beginning, when they were left to themselves, they loosely followed the Greek method of the direct participation of every individual in the counsels of the Panth, and for this purpose had yearly or half-yearly gatherings of the *Sarbat Khalsa* (the whole people) at the Akal Takht. When persecutions became rife, however, these meetings were impossible, and the authority came to rest solely in the Akal Takht. During the rule of the Missals the numbers of the *Sarbat Khalsa* became unwieldy and it was necessary to have some system of representation; but the general ignorance and the newly-acquired lust for power had corrupted the democratic genius of the people. There appeared on the scene a man of supreme influence in the person of Ranjit Singh, whose ambition was to give the Sikhs an empire similar in power and dignity to that of the Moghuls and whose imperialism did not encourage him to think along the lines of representative

institutions. During his time no central association or parliament was possible. The people in the meanwhile had lost all hold on the first principles of Sikhism, what to say of its Institutions; when their rule was supplanted by the British, they were too degenerate and broken-hearted to think of representative assemblies. With the coming of education and a knowledge of Western institutions, the Sikhs too began to form *diwans*, or associations, to take in hand the work of education and social and religious reforms. Owing, however, to the instinctive self-assertion of the Sikhs and to the lack of a wholesale awakening among them, which could be possible only with mass education, no one association was able to take the central place among them. The Singh Sabha movement started in 1873 slowly caught the mind of the Sikhs and their joint suffering during the six years (1921-26), welded them together as nothing else did before; in the matter of religion they learnt to obey one central body. The new law of temples has given them, for the first time in their history, an association representative of their whole community; but, as I have said before, it cannot take the place of the central body, which should wield the *whole* authority of the Panth."¹

The Present Situation

The Panth is passing through a critical period, and faces numerous problems. Although the SHIROMANI AKALI DAL (B) is a partner in the NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE government at the Centre, the glow of freedom the Sikhs have struggled for, is nowhere visible. The infamous Blue Star Operation and the repression that followed continue to cast their painful shadows on the Sikh psyche. The Panth is divided into several political parties as well as religious sects.

There is no unanimity on the long-term political goals of the Sikhs. While some sections demand a sovereign independent state, others prefer autonomy within the Indian Union. The SAD has favoured the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 subsequently modified in 1978. The Hindu majority, however, considers it secessionist, and is in no mood to concede the demand.

There are challenges to Sikh identity, and concerted efforts are afoot to treat the Sikhs as a sect of Hindus. The Rashtriya Sikh Sangat wing of the BJP is busily engaged in confusing the Sikhs on this issue.

Then there is the problem of *apostasy*, particularly among the Sikh youth. Under the influence of the West and the TV culture,

alarmingly large numbers of Sikhs have dropped the most visible and essential requirement of Sikhism – the unshorn hair.

The Sikhs outside Punjab as well as Sikh diaspora outside India have their own peculiar problems. Besides, there are millions of tribal Sikhs like Vanjaras, Sikligars, Lobanas, Tharus, etc., known as Nanak Panthis, who are living in utter neglect and abject poverty in several states of India, notably Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, etc. They have received no attention from the Panth, and are vulnerable to influence of missionaries of other faiths.

To the list of problems must be added the recent controversies over Dasam Granth, All India Sikh Gurdwaras Act, Sikh Personal Law, seating arrangements in *langar*, the authority of the Takht *jathedars*, etc.

Little organised effort has been made by the Sikh leadership to carry the message of the Gurus in its pristine form. Clever individuals taking advantage of this situation have established their *deras* where they preach their own cult in the garb of Sikh religion among the credulous Sikh masses not only in India but also abroad. This leads to erosion of Sikh values and weakens the Panth. Each dera is a potential Schism and a challenge to mainstream Sikhism.

Schisms

This problem needs special mention; to quote Prof Teja Singh again:

"The belief of the Sikhs that 'there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation'² does not allow them — at least theoretically — to have any sects among them. Sects arise in those religions where no arrangement is made to secure the permanency of Guruship. When the founder dies leaving nothing behind but his Word, he begins to be interpreted differently by his followers, and in the course of time sects arise as a result of these differences. In Sikhism, however, a peculiar arrangement was made by which no differences were to be allowed in doctrine or its interpretation. The Guru was always one, and always alive. This was not possible physically. So it was designed that with the change of the Guru the spirit should not change. 'The spirit was the same, and so was the method, the Master merely changed his body'³ (*Var Satta*). As long as the Gurus were personally

present they did not allow any change in the doctrine, nor did they allow any new centres to be formed within the pale of Sikhism. Whenever anybody tried to found a schism, he and his followers were thrown out. That was the fate of the Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramraiyas, etc. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh the whole Sikh community, as a collective unit, was invested with the authority of the Guru, and was to guide itself in the light of the Word incorporated in the Holy Granth. It meant that the Word for the guidance of the community was the same as before, only its interpreter had changed his body. Instead of being one person he had assumed the shape of a corporate body, called the Panth.

"Owing to certain historical causes this principle of Panthic Guruship has had no chance of working effectively, with the result that many sects have arisen in Sikhism, and the Sikhs do not know what to do with them. If after Guru Gobind Singh the Sikhs had instituted a central assembly to exercise the right of personal guidance in the name of the Guru, there would have been no differences in interpretation, and no sects would have been formed round those interpretations. But there being no central authority to check, control, unite or coordinate, there have arisen certain orders of preachers or missionaries who in the course of time have assumed the form of sects. Such are the Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewapanthis, Namdharis, Nirankaris, etc."⁴

The Need For An Apex Body (Guru Panth)

The above problems are indeed formidable, but by no means insurmountable; they can be solved only if we know who is to deal with a particular problem, and how. In order that an agency or institution can solve a problem, it must have the competence to make a sound judgement / decision and the authority required to enforce it. And since most of the decisions would affect the entire Panth, the decision makers should represent the entire global Sikh community.

Let us see if any of the existing Sikh institutions fulfill these requirements. There are some basic institutions which have played an extremely important role in the growth and development of the Panth, and are indispensable. Their relevance, for the present purpose of dealing with current problems, however, is limited. Here we can consider only the Sikh institutions in the sense of an organisation.

In times of crisis we frequently turn to Sri Akal Takht. It is

regarded, as indeed it is, a panacea for all ills. It, however, lacks the organisational structure and technical support to perform its functions. Also, while the authority of Akal Takht is accepted by all without question, there is no such unanimity on the absolute authority of its Jathedar.

The SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) is the second alternative. This is often called the Parliament of the Sikhs, and is no doubt the most representative body of the Panth. This, too, however, has its limitations. Sikhs abroad and even the Indian Sikhs outside Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh, are not represented on it. Its mode of election does not attract men of the required religious calibre among Sikhs. Further, the fact that SGPC elections are fought by political parties, the goal becomes political authority or hegemony of a group, and not efficient management of Gurdwaras or serving the Panthic interests. In view of this and also because of the existence of other bodies like the DSGMC (Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Management Committee), the claim of SGPC as the sole representative of the Sikhs gets considerably diluted.

With regard to the ‘council of high priests’ as the central decision-making body of the Panth, nobody is clear as to who are the members of this council. Is it the Jathedars of the five *takhts*? History does not support this tradition. In fact, until a few years back, there used to be only four *takhts*. And the two *takhts* (Patna Sahib and Hazoor Sahib) had no jathedars. They had their high priests who were not under the control of the SGPC and seldom attended the meetings of the council. According to tradition, high priests of these two *takhts* are not supposed to leave their headquarters, and the best they can do is to depute their nominees with the approval of their respective managements. While we consider this alternative, we should also not forget that there are no qualifications prescribed for the high priests, nor are there any satisfactory procedures for their appointment.

The other existing organisations also do not offer much hope. The Chief Khalsa Diwan appears to have virtually withdrawn from activity. The Sikh Education Conference is practically defunct. The World Sikh Council envisaged in the Vishav Sikh Sammelan of 1995 has been struggling unsuccessfully to make a start.

It will be seen that at the moment there is no agency to represent the Sikh Panth and to take decisions in its behalf, which is acceptable to all. During the Gurus’ times, the Sikhs looked to the Guru for guidance, direction and decisions. When the Guruship was vested in

Guru Granth Sahib, it was stipulated that the Guru Panth or a representative body of Sikhs would take decisions in its behalf. According to the contemporary *Gursobha*, Guru Gobind Singh said, "I have bestowed the physical (or secular) Guruship on the Khalsa" ...and "The True Guru is the infinite Word, whose contemplation enables one to bear the unbearable." This was the intention of Guru Gobind Singh when he nominated five *pyaras* to go with Banda Singh Bahadur on his expedition to the Punjab. However, in the post-Banda Singh period when Sikhs had to face repression and exile, this institution could not be formalised. The concept was revived during the *misl* period when the heads of various *misl*s used to meet at Akal Takht on Vaisakhi and Diwali to discuss their problems and a common agenda for the Panth. Their unanimous decisions used to be called *gurmattas* and were accepted by all as decisions of the Guru. This practice was discontinued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh for his own reasons, and has remained redundant ever since.

This vacuum is responsible for the prevailing confusion and uncertainty, and for a solution of the present as well as future problems, we have to fill it. An agency has to be created that can represent and speak in behalf of the Panth. The Akal Takht and the SGPC are the greatest assets of the Sikh community. The former was bestowed by Guru Hargobind, while the latter was won after a prolonged struggle and tremendous sacrifices, and is also the biggest and the most representative body of the Sikhs. These two institutions can provide the answer. The SGPC should take the initiative and convene a meeting of the representatives of the major Sikh organisations like the DSGMC, The Chief Khalsa Diwan, Kendri Singh Sabha, Damdami Taksal, etc., besides accredited fora of Sikh intelligentsia like the Institute of Sikh Studies (IOSS), Chandigarh, Sikh Missionary College, Ludhiana and the Sri Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, Ludhiana to discuss the situation. With an earnest effort, an Apex Body can be created with SGPC as nucleus. All Sikh interests including the Sikh diaspora will have to be represented on it through formal or informal nominations.

It is not my intentions to prescribe any details in this keynote address. These will be discussed by learned scholars. I can only stress that Sikhs must have a representative Apex Body to perform the role of Guru Panth assigned to it by Guru Gobind Singh and to lead the Panth to its destined glory. The IOSS has done a lot of thinking and spade work on the issue. The present seminar is also a part of that effort. Besides a galaxy of eminent scholars, some top leaders have agreed to

address this seminar. This makes me optimistic about the outcome. This Apex Body should be assisted by Advisory Committees consisting of eminent Sikhs and experts from different disciplines, for advice on religious, economic, educational and other technical matters. No decision should be made without reference to these Committees.

If the proposed Apex Body of the Panth can be set up, it may be the most auspicious start not only for the 21st century, but also for the 3rd millennium, and the trauma suffered by the community in recent years will not have gone in vain.

Functions

This Apex Body which will acquire the status of Guru Panth in due course, will decide its own functions. However, *inter alia*, it must pay attention to the following :

- a. To share the message of Guru Granth Sahib with the whole humanity in the interest of world peace and prosperity.
- b. To articulate short-term and long-term goals of the Panth, nationally as well as internationally.
- c. To assure coordination among various Sikh Organisations.
- d. To deal with the problem of existing or potential schisms.
- e. To repulse academic and other attacks on Sikh identity, religion, culture and history.

Authority

The proposed Apex Body will derive its authority from Sri Akal Takht Sahib. All decisions will be implemented through it.

Role of Existing Organisations

The proposed Apex Body of the Sikhs is not intended to replace any of the existing institutions. Rather, it will provide them with the support and the Panthic authority they need to discharge their functions. The SGPC and DSGMC will continue to manage the gurdwaras under their charge, as heretofore. In fact, the joint authority of the SGPC and DSGMC should be extended to other gurdwaras also throughout India, through suitable legislation. The Shiromani Akali Dal should continue to look after political interests of the Sikhs in India. The World Sikh Council should be reorganised and enabled to secure a respectable position for Sikhs among the international community. The Chief Khalsa Diwan, and some other organisations like the Sikh Education Society, should be entrusted with the responsibility of providing quality education

to the Sikh youth. The Institute of Sikh Studies and Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle should be strengthened and encouraged to take up research work, translation of Gurbani, and production of suitable material for dissemination of information on Sikh religion, culture and history. The Damdami Taksal and Missionary Colleges as well as Nihangs will continue to play the traditional role assigned to them in history.

Before I conclude I must say that it was neither my intention, nor is it possible in this brief address to provide a blueprint for the proposed Apex Body of the Panth. That has been left to the learned scholars who will present their papers in this seminar. I have only stressed the urgent need for it. There is no other way we can survive as Panth and make our contribution towards advancement of mankind. The Guru beckons us. Let us respond to his call and carry out the task assigned to us under the doctrine of Guru Granth-Guru Panth.

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3. ਜੋਤਿ ਓਹਾ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਸਾਇ ਸਹਿ ਕਾਇਆ ਫੇਰਿ ਪਲਟੀਐ ॥ – Guru Granth Sahib, p. 966
4. Teja Singh, *Essays in Sikhism*, op cit, pp. 183-84

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*Recite His name with understanding.*

*With understanding obtain honour.*

*Reveal Him to yourself with understanding:*

*With understanding become the donor.*

*Sayeth Nanak, this alone is the path divine,*

*All others lead to the devil.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1245

## MODERN DIFFICULTIES OF SIKHISM\*

TEJA SINGH

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### **Concerning Panthic Organisation**

The present is a time of revival; and, as during the time of their fall, Sikhs had completely forgotten themselves; they have now to rediscover practically all their institutions. They are availing themselves of the tradition, imperfectly preserved in the army, or at the Takhts, which are the traditional seats of religious authority at Amritsar, Anandpur, Patna, and Nanded (Deccan), or as recorded in the *Rahatnamas* and other historical literature, but the material available is very scanty and there is great scope for the use of imagination in reconstructing the past tradition. There being a great lack of education among the Sikhs, their imagination is not always used to the best advantage in the work of reconstruction. And there being no one central body to give unity and coherence to their religious decisions, there are appearing among certain impatient reformers some very strange and anomalous customs and institutions quite alien to the liberal spirit of the Khalsa. But the mass of the intelligent leaders are wisely checking themselves from any hasty reform of the doctrine, and are very busy in promoting mass education and temple reform, and in trying to secure a central representative body for all Sikhs. They have made great strides in education and their progress in this direction, if it were unchecked by the Educational Department, would be very rapid. As a result of strong agitation, carried on with unprecedented sacrifice, they have obtained control over most of the historical gurdwaras, or temples, and have secured a law to help them to obtain control over the remaining ones, whose possession is yet disputed. To exercise this control, they have been provided with a central assembly, freely elected with the vote of every adult Sikh, man and woman. The right of vote accorded to women is likely to produce most far-reaching results, as this gives

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\* Reproduced from his book *Essays in Sikhism*, published by the Language Department, Punjab, 1988.

them a share in the deliberations of the highest association of the community in charge of the temples and the ritual. This association, however, has only a limited scope of work, and cannot guide and control all the activities of the Panth. And the Sikhs are in several minds as to whether they should have another association, wielding a higher and more comprehensive authority, or they should content themselves with the one already obtained for the control of gurdwaras.

The question of having a supreme Panthic body is most important. At the death of the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, when the Sikhs got spiritual home rule and, wielding the power and authority of the Panth, became masters of their own destiny, they had to dispense with the personal leadership of one man. It was inevitable that, for the exercise of corporate authority, they should create for themselves a central body, but somehow it has not been possible for them upto this day to succeed in providing themselves with this most elementary necessity. In the beginning, when they were left to themselves, they loosely followed the Greek method of the direct participation of every individual in the counsels of the Panth, and for this purpose had yearly or half-yearly gatherings of the *Sarbat Khalsa* (the whole people) at the Akal Takht. When persecutions became rife, however, these meetings were impossible, and the authority came to rest solely in the Akal Takht. During the rule of the Missals the numbers of the *Sarbat Khalsa* became unwieldy and it was necessary to have some system of representation; but the general ignorance and the newly-acquired lust for power had corrupted the democratic genius of the people. There appeared on the scene a man of supreme influence in the person of Ranjit Singh, whose ambition was to give the Sikhs an empire similar in power and dignity to that of the Moghuls and whose imperialism did not encourage him to think along the lines of representative institutions. During his time no central association or parliament was possible. The people in the meanwhile had lost all hold on the first principles of Sikhism, what to say of its Institutions; when their rule was supplanted by the British, they were too degenerated and broken-hearted to think of representative assemblies. With the coming of education and a knowledge of Western institutions, the Sikhs too began to form *diwans*, or associations, to take in hand the work of education and, social and religious reforms. Owing, however, to the instinctive self-assertion of the Sikhs and to the lack of a wholesale awakening among them, which could be possible only with mass education, no one association was able to take the central place among them. The Singh Sabha Movement started in 1873

slowly caught the mind of the Sikhs and their joint suffering during the six years (1921-26), welded them together as nothing else did before; in the matter of religion they learnt to obey one central body. The new law of gurdwaras has given them, for the first time in their history, an association representative of their whole community; but, as I have said before, it cannot take the place of the central body, which should wield the whole authority of the Panth.

Should they have a separate body for this purpose? There is some difficulty in achieving this. The main point at issue is whether politics should or should not be included in the scope of its work. In order to make this difficulty of the Sikh organisation clear it is necessary to throw some light on its relation with the State. Guru Gobind Singh at a time of peace had exhorted his Sikhs to recognise the house of Babar as supreme in worldly power, just as they recognised the house of Guru Nanak as supreme in religion. (*Vichitra Natak*, XIII. 9). Yet, owing to certain unfortunate developments in history, the constitution of the Panth does not contemplate the acceptance of superiority of any earthly power outside its pale. During the last 300 years, during which their institutions have grown and developed, the Sikhs have seldom had any chance to work in cooperation with any government other than their own. Either they have been in conflict with the ruling powers or they have been ruling themselves.<sup>1</sup> It is only since 1849 that they have had occasion to serve under a friendly government. But then they had no political status of their own, nor have they been fully self-conscious. It is only quite recently that they have witnessed the growth of their institutions to their full stature, and with it has come the old conflict. The Sikhs must boldly face the fact that their organisation, if revived strictly on its original lines, must clash with the government of the land, or, for that matter, with any other organisation that is not Sikh. For, each Sikh, having personal relations with the Panth as Guru, must in all cases give his first obedience to it. Therefore, whenever there is difference with any body other than the Panth, there is no possibility of compromising the Panth, as it would be lowering the flag of Guru Gobind Singh. This gives strength and makes the Sikhs unbending under the stress of greatest suffering; but it also obliges them to be uncompromising whenever their collective will expressed in *gurmatta* form is opposed to another will. This is all right in religion, which admits of no conscious compromises with outsiders, because there we have no deal with doctrines and dogmas which are exclusive and fixed; but in politics or other worldly matters, where things are not absolutely

sectarian, but have to be shared in common with others and where the co-operation of other communities is essential, an uncompromising attitude does not always succeed and has often to be modified to suit the conveniences and prejudices of others. But a *gurmatta* is a *gurmatta*, and having once received the sanction of the Guru Panth admits of no give-and-take from any non-Sikh power. This was exemplified during the Akali agitation. When the Sikh leaders could not hold any direct communication with the Government on the question of the Gurdwara Bill, because a *gurmatta* to the effect that unless prisoners were released first no talk was to be held with the Government stood in their way. This created differences because most of the leaders were convinced of the futility of the resolution and therefore in the end, after much suffering, they had to resort to indirect negotiations with the Government. Hence, most of the compromises made with the Government were secretly entered into by the leaders, but kept veiled from the eyes of the general public, to escape from the stigma of lowering the prestige of the *gurmatta*. This is responsible for the present split between the Sikh masses, who following the old spirit, are uncompromising, and their more intelligent leaders, who see reason in making compromise for the Panth, when necessary, even when the letter of the *gurmattas* stands in their way.

The best way out of the difficulty would be to modify the constitution in the light of the present circumstances, to confine the *gurmatta* only to those matters which are strictly religious and to separate from them the political matters, for which mere *mattas* or resolutions carrying more earthly prestige should be passed. Two main circumstances justify this change. In the first place, our political outlook has changed radically since the days when the foundations of the Panth were laid. In those days the Khalsa was completely independent: God above and the Panth below, with no earthly power to intervene. Now even the most free-minded Sikh is in favour of the British connection, or at least in favour of *swaraj*, which means the rule not of the Sikhs alone, but of all Indians – Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh. In those days the country could belong to one party only, either Hindu or Sikh or Muslim: but now patriotism has changed its meaning, and has come to include love for the rights of other communities besides our own. Many questions which were supposed to belong exclusively to the Sikh community are now of equal concern to other communities as well, and have therefore passed out of the jurisdiction of the Panth. The question of the Punjabi language, for example, which the Sikhs

had made a particular concern of their own, must now pass on to some society representing the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There was a time when, on a complaint being received from a Brahmin that his wife had been taken away by the Nawab of Kasur, the Missals gathered at once at the Akal Takht, espoused the cause of the afflicted husband, and sent out an expedition to avenge the wrong and restore the bride. If such a case occurred now it would have to be handed over to the police; that is, the authority of a separate power other than that of the Panth must be recognised to deal with it. Many troubles are destined to arise between the Government and the Sikhs unless this distinction is recognised, and the sooner the better. The leaders of Sikh thought owe it as a duty to their community to disillusion the masses and lay before them clearly the definite change that has been brought about in their political conceptions, and the consequent necessity of recognising a change in the ideas of their Panthic organisation.

### **Concerning Sects**

The belief of the Sikhs that 'there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation'<sup>2</sup> does not allow them — at least theoretically — to have any sects among them. Sects arise in those religions where no arrangement is made to secure the permanency of Guruship. When the founder dies leaving nothing behind but his Word, he begins to be interpreted differently by his followers, and in the course of time, sects arise as a result of these differences. In Sikhism, however, a peculiar arrangement was made by which no differences were to be allowed in doctrine or its interpretation. The Guru was always one, and always alive. This was not possible physically. So it was designed that with the change of the Guru the spirit should not change. 'The spirit was the same, and so was the method, the Master merely changed his body' (*Var Satta*). As long as the Gurus were personally present they did not allow any change in the doctrine, nor did they allow any new centres to be formed within the pale of Sikhism. Whenever anybody tried to found a schism, he and his followers were thrown out. That was the fate of the Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramraiya, etc. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh the whole Sikh community, as a collective unit, was invested with the authority of the Guru, and was to guide itself in the light of the Word incorporated in the Holy Granth. It meant that the Word for the guidance of the community was the same as before, only its interpreter had changed his body. Instead of being one person he had assumed the shape of a corporate body, called the

Panth.

Owing to certain historical causes this principle of Panthic Guruship has had no chance of working effectively, with the result that many sects have arisen in Sikhism, and the Sikhs do not know what to do with them. If after Guru Gobind Singh the Sikhs had instituted a central assembly to exercise the right of personal guidance in the name of the Guru, there would have been no differences in interpretation, and no sects would have been formed round those interpretations. But there being no central authority to check, control, unite or coordinate, there have arisen certain orders of preachers or missionaries who in the course of time have assumed the form of sects. Such are the Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewapanthis, Namdharis, Nirankaris, etc.

What is to be done with them? If the Sikhs exercise their collective authority in the name of the Panth as Guru, they cannot tolerate the existence of separate centres, having their own Gurus and their own interpretations of the doctrine. If, on the other hand, they allow the schisms to continue unchecked, their own authority, their own principle of Panthic Guruship is undermined and they can make no progress with uncertain or divided doctrine.

In my view, the remedy is not to throw out all those who differ from the Singh Sabha form of Sikhism. but to tolerate their differences for some time until we are able to remove the cause which has given rise to these sects. We should give a definite shape to the principle of Panthic Guruship, which has been so long kept in abeyance. Let us recognise one body as the central authority for the whole community. Is it to be the SGPC or the Chief Khalsa Diwan ? If no agreement is possible on any one of these, then a separate body should be created to assume the accredited position of the Guru Panth, which alone can claim the allegiance of the whole community. Many of the existing sects will not be able to reconcile themselves to the rule of the SGPC which as custodian of gurdwaras may have given them a cause of difference. Even the reformed sections of the community may find some differences with the SGPC which, cannot be expected to be as zealous for effecting reforms in the ritual as the reformers would like it to be. The Committee should therefore be a mere custodian of gurdwaras and should not be burdened with the additional work of deciding the questions of doctrine for the Panth. If it is invested with the sanctity of the Guru Panth, it becomes too powerful to care for any criticism of its work as a manager of gurdwaras and their property. It should not be deprived of the sense of responsibility to some authority outside its

own constitution. This authority should be of an independent body, which should derive its power, not from the wealth of gurdwaras or influence with the Government, or any association with politics but from the confidence placed therein by the community through its accredited representatives.

This body should not concern itself with the failings or differences of the so-called sects, except when these failings take the form of positive desecration of Guru Granth Sahib or anything else that is sacred. Let the Sikh principles be integrated through preaching, constant co-operation through liaison bodies like the All-Sects Conference, and mutual love and toleration. The central body mentioned above should publish a book of Sikh doctrines, well-authenticated with quotations from Sikh Scriptures and history. It should also prepare a standard history of the Sikhs from Guru Nanak down to the present day. These publications and the preaching based on them will level down all differences which justify the existence of sects, and then “there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation”, as designed by the Gurus.

### **Concerning New Needs Of Missionary Work**

The standardization of the Sikh doctrine is necessary not only for unifying the different Sikh elements, but also for organising missionary work beyond the borders of the Punjab. In fact no serious attempt has been made, since the days of the Gurus, to spread their message outside the Punjab. All sporadic attempts made to establish connections with Bombay and Malabar have come to nothing. The cause may be that the bodies responsible for these campaigns were not very serious in undertaking the work. Or it may be that their engagements in other spheres, or rivalries with other local associations did not allow their best men to leave the Punjab. The failure in the case of Malabar has a special significance. About five hundred men and women from that region, were converted to Sikhism, and were baptised at the Akal Takht with the ceremony conducted in English. They were sent away to their province with the good wishes of the whole Panth, but in a short time almost all of them went back to their old faith. The reason was that they could not be provided with any spiritual outfit, such as the daily prayers done in their own tongue. No gurdwara was provided. But even if one had been built for them, what programme could they have followed in it? Which Scripture was to be installed therein? What music, what prayer?

Here is the crux of the matter. As long as Sikhism had to deal with people whose language was akin to Punjabi or Hindi, it had all possibilities of advance. But as soon as it came in contact with people who could not be approached in the original language of the Sikh Scripture, the attempt failed, because those responsible for the missionary work were not yet certain whether they could use translations in place of the original. This is the problem. Can Malayalam, or for that matter any other language, serve the purpose of the Guru's Word? If Sikhism is to go to America or England, which language is to be used by the new converts, English or Punjabi? They will have to recite prayers individually, and approach God in their own tongue. How can their prayer be realistic if they offer it in the original Punjabi or Hindi?

But the difficulty is: Will the translation of the Guru's Word convey to them its whole content? Can the whole community, especially those who live in the Punjab, accept the translation with the same faith and reverence as they have been showing to the original? Will not different renderings create confusion in the Sikh world?

The answer to these pertinent questions depends on what our conception is of the 'inspiration' of the Word. Does the inspiration apply to the letter or to the meaning. If we believe in the verbal inspiration of the Guru's Word, then it is impossible to take translations as of equal efficacy with the original. But if we think that the idea lying behind the Word is sacred, then translations can be allowed. From this point of view, the divine Idea which the Guru shares with God is immortal and the clothing of the Idea, which the Guru has in common with humanity, is mortal, changeable and liable to grow strange and obsolete in a few lifetimes. For the immortal puts on mortality when great conceptions are clothed in the only garment ever possible in terms whose import and associations are fixed by the form and pressure of an inexorably passing time. Sikhism is for all time, and so is the Guru's utterance; but the language in which it is couched will become dead even to us Panjabis in a few generations. What shall we do then? We shall have to translate it. Then why should we not allow it to reach distant people in their own language?

The Guru himself believed in making translations. Guru Arjun, while preparing Guru Granth Sahib as the scripture of Sikhs, laid down an injunction for his followers that they were to translate the Holy Volume into Indian and foreign languages so that it might spread over the whole world as oil spreads over water.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Even Maharaja Ranjit Singh sometimes found himself in very awkward situations when the Akalis wanted to assert the law of the Panth against him. But he knew how to get over these difficulties by humouring the Akalis and keeping up the forms of the Panthic law.
2. Guru Amar Das in *Var Sorath*
3. *Suraj Parkash*, Ras III

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The Punjab Heritage and Education Foundation (Regd) SAS Nagar, Chandigarh organised a meeting of intellectuals in Guru Granth Vidya Kendar, Kendri Singh Sabha, Sector 28, Chandigarh on December 20, 2003. Dr Balwant Singh Hansra (Chicago), Trustee of 'Parliament of World Religions' addressed the meeting and gave a very brief but eloquent account of the activities of the Parliament of World Religions in the past and its future projects. He exhorted the Sikh scholars and institutions to play an effective role in the programmes of the Parliament of World Religions, and expressed his satisfaction over the response from individuals and organisations to his suggestions. He hoped that knowledgeable Sikhs would exert all the more and in an organised way to project the Sikh value system across the globe.

Sardar Gur Rattanpal Singh, S Gurcharan Singh Mohali, Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian, Principal P S Sangha, Sardar Sohan Singh Chicago, Dr Kuldip Singh, Sardar U S Gill (Chicago), Maj Gen Narindar Singh and Principal Gurbax Singh Shergill made useful observations in their brief comments. Main outcome of discussions at the meeting was the need of right action by various Sikh individuals and institutions that should provide beacon light to the adherents of Sikh faith and enhance the Sikh image among various sections of mankind.

Sardar Gurdev Singh, President, Institute of Sikh Studies, who chaired the meeting expressed the hope that each individual, whatever his professional status or calling, would conduct himself in a manner as should inspire others to emulate him and thus would nurture leadership in different spheres / levels of human efforts / organisations. Dr Kharak Singh, Dr Kirpal Singh, Dr Gurbakhsh Singh USA, Sardar Sadhu Singh, members of the Institute of Sikh Studies, were among the distinguished attendees.

SIKH SYMBOLS AND CONFORMISM*

SIRDAR KAPUR SINGH

Sardar Pushpinder Singh Puri has written a very interesting and informative article in the February issue of the *Sikh Review*.

He informs us that the younger generation of Sikhs in Canada defines Sikhism 'in a slightly different way than it is defined in the native Punjab.' He goes on to tell us that there, in Canada, 'a Sikh especially the young one, considers that so long as he expresses his faith in the teachings of Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh and considers the Guru Granth Sahib as the holy scripture of the Sikh religion, he is a Sikh.' He goes on, 'the hint is clear, he is not prepared to accept the traditional physical outlook (sic) of a Sikh, which was made compulsory by Guru Gobind Singh by imposing on the Sikhs the five Ks. He advocates the essence of Sikhism in the script and soul, and not in the physical requirements.'

The writer concludes the point by informing us that the young Sikh in Canada 'pleads that the need of the time is different and that to fit in the Canadian pattern of life we will have to look like others.'

Mr Puri offers an apology for all this by adding that, 'though the faith from tradition is shaken, faith in Sikhism stays.'

While it is possible to understand and even appreciate the attitudes of the younger generation of the Sikhs in Canada and elsewhere outside India, it is not easy to accept it either as logical or as otherwise capable of defence from the point of view of the Sikh doctrines and the historical role the Sikhs are required to play according to the vision of the Gurus.

The psychological need to look like others who are in a majority and also in a position to impose their approval-judgements on a strange minority amidst them, is all too obvious. The writer of these lines, while a student at Cambridge in the Great Britain during the forties of this century, was personally made aware of this social stress for a number of years. But the more he has thought over this question, the more he

* Courtesy: *Sikh Review*, April 1973.

is convinced that those who surrender to the foreign social ethos of non-Sikh societies neither display any exemplary integrity or strength of character, nor much proficiency in logical thinking and nor even practical wisdom. Conformism is the easiest response to antagonism and stresses of a social and emotional character such as the presence of a strange minority in foreign social surroundings generates. Conformism releases an individual from the terrible tension of being different from others all the time, in a foreign social atmosphere, but when this has been said, all has been said in favor of the attitudes of the young Sikhs in Canada and elsewhere.

Firstly, it is not easy to sympathise with a point of view which arrogates to itself the authority to define Sikhism, 'in a slightly different way,' from how it has been defined by the founders of Sikhism and the collective national consensus of the historical Sikh community. This arrogation is escapist cowardice, if words are not to be minced. It would perhaps be less presumptuous and more honest to adopt and declare an attitude of a personal incapacity to act upon and sustain the true definition of religious requirements than to assume the competence to 'redefine' what ought to be the true Sikhism. Heresy, apostasy and defection from a religion are more honest names for the attitude that underlies the claim to 'redefine' a religion. Those who shirk from calling a spade a spade and do not admit this truth to themselves merely push their personalities into emotional conflicts and complexes, which do more damage to themselves than the gains they seek to achieve by the circuitous path they thus follow. Is it more profitable from the point of view of individual himself to be utterly honest with oneself and admit what he really intends and does, or is it a cleverer or wiser path to conceal the true contours of one's own hidden urges and temporary emotional problems such as arise in the case of Sikhs when they try to transplant themselves in a social milieu altogether strange from, if not hostile to, the fundamental insights into Reality, represented by the religious way of life of their ancestors? Any psychiatrist or a psychoanalyst practitioner will not hesitate as to what advice to give under the circumstances. By arguing falsely that while they are actually defecting from Sikhism they are merely 're-defining' it, is to create greater problems than those that are sought to be solved. This is one important aspect of the problem to be seriously considered by the younger generation of Sikhs in Canada.

The second point, which is no less important for them, is that in Sikhism, unlike many older religions such as Islam, Mahayan Buddhism,

and certain varieties of Christianity, mere verbal assent to a faith is of no avail. The young Sikh in Canada seems to think that he has the capacity and authority to separate the essence of Sikhism from the formally non-essential, and that thereby he achieves access to the kernel of religion and discards the husks. What that 'essence' and 'kernel' is, he alone presumes to be the final judge of it. It was maintained in the past, in the older religions, that if a votary of religion just makes a true and unreserved assent to a certain verbal formula, which was supposed to enshrine the 'truth' of that religion, the devotee was automatically saved thereby. From Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, constant and repeated stress was laid on the divergence of religious stand of Sikhism on the point, namely, that the essence of religion is not the dogma or the formula, for, what people think is relatively secondary; what matters is the true substance of the dogma and the formula which is expressed in the acts of men and not in the mere words or utterances of men. This, incidentally, is the new movement of humanism where Catholics, Protestants, and Marxists move in common disregarding different formulae and ideologies that separate them. This central truth of Sikhism is enshrined in the revelation of Guru Nanak himself :

galli[n] bhist[i] na jaii chhuttai sachch[u] kamaï (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 141)

"the goal can be achieved only through the deed and not the word."

It is obvious, therefore, that the very claim which the young Sikhs of Canada thus make of redefining Sikhism for themselves is not only highly presumptuous, but it also constitutes a defiance of the starting point of Sikhism. Thereby, these young Sikhs do not accept or practise Sikhism, but repudiate and defect from it. It is necessary for the young Sikhs to be clear in their minds on this second point also.

The last point to bear in mind is as to what culture, which includes the practice of religion, consists of. In the UNESCO sponsored book, *Traditional Culture in South East Asia*, the following definition of culture is given:

Culture means the total accumulation of all material objects, ideas and symbols, beliefs, sentiments, values and forms which are passed from one generation to another in any given society.

The belief, therefore, of the young Sikhs of Canada that they can diverge from the culture of the older Sikh generations nurtured in Punjab and yet can remain whole Sikhs is shown to be altogether fantastic when this definition of culture is kept in view. What the young Sikhs of Canada are doing is not a continuation of the culture of their

ancestors, but a hiatus and a break from the culture, and let there be no mistake about it. No matter how unpleasant and unpalatable this truth sounds to the rebellious young mind planted in the current chaotic, moral and spiritual, atmosphere of the Western societies, it is the truth.

The *keshas*, the turban, the iron bangle and all these details that keep the Sikhs and the Sikh life separate from the majority of mankind surrounding them, are of the utmost spiritual importance when they are properly considered. They are the fences surrounding their daily life; they are not the daily life itself. They make it possible for Sikhism to survive, but they are not the reasons for that survival.

The Sikhs from Punjab, who, during the unsettled history of the community during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, settled in UP and Mysore and other parts of India, were completely submerged in the surrounding sea of Hindus by the end of the nineteenth century as soon as they gave up their peculiar Sikh symbols, and outward Sikh forms. They even forgot their origins as Sikhs and it is only now, during the last twenty or thirty years, that evidence has been dug up and discovered from the past memories and other bits of evidence concerning these communities that they are originally Sikhs from the Punjab. The sturdy Sikhs from the Punjab who settled in the early twentieth century in South America, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, have been almost completely submerged into the majority Catholic Christian community by the middle of the twentieth century once they abandoned their peculiar religious symbols.

It requires no prophetic insight to know the fate of these young Sikhs in Canada once they abandon the peculiar symbols of Sikhism ordained by the Guru himself to whom they profess their total allegiance in this world and the next. This fate shall be no different from the fate of those who turn their backs on the Sun in whose light they hope to walk and move about.

True, Sikhs remain Sikhs inspite of every pressure and temptation, because it is basically good and satisfying to be a Sikh and not because they are forbidden to shingle (?) or shave or to smoke the deadly nicotine poison. And, it is basically good and satisfying to remain a Sikh because of the deep spirituality and the profound faith in the Word of the Guru, and not merely because of observance of certain forms or verbal assent to certain formulae. But this neither detracts from the vital relevance of these forms and formulae to the all-important question of ultimate survival, nor authorizes any one to deviate from or redefine Sikhism as originally revealed by the Gurus. Such a stance is simply impermissible as well as dangerously unwise.

When at the location of present-day Muktsar, the Sikh elders of

Majha, in 1706 AD presumed to request Guru Gobind Singh to reshape his posture towards the political power by 'redefining' Sikhism, the response of the Guru was sharp and to the point :

Sikh hovat leve updes[i]. devat ho biprit vises[u].

"a true Sikh hears and obeys but you, on the contrary presume to advise and guide the Guru."

The present age calls not for prohibitions, it is true, but for positive contribution of religion though conditions necessary for preserving the ethos and the milieu out of which that contribution is most likely to come, must also be preserved and sustained with utmost care and devotion. One cannot live without the other and this is the arcane meaning of the part of our congregational prayer in which we ask from the Unseen Power that "each Sikh may be given the strength to remain steadfast in his faith in Sikhism up to his last breath on this earth with his sacred hair and symbols unmolested."

The Great Sankracharya taught the fundamental classification of human activity and goals into two categories. The *preya* thoughts and actions are those that give easement to immediate stresses and problems and lead to the passing pleasures of life. The *shreya* actions and attitudes in life are those that ultimately lead to enduring satisfaction and spiritual achievements. The claim of religion is to teach men to sift the *preya* from the *shreya*. The path, which the young generations of Sikhs propose to tread in Canada and elsewhere, is the road to the *preya* mode of life. The path that Sikhism claims to show men is the *shreya* mode of life. When one is young and feels the pulsations of bewitching spring of sensations and pleasures as the only real thing in life, one is irresistibly drawn to the *preya*. But when the hectic pulls of sensations and passing pleasures weaken and are slackened and the mind matures and gains strength for appreciating and pursuing enduring values of life, then it is the *shreya* path which appeals to properly cultured human mind. Throughout the modern western societies, in which are to be included the Communist forms of societies, there is evident the uncontrolled yearning for the *preya* to the exclusion of the *shreya*. But this is only a passing phase. As the signs already indicate on the horizon, mankind must turn its face to the Sun of religion as refuge from the uncertainties and frustrations of the modern western way of life.

Sikhism and its formal life represent the Light to which mankind is destined to return sooner or later and it seems, sooner than later. Has not the Guru prophesied this in the Sikh scripture itself that the eternal Truths of religion cannot be finally abandoned by man: *eh vastu taji nah jai nit nit rakh[u] ur[i] dharo* (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1429).

IS THERE GOD ?*

“Let me explain the problem science has with God.” The atheist professor of Philosophy pauses before his class, and then asks one of his new students to stand.

“You’re a God-believer, aren’t you, son?”

“Yes sir”, the student says.

“So, you believe in God?”

“Absolutely.”

“Is God good?”

“Sure! God’s good.”

“Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?”

“Yes.”

“Are you good or evil?”

“The teachings say I’m evil.”

The professor grins knowingly. He considers for a moment.

“Here’s one for you. Let’s say there’s a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help him? Would you try?”

“Yes sir, I would.”

“So you’re good...!”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“But why not say that? You’d help a sick and maimed person if you could. Most of us would if we could. But God doesn’t.”

The student does not answer, so the professor continues. “He doesn’t, does he? My brother was a God-believer who died of cancer, even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this God good? Hmmm? Can you answer that one?”

The student remains silent.

“No, you can’t, can you?” the professor says. He takes a sip of

* Contributed by Ishwinder Singh, (#114, Sector 18-A, Chandigarh) based on internet discussion, Sikhs acrossIIMS.yahoo.group.

water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax.
“Let’s start again, young fella. Is God good?”
“Er... Yes”, the student says.
“Is Satan good?”
The student doesn’t hesitate on this one. “No.”
“Then where does Satan come from?”
The student falters. “From... God...”
“That’s right. God made Satan, didn’t he? Tell me, son. Is there evil in this world?”
“Yes, sir.”
“Evil’s everywhere, isn’t it? And God did make everything, correct?”
“Yes.”
“So who created evil?”
Again, the student has no answer.
“Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things, do they exist in this world?”
The student squirms on his feet. “Yes.”
“So who created them?”
The student does not answer again, so the professor repeats his question. “Who created them?”
There is still no answer. Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace in front of the classroom. The class is mesmerized.
“Tell me”, he continues. “Do you believe in God, son?”
The student’s voice betrays him and cracks. “Yes, professor. I do.”
The old man stops pacing. “Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen God?”
“No Sir. I’ve never seen Him.”
“Then tell us if you’ve ever heard your God?”
“No, sir. I have not.”
“Have you ever felt your God, tasted your God or smelt your God? Have you ever had any sensory perception of God?”
“No, sir, I’m afraid I haven’t.”
“Yet you still believe in Him?” thundered the professor.
“Yes.”
“According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn’t exist. What do you say to that, son?”

“Nothing”, the student replies. “I only have my faith.”

“Yes, faith,” the professor repeats. “And that is the problem science has with God. There is no evidence, only faith.”

The student stands quietly for a moment, before asking a question of his own.

“Professor, is there such a thing as heat?”

“Yes,” the professor replies. “There’s heat.”

“And is there such a thing as cold?”

“Yes, son, there’s cold too.”

“No sir, there isn’t.”

The professor turns to face the student, obviously interested. The room suddenly becomes very quiet. The student begins to explain.

“You can have lots *of* heat, even more heat, super-heat, mega-heat, white heat, a little heat *or* no heat, but we don’t have anything called ‘cold’. We can hit 458 degrees below zero, which is no heat, but we can’t go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold; otherwise we would be able to go colder than -458 degrees. You see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence *of* heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the *opposite of heat*, sir, just the *absence of it*.” Silence across the room! A pen drops somewhere in the classroom, sounding like a hammer.

“What about darkness, professor. Is there such a thing as darkness?”

“Yes,” the professor replies without hesitation. “What is night if it isn’t darkness?”

“You’re wrong again, sir. Darkness is not something; it is the absence *of* something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, flashing light. But if you have no light constantly you have nothing and it’s called darkness, isn’t it? That’s the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, Darkness isn’t. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn’t you?”

The professor begins to smile at the student in front of him. This will be a good semester.

“So what point are you making, young man?”

“Yes, professor. My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with and so your conclusion must also be flawed.”

The professor’s face cannot hide his surprise this time. “Flawed? Can you explain how?”

“You are working on the premise of duality,” the student explains.

“You argue that there is life and then there’s death; a good God and a bad God. You are viewing the concept of God as something finite, something we can measure. Sir, science can’t even explain a thought. It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understood either one. To view death as the opposite of life is to be ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a substantive thing. Death is not the opposite of life, just the absence of it. Now tell me, professor. Do you teach your students that they evolved from a monkey?”

“If you are referring to the natural evolutionary process, young man, yes, of course I do.”

“Have you ever observed evolution with your own eyes, sir?”

The professor begins to shake his head, still smiling, as he realizes where the argument is going. A very good semester indeed!

“Since no one has ever observed the process of evolution at work and cannot even prove that this process is an on-going endeavour, are you not teaching your opinion, sir? Are you now not a scientist, but a preacher?”

The class is in uproar. The student remains silent until the commotion has subsided.

“To continue the point you were making earlier to the other students, let me give you an example of what I mean.”

The student looks around the room. “Is there anyone in the class who has ever seen the professor’s brain?” The class breaks out into laughter.

“Is there anyone here who has ever heard the professor’s brain, felt the professor’s brain, touched or smelt the professor’s brain? No one appears to have done so. So, according to the established rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says that you have no brain, with all due respect, sir. So if science says you have no brain, how can we trust your lectures, sir?”

Now the room is silent. The professor just stares at the student, his face unreadable!

Finally, after what seems an eternity, the old man answers.

“I guess you’ll have to take them on faith.” The class breaks into a deafening applause.

GURU GRANTH SAHIB
A GUIDE TO THE PATH OF PEACE FOR HUMANITY

GURBAKHSH SINGH USA*

The relevance and significance of Gurbani for world peace can be understood if we discuss the answer to the serious question quite often asked from the author at the Sikh youth camps:

The Question

Why not abolish religions ? From the very period of their founding they have divided people into mutually hating groups. And this hatred is spreading and getting intensified every day. We have witnessed shedding of innocent blood all over the globe and unfortunately it is going on even at this time. Is then there any logic for retaining religion?

Every religion says that there is only one God. Why this belief does not unite us ?

The Answer

Sikhism, *gurmat*, founded by Guru Nanak preaches, “Do not divide people into Hindus and Muslims; all are children of God, hence equal. No one is superior or inferior and no one is alien.”

Many scholars, who have studied Sri Guru Granth Sahib agree that the answer to this question is provided by Gurbani. I will try to explain it in my words.

This philosophy is elaborated in hundreds of hymns which all of you know; only four of these as a sample are quoted below :

1. ਨ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ॥ ਅਲਹ ਰਾਮ ਕੇ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਪਰਾਨ ॥ (GGS, p.1136)
2. ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ (GGS, p.611)
3. ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥
ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥ (GGS, p.1349)
4. ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਈ ਸਭ ਤਾਤਿ ਪਰਾਈ ॥ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮੋਹਿ ਪਾਈ ॥
ਨਾ ਕੇ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥ (GGS, p.1299)

Ram and Allah are the names of the same Lord; these were used by Hindus & Muslims, respectively. In Gurbani, however, they refer

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to the Creator, the Common Father of whole humanity, not the God of Hindus or of Muslims alone. Gurbani accepts all the innumerable names given to Him by His devotees. Many such names have been mentioned in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

It is not a theory for intellectual exercise but the Gurus demonstrated it through the institutions of *sangat* and *pangat*. Hindus and Muslims, high caste & low caste, men and women all sat together as equals (*sangat*) to sing the praises of the Lord, their common Father addressing Him by many different names with equal love. To share their feelings of brotherhood, they cooked food together & partook of it together without any kind of discrimination.

Thread of Peace

Why and where have we missed this lesson of Gurbani ? We need to reintroduce it to spread the message of the unity of humanity. It should be an issue to be discussed by scholars, and social leaders to plan the celebration of the forthcoming fourth centenary of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Accordingly, they should draw an action plan to pick up the thread of peace among the people to move forward.

This does need sacrifice, of course, may not be of our heads as during the 18th century, but surely of our ego so that we learn to respect others as equal members of the larger brotherhood, humanity. Unfortunately, we see the believers of Gurbani strongly divided among themselves. *Gianis*, scholars, politicians, heads of different *deras*, etc., differ a lot on the details of the message of Gurbani and the code of conduct for a Sikh.

The institution of Guru Panth which was to provide a common platform and keep the Sikhs united and moving on the *gaadi rah* (highway) of *gurmat* has got slowly diluted and become unidentifiable, and hence ineffective. Maybe, this appeal will awaken us to the message of Gurbani and our responsibilities as believers of *gurmat*. Let us make a beginning, God will surely bless us.

Another aspect of the revolutionary reveals of Gurbani is that no body can claim a monopoly over God. Gurbani explains that He is our Common Father and He loves us all equally.

ੴ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥ (GGS, p.97)

Hatred arises when the followers of a faith preach themselves to be the only true believers and regard members of other faiths as non-believers. With a wrong belief of 'saving' members of other faiths, they actually bribe them, pressurise them, torture them and even threaten

to kill them (they may actually kill them to scare others) to convert them to their faith. The people in power in the past committed and those in power are still committing, this serious sin believing it to be a pious act. While they think they are doing a favour to the 'non-believers' (people of other faiths) to qualify them to enter heaven, they create a hell for them on this very earth.

Gurbani decries such forced conversions by declaring "God is no body's father's property to make a sole claim on Him. He belongs to all those who love Him. ਆਪਨ ਬਾਧੇ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੋ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੋ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ ॥ (GGS, p. 658)"

Also, Gurbani tells that those who remember Him are graced by Him.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ ॥(GGS, p. 8)

And the Sikh prayers always end with a request for the welfare of whole humanity, ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ, not just of Sikhs or of Indians alone.

Struggle for Human Rights

To ensure peace Guru Nanak preached protection of human rights, particularly of the lowly and the weak. Gurbani tells that true religion lies in providing justice to all.

ਰਾਜੇ ਚੁਲੀ ਨਿਆਵ ਕੀ ॥ (GGS, p. 1240)

ਤਖਤਿ ਰਾਜਾ ਸੋ ਬਹੈ ਜਿ ਤਖਤੈ ਲਾਇਕ ਹੋਈ ॥ (GGS, p.1088)

ਤਖਤਿ ਬਹੈ ਤਖਤੈ ਕੀ ਲਾਇਕ ॥ ਪੰਚ ਸਮਾਏ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਪਾਇਕ ॥ (GGS, p.1039)

ਜਿਨੀ ਸਚੁ ਪਛਾਣਿਆ ਸਚੁ ਰਾਜੇ ਸੋਈ ॥ (GGS, p.1088)

Gurbani, thus warns the tyrant rulers and the administrators against their anti-people actions. It says true kings are those who respect truth and deliver justice to common persons.

The corrupt religious teachers as well as the corrupt judges were exposed by Guru Nanak through very harsh and strong words.

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ ॥ ਜਾਇ ਜਗਾਇਨਿ ਬੈਠੇ ਸੁਤੇ ॥

ਚਾਕਰ ਨਹਦਾ ਪਾਇਨਿ ਘਾਉ ॥ ਰਤੁ ਪਿਤੁ ਕੁਤਿਹੋ ਚਟਿ ਜਾਹੁ ॥ (GGS, p.1288)

ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ ॥

ਜੋਗੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੰਧੁ ॥ (GGS, p. 662)

On the economic front too he condemned the dishonest and corrupt people defining them as greatest sinners.

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੁਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਪੀਰੁ ਹਾਮਾ ਤਾ ਭਰੇ ਜਾ ਮੁਰਦਾਰੁ ਨ ਖਾਇ ॥ (GGS, p.141)

Further, to help the needy, he advised that one tenth of one's earnings should be shared for social welfare. He said that serving poor is serving God. To ensure social equality, he founded the institution of

sangat and *pangat* as stated earlier. Splitting of society into high caste and low caste by birth is strongly decried by Gurbani.

ਜਾਤਿ ਕਾ ਗਰਬੁ ਨ ਕਰਿ ਮੁਰਖ ਗਵਾਰਾ ॥

ਇਸ ਗਰਬ ਤੇ ਚਲਹਿ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਵਿਕਾਰਾ ॥ (GGS, p. 1128)

ਸਭੇ ਸਾਝੀਵਾਲ ਸਦਾਇਨਿ ॥

ਤੂੰ ਕਿਸੈ ਨਾ ਦਿਸਹਿ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ (GGS, p. 97)

The pride of caste is basically wrong and harmful. We are all equal and no one is alien.

Universal Brotherhood in Practice

The character of the Khalsa to respect people of all faiths during the 18th century is well documented. I wish to quote a small incident of the 20th century also to show how the Sikhs treated people of other religions with love. Less than two decades ago an old man, unable to walk on his own, and supported on both sides by two healthy Sikhs, was led out of the Ross Gurdwara, Vancouver, Canada. His harsh Punjabi words expressed his great frustration. “Why have you brought me here? *This also is not the Gurdwara where we all ‘brothers’ Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims & Goras jointly cooked langar and partook of it together.*” Emotional out burst of the old man brought tears in my eyes, and that touching scene was engraved on my heart for ever.

However, against this old practice of all communities having mutual love, the recent *langar Hukamnama* has divided even the Sikh community into irreconcilable groups, each gurdwara *sangat* has been split into two — *kursiwala* gurdwara and *pangatwala* gurdwara; the hatred among them is as strong as that between two different communities in Kashmir.

In Punjab also, we observe very strong mutual differences among the leaders of the Panth. Therefore, it is increasingly being realised that Guru Panth needs to be revealed and strengthened to overcome the problems of the Sikh community all over the world. Without this institution we cannot spread the message of the Granth (ਅਗਰ ਪੰਥ ਨਾ ਰਹਾ ਤੋ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਕੋ ਕਉਨ ਮਾਨੇਗਾ). Only Guru Panth can direct all Sikh leaders to resolve their mutual differences and move together on the path of *Gurmat*.

Silver Lining

Luckily, the nucleus of the Panth, the *sangat*, is still devoted to Sri Guru Granth Sahib. We can observe train-loads of people of different faiths and different communities coming from all corners of India and also from foreign lands to pay their homage at Sri Harimandar Sahib,

Amritsar. We also observe that all communities of different colors and features every day enter *langar* halls and partake of food together as equals without discrimination. Go to even any local gurdwara, and find the *sangat* devoted to the Guru Granth, *kirtan* and *katha* of Gurbani. (It is only during elections that the leaders split them to “capture” gurdwaras for their selfish ends.)

This is a very encouraging situation. Before, the selfish and opportunist leaders can do any damage to this unity of the *sangat*, they can be guided by the Panth to follow the directions of Gurbani so that its message of peace can reach all corners of the globe.

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DR GURCHARAN SINGH VISITS INSTITUTE

Dr Gurcharan Singh Sidhu an eminent scientist from Australia visited the Institute on December 23, 2003. He had discussions with Sardar Gurdev Singh, President of the Institute and Dr Kharak Singh, Editor of the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*. He appreciated the services rendered by the Institute and offered to promote the journal under the bulk mail supply scheme.

Dr Gurcharan Singh, a top scholar and a Gold Medalist from Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, was selected for Ph.D. study in Australia. He returned to join as State Biochemist at Ludhiana but went back to Australia when he was selected for the coveted post of a research scientist. He is a scientist of international repute and has represented Australia at world level conferences in the discipline of Biochemistry. Now he is working as a Nutrition and Food Science Consultant to the Australian Government. One of his numerous achievements in research is production of cholesterol-free eggs in poultry.

He is actively involved in social and religious activities of the Sikh community. He took lead in association with Sardar Ajaib Singh, an Engineer, in raising a huge gurdwara building in Sydney at a cost of 4 million dollars. Dr Sidhu welcomed the IOSS’ move for an Apex Body of the Sikhs. He assured full support to the idea and said that Sikh diaspora all over the world were keen to have such a body at the earliest.

RELIGIOUS HARMONY AND UNIVERSAL PEACE
– A REALITY : LIVING HAPPILY TOGETHER –

BHAGWANT SINGH*

‘Living happily together’ is so indelibly inscribed in my psyche that it seems to have come to me with a spiritual spoon in my mouth at birth. Ever since I remember coming into my own adult consciousness, never has a thought come to my mind that as a human being I am any different from others. I have spent all my life in peace and harmony with all kinds of people. Even when I was not aware of my spiritual heritage and spiritual consciousness, I had it ingrained in my heart that all human beings are equal and all mankind is one brotherhood. My school bench-mate, Sarfaraz Khan, the son of a Muslim Magistrate in British India, smiled and laughed with me, joked and played with me. He also quarrelled with me as a fellow student, not as a different religious denomination, but as my equal human companion. Despite the horrendous killings and alienation of the partition days, it never brought me a feeling that a whole community could be dubbed as evil merely because one of its members had behaved in an inhuman way.

When I came to the Foreign Service after migration to India, it was a real treat to work as a team in the Ministry or abroad with no feeling at all about one's origin or religion, State or background. In over twenty years of service in India or abroad, not once did I feel that my colleagues from different religions, different States or different economic backgrounds were, in any way, less or more Indian.

But the reality of the religious harmony being directly related to universal peace appeared in my heart and my whole being became the symbol of spiritual universality when my religious consciousness manifested spiritual splendour within myself. In 1970, the fact of having been born in a Sikh family, and yet belonging to the whole world, dawned on me when I began to be attracted by the teachings and lives of Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak, the founder, was so universal that both Hindus and Muslims claimed him as their Prophet. All Gurus emphasised

* Tapovan, Amravati, Maharashtra - 444 602

spiritual oneness. Guru Arjun's willing sacrifice for human solidarity strengthened my resolution in truth and love of the one God of all religions. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom for the sake of human rights and freedom of worship impressed me to the core of my heart. Under the guidance of Guru Granth Sahib, the universal Sikh Scripture, that contains the messages not only of six Sikh Gurus but also of Hindu and Muslim saints including the so-called untouchable *bhaktas* like Kabir, Ravidas of UP, Namdev of Maharashtra, Jaidev of Bengal and Baba Farid, a Muslim saint of Punjab, Gurbani led me to lead a life of practical religious harmony and universal peace even when I was a functioning Foreign Service Officer. While serving in Egypt, an old Muslim lady, on her death bed, told her children to call me for her last meeting.

Later, I discovered in Guru Granth Sahib, that we had been specifically commanded to; (i) treat everyone as our friend and become the good friend of all, (ii) to have no divisions among human beings, (iii) to show equal respect for women, (iv) to consider everyone our equal, to remember the one Lord of all, by whatever name people call Him and, above all, (v) to display in our conduct the twin essential aspects of religion - self-annihilation through 24 hour remembrance of the Lord and the deeds of piety and purity - throughout our life.

My inner voice dwelt on two concepts; there is only one religion – that of truth, and there is only one caste – that of humanity. That is why our Scripture specifically declares that there is one and the same sermon for all, whether one is a *brahmin*, a *khatri*, a *vaish* or a *shudra*. Discrimination on the basis of caste is severely condemned.

While I was serving in Paris, in addition to my diplomatic, consular or commercial work, I became a member of the Petits Freres Des Pauvres (Little Brothers' Association for the Poor), a French charitable society for serving French old people in their homes. My distinct bearded and turbaned appearance did not come in the way of my love for them. They affectionately accepted my love and extended theirs to me. It was a divine treat not only for me, but also for the French old couple, when I helped the paralysed Frenchman to walk some distance on Saturdays or Sundays.

This unique experience of spiritual unity of Man charted a new course for my life. I witnessed the divine glow on the face of a Pakistani young doctor when I suggested to him to be regular in *namaz*, the Muslim prayer, and return to Pakistan to serve his poor countrymen after completing his studies. He gave me a warm smile when he said

his parting good-bye: "*Khuda hafiz*, I shall never forget that in a non-Muslim country, a non-Muslim reminded me of my Muslim religious duties."

God decided for me that the time had come now to leave my service, and experience on a wider scale the concept of living happily together with the downtrodden through religious harmony. I thought merely reciting the name of God was not enough; it must be translated into whole time service of humanity. I had experienced the truth of love and peace in religion through my oneness with the French old people but I had no training to serve the sick. I did not know which service I should take up. To see God face-to-face, one must love the meanest creation as oneself.

I became a little apprehensive, however, to realise that I could, in terms of my beliefs, never consider anyone mean. God solved my problem. During the half-awake state at night, I noticed the picture of a leprosy patient. I learnt leprosy work in CMC Vellore and afterwards, leaving my job, came to this leprosy treatment-cum-rehabilitation centre at Amravati, started by late Dr Shivaji Rao Patwardhan. Today I literally live the Reality of Religious Harmony and Universal peace. I came to Tapovan, the name of the Centre, in October 1979, and in these 24 years, I have been living happily together with more than a thousand leprosy patients. The reality of this experience is profound, because none of the inmates – in the management or among patients – is a Sikh. Most of them are Maharashtrian Hindus and some are Muslims and Christians, but for me every inmate is either my son or daughter, my brother or sister, and my father or mother. The beauty is that they too regard me as their own and we live like a family.

I have various opportunities to participate in inter-faith dialogue and since 1980 I must have attended over 20 such meetings. Former Bishop of Amravati, Rt. Rev. Joseph Rosario, has been a close friend in fostering the spirit of religious harmony ever since I came to Amravati. Since I was born in a Sikh family, I am recognised as the representative of Sikh religion, but I humbly and mildly protest by correcting that I belong to all religions and anyone who lives truth, remembers the Lord 24 hours and practises universal love, is my co-religionist, whatever be the label. I firmly believe that the core of religion is love — love without discrimination, love without expectation, love in the name of one God – of all and love as the direct representation of Divine presence.

The guidance that I have received from Guru Granth Sahib is so

direct, and so unambiguous, that I cannot help being universal. In fact I cannot live my religion without loving and respecting all persons irrespective of their religion. Many times I believe that for others it may be a kind gesture to foster religious harmony and peace. But for me, this is my religion.

Look at my heritage. Where would you find the instance of the most important shrine of one religion having had the distinction of its foundation stone laid by a divine personality of another religion ? The foundation stone of the Golden Temple of the Sikhs was laid by a Muslim divine, Hazrat Mian Mir.

Where would you find in the religious text of one religion, the sacred divine messages of the saints of other religions, who would loudly talk of their own prophets ? In Guru Granth Sahib there are messages of only six Sikh Gurus, but 16 highly respected Hindu and Muslim saints also speak from there with the same status and same recognition, because every word of Guru Granth Sahib is our Guru. Allah and Ram, Hindu and Muslim, *namaz* and *pooja* are so prominently mentioned in Guru Granth Sahib that this Scripture becomes the treasure of all religions automatically. The core point is living the commands of God. Many times I have said at the inter-faith meetings that perhaps Sikh Gurus did not meet Christian saints, otherwise we would have some Christian hymns too in our Scripture.

When we all believe that all the religions stress love and peace, fraternity and equality, harmony and unity, how come we find ourselves in strife and disunity ? Where do we fall and why do we indulge in divisions, hatred, ill-will, wholesale condemnation, murders, carnage, massacres, sexual crimes ? I venture to suggest the causes of our inhuman and foolish aberrations :

1. We parade religion but do not practise it, and politicians particularly create vested interests in terms of vote-banks, racial superiority, commercial exploitation and human upheavals.
2. We pay lip-service to equality but continue economic exploitation of the underprivileged sections on religious and racial lines.
3. We develop real or imagined wrongs done by some community, group, country, etc.
4. We regale ourselves with majority-minority imaginary conflicts, forgetting our own religious principles.
5. We foolishly believe that our prophet or Guru or Swami will be pleased with hatred for and condemnation of other religions and killing of people other than those of our own religion.

True, such people are in a majority. But they have perseverance to parade untruth as truth, project loot as *loksewa*, personal interest as common welfare and, above all, political chicanery as religious fervour.

We recently had an inter-faith rally in Amravati conducted by the Police Commissioner, Mr Ankush Dhanvijay, and it was a remarkable success. I later wrote an article in *The Hitavada* of Nagpur referring to my 24 years 'Living Happily Together' with leprosy patients and mentioning a *bhajan* which I sing with the patients. I am sure, it is relevant for this paper.

*"Mujh mein Ram tujh main Ram sabh main Ram samaya
Sabse karlo pyar jagat mein koi nahin paraya.*

1. *Jitne hain sansar mein prani sab mein ek hi joti
Ek bagh ke pushp hain sare ek haar ke moti
Na jaane kis karighar ne ik mitti ka banaya
Koi nahin paraya.....*
2. *Ek baap ke bete hain ham ek hamari maata
Daana paani dene vala ek hamara daata
Na jaane kis moorkh ne ye larrna hame sikhaya.
Koi Nahin paraya*

(God is in me, God is in you, God is in everyone. Let us love everyone because God resides in every heart. The same Light shines in all the people of the world and they are all the flowers of the same garden as also the pearls of the same necklace. But we know not how He Himself creates all from the same clay. We are all the children of the same father, the same mother. The same gracious Lord is giver of everything to all of us. But we know not which fool teaches us to quarrel).

My article ended with the remark : That fool is the politician. We have now become pastmasters in scams, criminal politics and political criminality, and have brought shame to our country and our religions. In fact, when I am asked to discuss "religious harmony and universal peace – a reality", I have a strange sense of shame. The reality so obvious but when religion itself becomes a hypocrite's pastime, a politician's gimmick, a businessman's trick, then the discussion alone will be an exercise in futility. Let us see why we make no headway. Conflicts go on rising, massacres continue, exploitation is on the increase and all this despite the increase in the number of prayer houses and pseudo-saints. The fact is that :-

1. We parade Gandhi on 2nd October and 30th January, but have no desire to follow him in practice.

2. We pour out sweeties from our mouths but we do not know the truths of our own religion and certainly not of other religions, although the core is the same.
3. We have lost our moorings, and morality is at the lowest ebb. Without morality religion is an empty slogan.
4. We are unwilling to sacrifice even our illegal privileges and we are unwilling to observe the rule of law.
5. Our legislators themselves are an unruly lot. They indulge in crimes; they exploit the poor and amass illegal wealth. They make rules which they do not want to obey.

Let us not forget that there is another dimension to the problem of universal peace. That is of poverty. If we really wanted to solve the problem of poverty, we would have been doing our religious duty of looking after our downtrodden people. But what we witness is not only our aversion towards the poor but our deliberate disinterest in raising their standard of living. We go on creating more poverty by usurping their rights and exploiting their ignorance and innocence. Religion becomes then only a tool for exploitation because its basic morality is missing.

We love prophets, we love religion, but only externally. Now even religion has become a five-star culture. We now concentrate on external cosmetism, external celebrations, external extravagant ostentation. We believe that bigger the car in which a holy man travels, the bigger the house in which he lives, the more spiritual he is, depriving the poor people of the faith of the pious and the pure. We cannot deny that even safe drinking water is not available to a lot of people. We cannot deny that all our people do not have two square meals a day. What kind of religion do we preach and practise which does not ensure even drinking water and two square meals to our people. The seminars and conferences also become meaningless with repetition of empty slogans of peace.

Where is the connection between religious harmony and excruciating poverty ? Where can the peace come when the stomach is empty, a poor woman is humiliated and raped and the exploited bonded labour is being crushed even by those who have temples and other prayer-rooms in their homes ? What kind of universal peace and religious harmony can we achieve in such an environment ? Religion means morality and integrity of the highest order.

In conclusion, let me submit the story of Guru Nanak, who chose to stay with Bhai Lalo, a poor artisan of low caste. Malik Bhago, a high

caste official, ordered Guru Nanak to join the public meal he arranged for all holy men, but Guru Nanak refused to join and, when pressed, pointed out that his wealth was collected by exploitation of the poor and contained their blood while the food of the honest and poor Lalo was pure. We witness the same spectacle today with ostentatious marriages, birthdays and political bashes while the exploiters talk of religion and peace. Our black money runs in *crores*. Our poor people sleep on footpaths, sometimes without food. Indeed even devil can quote scriptures, but unless we have our internal commitment and internal purity, we cannot make religious harmony and universal peace a reality. For this, our hearts must change and we must decide to do unto others what we want to be done to us. Peace cannot come with external religious words when the poor can collect only the crumbs thrown by ostentatiously rich exploiters.

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*Put away from my mind is envy of others,
As company of the holy I have attained.
None now is our foe not a stranger,
With all are we in accord.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299

SOCIAL INJUSTICE AGAINST WOMEN – GENESIS AND CURES

PRABHJOT KAUR*

Man has travelled a long distance in time as he steps on the threshold of 21st century. An amazing progress made in the field of science and technology has completely revolutionized the everyday life of man. Progress made by women and their participation in the field hitherto untouched by women is another area where man has witnessed change like never before. Today there is no area of human endeavour where women have not contributed remarkably. Kalpna Chawla, the woman astronaut, has carved out a niche for herself, in a field that was totally unthought of for women's participation till now. She stands as a symbol of gut and courage for the women of today. Indian constitution grants equal rights to women. A total cultural revolution seems to have taken place. From the number of women officers, managers and workers in almost every organisation and glamorous images of women on glossy magazines, it appears that it is the woman who rules the world today.

So far so good. But we should not forget that this image reflects only a minor section of society and that there is another side to the picture too. Even a cursory look at the pages of different dailies tells an entirely different story. Rapes, buying and selling of minor girls, dowry menace, exploitation of women at work place, domestic violence, eve-teasing, etc., make a daily reading. Female foeticide is rampant in the country, with Punjab topping the list. No doubt with all these problems, society is at the lowest ebb of morality and woman is facing problems the like of which she never did before.

Historically speaking, the problem of social injustice against women, dates back to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, according to which Eve is responsible for all the problems mankind is facing today. It was she who tempted Adam into that original sin, which led to his being thrown out of paradise into this hellist existence, and as a

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result, his life is beset with all kinds of problems. Dr Radhakrishnan in his book *Religion and Society* writes, "Christian Europe has been brought up in the belief that death would have been unknown but for the unkindness of women. She was accused of treachery, backbiting and tempting man to doom."

It appears that the idea of original sin is imbedded so deep into the psyche of man that till today, he has not been able either to forget or forgive, and holds Eve responsible for anything that goes wrong. As a result, the problem of social injustice against women continues to stare us in the face.

Female infanticide as a social problem dates back to ancient times and the progress made in the field of medical science and technology has only contributed to its increase at an alarming rate by way of an advanced technique of foeticide. The recent census has shown a sharp decline in female population. The problem if allowed to remain unchecked can have far-reaching and serious repercussions. Such an imbalance in the ratio of male-female population can cause serious psychological and mental disorders, and can plunge the society into deep pits of utter moral degeneration. Social scientists need to address this problem urgently and in all earnestness.

There are many different ways in which the problem of social injustice against women raises its ugly head. Every year around 7000 cases of crime against women are reported in Delhi alone. Far too many go unreported. National Crime Record Bureau registers more than one *lac* cases of crime against women. A rough estimate says that by 2010, the rate of crime against women will be more than the rate of population growth. All this certainly does not indicate a healthy and happy society, which is possible only if discrimination of all kinds is put to an end. Dr Dinesh, a family counsellor and a psychiatrist, considers a unity-based family as the first requirement of healthy social set-up. He writes in his book *Violence-free Family*, "in a unity-based family or society, the individuals endeavour to their utmost to serve one another, while at the same time, the family and society make certain that justice will be the *modus operandi* of the group." A society where half the population is crushed under the weight of injustice, cannot be called a healthy, happy society, nor can the other half lead a happy life. P B Shelley, an eminent English poet asks a very pertinent question, "Can man be free, if women are slaves?" In any social set-up each member depends on the other. Even political freedom becomes an unachievable ideal, if the women in a society are treated like slaves.

History of India is sufficient testimony to this fact. Equated with animals and fools, the Indian women did not have the right to worship or to education. Totally devoid of any sense of self-respect, her progeny could not possibly be better than herself. In the face of more than 200 foreign invasions, they proved to be absolutely impotent and ineffective. So deeply plunged they were in the slush of mental slavery, that they thought nothing of giving away their daughters to the foreign invaders. Indian women were sold for a dime in the bazaars of Ghazni. A society that labelled women as footwear and had called her “ਪੈਰ ਦੀ ਜੁਤੀ” was itself reduced to that status, and became the dirt of the shoes of foreign invaders. Shelley’s question “Can man be free if women are slaves?” gets adequately answered in this context.

It was in such a scenario that Guru Nanak appeared on the Indian scene. A man of destiny that he was, he analysed the whole situation, and concluded that the root-cause of slavery was the ignorance of Indian people and social injustice against women, born out of this ignorance. He makes a sad comment on the gender relations in Gurbani :

ਇਸਤਰੀ ਪੁਰਖੈ ਖਟਿਐ ਭਾਉ ॥

ਭਾਵੈ ਆਵਉ ਭਾਵੈ ਜਾਉ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 951)

And,

ਰੰਨਾ ਹੋਈਆ ਬੋਧੀਆ ਪੁਰਖ ਹੋਇ ਸਈਆਦ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1242)

Gender relationships were based on mercenary considerations only. The feeling of love and sincerity was totally absent, and as a result men had turned tyrants and women weak. There was no moral or spiritual beauty left in this relationship, and the progeny born out of this relationship could in no way be better. This morally bankrupt society was easily reduced to abject slavery by foreign invaders. It is said that the status accorded to women is the true barometer of the health of a society. Obviously, Indian society was not a healthy one. Recognising this fact, Guru Nanak Sahib decided to undertake this uphill task of raising the status of women with his powerful voice in favour of the mothers of the world.

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 473)

Kings, the rulers, are born to women. Why should the mother of a king be called ਕਲੰਕਣੀ (sinner), when the king himself is considered to be above all blame. Guru Nanak refused to accept this state of affairs and raised a banner of revolt against this injustice against women. He visualised a society where the women had a flawless and radiant personality so that they gave birth to a flawless and radiant offspring.

He made woman the central character of his poetic compositions (Gurbani). Gurbani uses as a metaphor the voice of a lovelorn wedded woman.

ਆਸ ਪਿਆਸੀ ਪਿਰ ਕੈ ਤਾਈ ਜਿਉ ਚਾੜ੍ਹਕੁ ਬੁੰਦੇਰੇ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1117)

.....

ਹਉ ਖੜੀ ਨਿਹਾਲੀ ਪੰਧੁ ਮਤੁ ਮੂੰ ਸਜਣੁ ਆਵਏ ॥

ਕੋ ਆਣਿ ਮਿਲਾਵੈ ਅਜੁ ਮੈ ਪਿਰੁ ਮੇਲਿ ਮਿਲਾਵਏ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1421)

In his chapter on women, in the book *Spirit Born People* Prof Puran Singh writes, "Her nobleness in Guru Granth Sahib is infinite, her freedom is of the highest..... She became a Supreme Reality and a freed soul. In a freed soul alone is the subordination of one to the other is effectively abolished and all disputes hushed." No doubt, all the worldly disputes vanish, when the soul is free, and all dualities are finished.

As against this, only men and women with a diseased mind and sick mentality will be unjust and intolerant, or will put up with any kind of injustice. Such people have the following features :

- i. Having low self-esteem.
- ii. Tendency to be depressed.
- iii. Tensions in the family because of problems in inter-personal relationship
- iv. Addiction to drugs
- v. Being of suspicious nature
- vi. Having had to face violence and injustice in childhood
- vii. Having a feeling of inferiority

As a great psychologist, Guru Sahib was keenly aware of these traits of the people with low self-esteem. So, he set about dealing with the problem. He realized that the first thing required to be done was to make women get rid of any feeling of inadequacy to enable them to lead a self-respecting life. As a first step, he dug at the roots of the prevalent customs that gave lower status to women. Female infanticide was strictly prohibited. The tenth Guru's *Hukamnama* to the *sangat* of Kabul says "ਭਾਦਨੀ ਤਥਾ ਕੰਨਿਆ ਮਾਰਨੇ ਵਾਲੇ ਸੇ ਮੇਲ ਨ ਰਖੇ ।"

The kind of life a girl should ideally lead in her parental house, finds a reference in Sri Guru Granth Sahib :

ਬਾਬੁਲ ਕੈ ਘਰਿ ਬੇਟੜੀ ਬਾਲੀ ਬਾਲੈ ਨੇਹਿ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 935)

Bhai Gurdas in his *Var 5 Pauri 16* recounts the life a daughter is expected to lead in her father's house :

ਪੇਵਕੜੈ ਘਰਿ ਲਾਡੁਲੀ ਮਾਊ ਪੀਉ ਘਰੀ ਪਿਆਰੀ ॥

ਵਿਚਿ ਭਰਾਵਾਂ ਭੈਣੜੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਦਕ ਸਪਰਵਾਰੀ ॥
 ਲਖਾਂ ਖਰਚ ਵੀਆਹੀਐ ਗਹਿਣੇ ਦਾਜੁ ਸਾਜੁ ਅਤਿ ਭਾਰੀ ॥
 ਸਾਹੁਰੜੈ ਘਰਿ ਮੰਨੀਐ ਸਣਖਤੀ ਪਰਵਾਰ ਸਧਾਰੀ ॥
 ਸੁਖ ਮਾਣੈ ਪਿਰੁ ਸੇਜੜੀ, ਛਤੀਹ ਭੋਜਨ ਸਦਾ ਸੀਗਾਰੀ ॥
 ਲੋਕ ਵੇਦ ਗੁਣੁ ਗਿਆਨ ਵਿਚਿ ਅਰਧ ਸਰੀਰੀ ਮੋਖ ਦੁਆਰੀ ॥
 ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੁਖ ਫਲ ਨਿਹਚਉ ਨਾਰੀ ॥

It is strange that inspite of such ideals before them, some Sikhs go about killing their daughter even before her birth.

A great social scientist dedicated to the creation of a healthy society, the Guru fought against all the prevalent social evils against women. Child marriage, *sati* system and observing of *sutak* and purdah system were strictly prohibited and widow remarriage allowed. Dowry system that has become the bane of modern society, was condemned by the Gurus.

On one hand, the Guru fought against all kinds of social injustice directed against women, and, on the other hand, he took care to raise their self-esteem by giving them positions of importance. He made them preachers and religious leaders, the most important social position of that time and sent them to distant lands.

Guru Sahib was very conscious of another evil prevalent at that time; an evil which is prevalent even today, may be on a larger scale. In spite of some improvement in the lot of women, the problem of extra-marital relation still looms large. Most of the T V serials focus on these problems. That shows the enormity of the problem. In Guru's time, polygamy was practised and had gained social acceptance. But the Guru had the courage to speak in favour of monogamy against the general environment in favour of polygamy. Woman as a rule was expected to be loyal to her husband. But, society did not have the same expectation from men. Guru Sahib demanded and expected the same level of loyalty from man, thus making them equally accountable for the healthy environment in the family. The ideal put before men was ਏਕਾ ਨਾਰੀ ਜਤੀ ਹੋਇ 6-8, Bhai Gurdas. (He who is loyal to his wife is a true ascetic). Derogatory and harsh words like 'sinner' and 'blind' have been used for the man who deviated from this norm :

ਘਰ ਕੀ ਨਾਰਿ ਤਿਆਰੈ ਅੰਧਾ ॥
 ਪਰ ਨਾਰੀ ਸਿਉ ਘਾਲੈ ਧੰਧਾ ॥...
 ਪਾਪੀ ਕਾ ਘਰੁ ਅਗਨੇ ਮਾਹਿ ॥

ਜਲਤ ਰਹੈ ਮਿਟਵੈ ਕਬ ਨਾਹਿ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1165)

This injustice at the domestic level has been strongly denounced by the Gurus as it gives birth to myriad other problems, social as well as psychological. When a woman suffers tensions because of such problems, she becomes a victim of mental disorders which lead to many family problems. When a woman, the pivot of the family, has personality problems, this affects inter-personal family relationships and, as a result, the family (called workshop of civilization) comes under attack.

Guru Sahib took care to handle the problem at the grass root level. He knew that any permanent change can be effected only if social environs change through transformation of the mind-set of general public. Only a profound inward revolution, which alters our values can create a different environment. The efforts put in by the Gurus brought about that profound inward revolution and by the time of tenth Guru, the women were confident enough to fight battles. They could perform arduous tasks of a military spy and lead a difficult life in the jungles during the days of 18th century holocaust. The CID records of the British Govt pertaining to the last days of the Sikh rule state that there was only one person with manly understanding left in Punjab and that was 'Rani Jindan', the widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She refused to accept subordination to the British rule till the last breath of her life. Rani Sada Kaur, the mother-in-law of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, instead of mourning the death of her husband in the battlefield, took possession of the arms from the body of her dead husband and fought like a great soldier. In fact, the credit for the establishment of the Sikh empire goes to Rani Sada Kaur. A point to be kept in mind is that women like these were not exceptions. History abounds with such examples, some known and more unknown. With such examples before us how can woman be called the weaker sex.

The need of the day is to create a kind of social environment where a woman is held in high esteem. Mere making of the laws which can easily be evaded and transgressed, is not the solution to the problem. Justice to women must be the *modus operandi* of the social system. Mrs Kiran Bedi, the first woman IPS who has spent a number of years on jail reforms and has worked on the criminal mind-set recommends : "What we need is a whole concerted mind-set of respecting the dignity of women and this becoming integral to our whole way of living and thinking. Respect for women is not in isolation.

It is integral to the respect for values in society.” (*The Tribune*, 30-12-2002)

Respect for values can be imbibed only by imparting value-based education, an area that needs utmost attention. Rising trend of commercialization of education needs to be immediately curbed. Concerted efforts in this direction are urgently required. NGOs can certainly play a very positive role in creating an environment in which moral and ethical values and respect for human rights are valued. In fact, only NGOs can help in creating the environment required for successful implementation of welfare policies of the government at local, national and international level.

Domestic services like creches and maid service can ease a lot of pressure from the lives of working women. This too is an area where NGOs can contribute to the family welfare in an effective manner.

In this age of science and technology, electronic media should be harnessed to ensure a healthy impact on the impressionable minds of young people, so that they learn to respect women as honorable members of society.

The most effective remedy for putting an end to social injustice against women, however, lies with women themselves. “No one can make a person feel inferior without his (her) consent”, said Confucius. Let women get rid of any feeling of inferiority they have. Let them know that woman is a most wonderful creation of the Lord. Very gentle and soft, she may appear to be, she has a very strong spirit within. The sad part is that she is unaware of her latent strength and qualities. Let her know her real self, be sure of herself, discover her inner strength and use it to create a healthy social environment, where woman is neither a slave nor a goddess to man, but his true companion sharing joys and sorrows with him, fully partaking in and contributing to the creation of a social fabric that is at once beautiful and healthy.

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*Guru says if vapid is our language in life,
Our body and soul shall go vapid.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 473

FEMALE FOETICIDE AND SIKHS

JASWANT SINGH*

I am a proud father of three married and well-settled daughters. When I was blessed with twin daughters in 1964, well meaning friends came to console us. My mother a God-fearing pragmatic lady remarked, "My son has been blessed with Lakshmi and Mahalakshmi. Let the girls bring luck to the family, be Gursikhs and may their parents be in a position to look after them". After the birth of the third daughter our attitude remained unshaken and as for my mother's prediction, these girls have brought to the family lot of cheer and good luck, materially, socially and spiritually.

As a practising doctor, I have all along been a votary of girl child being lucky, deserving our special care and nurture. Seeing around the social conditions of Punjab, I have been pained to note that there is definite preference for a male child; some parents are doing everything to snuff out a female foetus before she is born.

Causes of Female Foeticide

I find two important causes :

- a) A girl is being considered a liability in view of the dowry that accompanies her marriage and increasing demands of her in-laws in overt or covert manner. This custom which was forbidden by the Gurus among the Sikhs, has resurfaced with a fresh zeal since Guru's hold on the Sikhs is waning. Besides other qualities of the girl, good looks, excellent education, employability, social status of the parents, plus the increasing price tag of the groom is encouraging the parents to resort to immoral means of female foeticide. On the contrary, a male child is considered an asset. Way back in 1964 when doctor wife of a Gursikh doctor colleague of mine was about to deliver her first child, he remarked, "Soon my lottery result will be out. In case I get a boy, I am gainer by

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one *lac* of *rupees*, if a girl, I lose one *lac*, so the lottery result of *rupees* two *lacs* is at stake.” It is a different matter he got two sons successively and they are well employed doctors now. Those were the days when the ultrasound had not been invented.

- b) Ultrasound Investigation** : Though legally it is forbidden to have sex determination before delivery, yet practically it is being carried out clandestinely as it is commercially remunerative for the clinic. Government will have to enforce the existing law effectively.

Medical Viewpoint

All such foeticides are being done in various stages of pregnancy and in different settings. The worst situation is a rural setting, unqualified *dais* and insanitary conditions. This invariably endangers mother’s life and health, sometimes resulting in avoidable deaths. This amounts to a criminal killing. This is outside the purview of MTP – Medical Termination of Pregnancy – where two doctors have to agree to couple’s request. But criminal abortions at the behest of parents are resorted to in a clandestine manner sometimes under sanitary conditions by qualified gynecologists. This is reprehensible and illegal; we have to sensitise the parents and doctors against this malady. “While situation is bad in rural areas, it is worse than expected in urban areas”, says J K Banthia, Registrar General and Census Commissioner. Secretary, Family Welfare, P K Hota says, “There is need for a harsh law to punish those who help and aid female foeticide.”

Magnitude of the Problem in Punjab

The following figures are revealing and an eye-opener for Punjab. For every thousand males born, female births have been sharply declining.

District	Year 1991	Year 2001
Amritsar	878	775
Jalandhar	886	775
Kapurthala	879	783
Hoshiarpur	884	810
Nawanshahr	900	810
Ropar	884	810
Fatehgarh Sahib	873	754
Ludhiana	877	814

Moga	867	819
Firozpur	887	819
Muktsar	858	807
Faridkot	865	805
Bathinda	860	779
Mansa	873	779
Sangrur	873	784
Patiala	871	770

Haryana, Punjab lead in child sex ration decline

Hindustan Times, October 21, 2003, The declining child sex ratio (CSR), i.e., number of girls per 1000 boys compiled by Census Commissioner and Union Ministry of Health and released by Health Minister Sushma Swaraj says, "Ideally it should be 940-950 girls for 1000 boys, whereas, it has dropped from 850-899 girls in 1991 to 800 to 849 girls in 2001." Figures are similar for Haryana. My aim is not to drown you in a deluge of the statistics but to apprise you of the magnitude of the problem. Again on Oct 23, 2003 *Hindustan Times* reported – Delhi is a misogynistic society. Much of the discrepancy in CSR is because of female foeticide. Behind all this is the mindset of considering the girl child a liability.

If this trend continues, it will become very difficult for Punjabis and Sikhs specially to find Punjabi wives; they will be either forced to remain bachelors or marry outside Punjab, or only one son in the family will get married. All the options are not good for a healthy society / a progressive Sikh / Punjabi society.

Remedial Measures

- a) Religious measures,
- b) Social measures,
- c) Government intervention

I quote from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib :

ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥

ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੇਸਤੀ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ ॥

ਭੰਡੁ ਮੁਆ ਭੰਡ ਭਾਲੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥ (GGS, p. 473)

Bhand means a woman.

These hymns from *Asa Di Var* very succinctly convey the significance of the Gurus' message for the status of a woman. By and large Sikh society obeys these commands. It is the ultra modern few

who consider their own wisdom superior to their Gurus and go against Gurus' teachings. When Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa, one of the guidelines was to avoid any relationship with *kuri mar*, destroyer of the female. We do not have to find any other source of sermons. Our Holy Granth conveys all that and Sikhs are enjoined upon to follow these teachings. So, in our religious congregations, gurdwaras, seminars, in-house discussions, this evil of female foeticide should form a special subject, and masses, especially Sikhs should be enlightened.

In the end, it is a satisfaction to note that Supreme Court had ordered Union Territories and States to take remedial measures against prenatal sex determination and female foeticide. Also there has been a *Hukamnama* by Jathedar of Akal Takht forbidding female foeticide. However, more vigorous and committed efforts on the part of the State, the community, and the clergy, especially Sikh clergy are required to rout out the evil.

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*Evil by the evil-doer is held dear;
Evil laden, in evil are his affairs spread,
Should man casting off evil, realize his self,
Neither shall sorrow touch him,
Nor sequestration and affliction.
How may man be saved from falling into hell.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 935

THE FAILURE (?) OF THE GURU*
– THE QUESTION –

BHAI ARDAMAN SINGH

In 1968, a question in history Part II BA (Punjab University) raised a strong protest from Sikh community. There it was taken as a question set by some sycophant out to win promotion or some other favours. In condemnation of this question my father (late) Bhai Ardaman Singh Bagrian wrote an article which I take this opportunity to share with our readers.

Looking at the anti-Sikh posture of some in the majority community, one is forced to look into history for anti-Sikh stances.

In spite of the fact that Sikhs made sacrifices for and during independent movement of India, yet in 1947 when Government of India should have had more important matters to address, a secret letter was issued on 10-10-1947 to the effect that Sikhs were, by and large, a criminal community. They were a danger to the peace-loving Hindus of Punjab. They should be watched.

When the matter went to Supreme Court in a case, the GOI conveniently replied that the file was missing. For Punjabi language to get its due unilingual status only Sikhs had to wage a struggle. The murderers of Sikhs are enjoying the best of life even today after 1984 massacre. Whereas in other instances like assassination of Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the cases were decided without delay.

In July 1984, Defence Ministry Circular *Baat-Cheet* dubbed all the *amritdharis* as murderers, etc. Even then the Sikh community was under shock. In August 1984 CRRID (Chandigarh) organised a seminar and the topic was *Separatism in Sikh History*. I pointed out to the organiser and the attendees and the learned on the dais that it was a maliciously suggestive heading.

In July 1999, in the the beginning of Kargil conflict, 8th Sikhs (Regiment) lost 22 of its 27 men (Sikhs), but their martyrdom has not been recognised as in other cases. It is for the Sikhs as a whole to be ever vigilant to safeguard their interests. And for the saner sections of Indian society as a whole to take note how this microscopic minority is treated by those who matter.

(Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian)

* Reproduced from *A Peep Into Sikhism*, published by Guru Nanak Mission, Patiala, 1978.

During these days, all eyes and efforts are turned towards bringing about national and emotional integration. For orderly and peaceful progress of India and for preservation of freedom, unity is of paramount importance. Any and every thing that may tend to undermine and jeopardize the solidarity of the Nation should be picked up and meticulously removed. Posterity will regard it as the test of wisdom of the present-day leadership.

The question No 4 (Punjab History) BA (TDC) Part II set in the Examination of the Punjab University held in May 1968 calls for an answer which no student could give. No sensible examiner would have expected a straight answer from a student whose aim is only to humour the examiner and get through the test. Even grown up intellectuals would hesitate to provide one.

The question reads:-

“What were the reasons which led Guru Gobind Singh to come in conflict with the Mughal Empire ? Account for the ultimate failure of the Guru”.

Such surreptitious sallies do not contribute to creation of mutual happy relations or goodwill. They only add fuel to the fire. The question has been put in bad taste and has distressed Sikh circles. But it has given indications of a deep-rooted malady which has been spreading its virus specially since last 40 to 50 years.

It is for the experienced politician, seasoned statesmen and senior leaders of public opinion, especially the saner and wiser element in the majority community and intellectual thinkers to diagnose and find out the disease and prescribe the remedy. It is high time they do it now. The real answer lies with them.

To arrive at correct conclusions, it is necessary to have the complete picture before you. It is, therefore, not so much an answer to the examiner's question but to complete the picture that I state below some very relevant and cogent facts of history. In doing so, I have divided the subject in four parts (1) The conflict, (2) The Guru's mission, (3) The failure and (4) The malady.

The Conflict

To come to the right conclusion, the difference between the outlook and mentality of the Hindus and that of the Sikhs, as regards conflict, ought to be properly understood and borne in mind. During the Ramayana and the Mahabharata periods people were in high spirit and in trends of glory, ever ready, and welcoming opportunities to face

and overcome conflicts with clean hands, courage and bravery. To quote an instance from the *Ramayana*, when Hanuman met Seeta in Ravan's captivity, he offered to take her away, but she refused the offer saying it was not right to escape stealthily like that; let Ram come, fight out, and take her back. We have an example in the *Mahabharata* also that Dropadi, after her humiliation in the Court, refused to do up her hair until she had washed them with the blood of Dusasan. But this spirit and mentality changed when after the battle of Kalinga, Ashoka embraced Buddhism and abjured 'The Sword'. For Ashoka personally, it may have been a great day. Some people even glorify it as the day of Realization and Transformation. In fact it turned out to be the beginning of the downfall of Hindu Supremacy in India. Renunciation and self-defence or governance do not go together. They are antipodes to each other.

Since this abjuration of the Sword by Ashoka and emergence of the cult of renunciation and non-violence, these brave and manly qualities and high spirit began to disappear and the Hindu outlook towards conflict underwent a complete change.

Another factor which contributed to the development of this mentality was affluence, love of riches and worship of *Maya*, Lakshmi. The alluvial and fertile soil of the Indo-Gangetic plains and the other rich productive lands of India provided them plenty with comparatively little effort. This made them easygoing and calculative. Goethe had once said that everything in the world may be endured except continual prosperity. And the weather made them further indolent.

There was yet another factor which gave support to tendency. This was individualism amongst the Hindus. Their worship and everyday life are all individualistic. That is why their religion and interest are strictly personal and revolve only around the self. Loyalty has therefore remained confined to family or caste or has been at the most tribal or regional. There being no opportunity for community assemblage, there was little neighbourly love or sympathy. It is a hard fact of history that there has never been what may be called an Indian Nation or any such idea, much less any feeling or sentiment, of what is called Nationalism. The present-day India was the formulation brought about for the convenience of British Administration.

The first time a picture of India as an Integrated whole was projected, was when the 'Five Beloved Ones' volunteered to offer their heads to the Guru at Anandpur in 1699. They represented the country as a whole in five regions and came from five different castes which

were merged into one Casteless Society by the Guru. Daya Ram was a Khatri and came from Lahore in the North. Dharam Das was a Jat from Delhi in the Centre. Mohkam Chand, a calico-printer belonged to Dwarka in the West. Sahib Chand, a barber hailed from Bidar in the South and Himmat Rai, a washerman from Jagan Nathpuri in the East. It was recently in 1965 that first time a conflict created an All-India feeling of one Nation, however short-lived it was.

Thus the Hindus developed a mentality which always tried to avoid conflict by even surrender, prostration, submission, and by appeasement or compromise. They could only harass and become aggressive towards those who happened to be weaker, but quailed and quivered when confronted by those who were stronger.

This mentality, therefore, resulted in opening the floodgates to foreign invaders to whom the whole country was offered as if on a platter for plunder, booty, massacre, and taking away wealth and men and women as slaves. And it remained a one-way traffic. India was always attacked and mutilated as it lay helplessly prostrate before anyone who liked to invade it. History tells us that India had never had the courage or capability to make an attack across its borders, though we try to cover this weakness and imbecility and deceive and please ourselves by calling it our greatness and peace-loving tendency. The first attack across the Indus from the Indian side was made by the Khalsa Army during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's suzerainty over the Punjab.

Consequently, we see the Indian borders shrinking from the Hindukush to the Beas and Hussainiwala on the Sutlej, and from Duzdab-Zahidan at the Iranian border to Rajasthan in the West, and from Burma to almost the walls of Calcutta in the East. In the North too, Gilgit and half of Ladakh and Kashmir have been eroded away.

We have to hang our heads low when we read in our History that to avoid conflict, some Hindu rulers offered their daughters to the Delhi sovereigns to appease and please them, and Hindu men of influence and vested interests joined hands with the tyrant persecutors of their own people.

The recent division of the country and creation of Pakistan are an evidence that this mentality and outlook still persist. Most of our present day policies also are worked out under this very obsession. The Sikh outlook is just the opposite of it. They are ever ready to face and indeed welcome a conflict, if it is against a bully or an oppressor of the weak. They prefer to die than to surrender.

The Mission

Guru Nanak in the end of the 15th Century found the country in this sorry state. His was the first voice after almost one thousand years of slavery, that was raised against tyranny and injustice at Eminabad during Babar's invasion of India. He not only protested against the high-handedness and tyranny of the aggressor-invader, but also remonstrated against the Delhi Pathans who could not protect and save the precious country under their charge. He also remonstrated with the subjects for submitting like sheep and dead men without realizing their responsibilities and he also complained to the Creator for bringing about the scourge on a helpless people. The mission of the Satguru was to change this mentality of helpless imbecility, and to bring about manly qualities of self-respect, self-help, self-reliance and service to the needy, with a will and conviction not to bow before brute force, injustice, tyranny, or high-handedness. The noble saintly virtues and Godly values were to be protected with even our lives, by offering sacrifices, and if called upon, by wielding the Sword. With anchor in one God, the evil and evildoers were to be extirpated, and the land and ultimately the Universe made safe for good and God-conscious men. The Guru's mission is summed up in the words of the 10th Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, himself:-

ਧਰਮ ਚਲਾਵਨ ਸੰਤ ਉਬਾਰਨ ॥

ਦੁਸਟ ਸਭਨ ਕਉ ਮੂਲ ਉਪਾਰਨ ॥

*To uphold and advance righteousness,
and to emancipate the good. 'the Saint in us'*

To extirpate evil and evildoers, root and branch.

The mission was to create a nation of God-conscious people always ready with their 'heads on their palms' to do service and good to others and punish evildoers. In doing so, if any conflict comes in the way it was to be faced and conquered even if life itself has to be offered and sacrificed.

We find that the Great Shankracharya also noticed this depraved degradation brought about in the country by this mentality of self-humiliation and avoidance of conflict. From South to North and East to West, he untiringly worked to re-awaken the people back to manliness. As a consequence of his great and laudable efforts, the pre-Buddhistic Brahmanism was revived and self-humiliating non-violent Buddhism packed out of the country, lock, stock and barrel. But the virus had gone so deep into the minds and brains of the people that

one human span of life was not long enough to complete the task. Although Buddhism was banished, it had left behind its marks and effects on the thinking and living of the people. In some form or the other, they still continue and persist. And Jainism, a sister School of Buddhism, managed to escape the onslaught of the Great Shankracharya and stayed on in the country.

It took the Sikh Gurus four generations to do the brainwashing. When the spiritual re-awakening and regeneration of ‘man’ and resurrection of human values and restoration of consciousness of the self, and mental, moral, and social uplift was complete, the fifth Guru announced :-

ਹੁਣਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਆ ਮਿਹਰਵਾਣ ਦਾ ॥

ਪੈ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਕਿਸੈ ਰਵਾਣ ਦਾ ॥

ਸਭ ਸੁਖਾਲੀ ਵੁਠੀਆ ਇਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਹਲੇਮੀ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੀਉ ॥

The Merciful Lord hath now given the Command,

That no one will henceforth domineer over

And give pain to another.

And, all will abide in peace,

Such being the Rule of Merciful Lord.

After the martyrdom of the 5th Guru, the values and principles for which he gave his life, were not surrendered. The 6th Guru then took up the Sword to uphold, and protect them, and the light, that was thought to have been extinguished, flared up into a big blaze which ultimately consumed its antagonists.

The finality to this mission was brought about by the Guru in his 10th Form, when in his hand the two Swords of *Miri* and *Piri* which were separately worn by the 6th Guru, merged into one double-edged Sword called *Khanda*. It became the Creator of a liberated new Order when of this *Khanda*, the *Khalsa* and then the Guru himself took the *Amrit* in 1699, and the Guru became the Sikh and the Sikh the Guru. This took two hundred years to build a nucleus of Society, a living organism, with instruction to grow and prosper and perpetually evolve, guided by commonsense and *Shabad*, i.e., the Omnipresence of the Guru, and capable of propagating itself without waiting for any Prophets and *Avtars* to appear.

That this mission of the Guru was a complete success is borne out by instances and happenings, a few of which I have picked up and give below:

During Babar’s invasion Guru Nanak, moved by the atrocities

committed by the invader, not only protested against the bloody aggression but even courted arrest. He set the example that such a conflict must not be sidetracked and shirked or swallowed abjectly, but has got to be met face-to-face even though it may mean suffering and sacrifice.

The martyrdoms of the 5th and 9th Gurus are the pinnacles of this resurrection, regeneration, and rediscovery of character and manly virtues. It should be noted that both of them had prepared their sons and successors to wield the 'Sword', because if passive and non-violent effort and sacrifice failed to cut ice, it must not mean surrender of values and principles. When other means have failed it became incumbent to use force. The 6th Guru was 11 years and the 10th was 9 years of age when they succeeded to the Guruship.

That this spirit generated by Guru Nanak and the way of life nurtured and established by his nine successors had come to stay is evident from the subsequent happenings.

In December 1715, Bhai Gurbaksh Singh Banda Singh Bahadur was arrested by the Mughal Forces after the siege of Gurdas Nangal and taken to Delhi along with 740 Sikhs. They were executed in the beginning of March 1716, one hundred a day. It is noteworthy that not a single one of them, and there were even some teenagers amongst them, abjured his faith or faltered.

In the Great Holocaust at Kup near Malerkotla in February 1762 about 30,000 Sikhs were killed by the Durrani and their native allies. But even this did not affect the morale and the high spirits of the Sikhs, who continued the conflict (struggle) until final victory was won, the Mughal Empire uprooted, and the whole of Punjab brought under their sway.

A sample of this regenerated spirit could be discerned when the Durani invader was taking away amongst the booty about 25 to 30 thousand Hindu girls as slaves to Afghanistan. The Sikhs, unmindful of any risk to their lives, attacked the Durani hordes, rescued these helpless Hindu women from their clutches, and escorted them safely to their respective homes.

Recently, an evidence of this unsubduable and ever-shining spirit and unflinching determination and readiness to serve and sacrifice, was provided at Jaito and Guru Ka Bagh during the Akali movement to emancipate the gurdwaras.

The glorious deeds of the Sikhs both in the Army and the countryside during 1962 and 1965 are as outstanding as they are

unequaled, when some others trembled at the sight of blood and started to get heart attacks.

The Failure

Now we come to what the examiner calls the ‘ultimate failure of the Guru’ and causes of his conflict with the Mughal Empire.

We have seen that as far as the Guru’s mission was concerned, it was an unqualified ultimate success. The revolutionary evolution was complete. The change had affected the minds of the people. A will was created in the masses to resist tyranny and to live and die for an approved cause and free life. If justice was not given, it was to be exacted. With unflinching faith in one God, a fearless and useful life was to be lived. The motto was :

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ,

ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

Do not terrorize anyone,

nor submit to domineering by anybody.

This will to resist and never to abjectly surrender before tyranny and injustice naturally brought the conflict on with the tyrannous and bigotted rulers of the country who happened to be Mughals at Delhi and Hindu Rajas in the Hills. In a long-drawn war, battles are sometimes won and sometimes even lost, but it is the ultimate result that counts. And the pages of History are overflowing with the glorious deeds of the Guru’s Sikhs and their success in uprooting the Mughal Empire. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Baghel Singh Karorsinghia with their thirty thousand Sikh fighters were ultimately able to ride triumphantly into Delhi in 1790.

If by the ultimate failure of the Guru, the examiner refers to worldly riches, luxurious family life, and dominions, etc, that, according to his own materialistic outlook, is to a great extent correct. But he is evidently scrambling at the base groping in the dark, or has deliberately blinded his vision, or may be he is camouflaging his ignorance and merely posing to be a master of the subject without knowing the very elementary outlines of History and is viciously creating misunderstanding and bad blood. The very crux of the teachings of the Satguru was to be above such mundane considerations and worldly attachments.

After routing the Hindu Hill Rajas at Bhangani in 1686, if he had so wished, the Guru could have occupied a vast territory that lay at his

mercy. Similarly, if the Guru had wished, he could very easily have taken a chunk of the Punjab for himself when he helped Bahadur Shah in the War of Succession and got him the Delhi throne.

Looking from this angle, Lord Krishna's was also a similar failure. His strategy and direction having won the great war for the Pandus, he himself ultimately fell to a fatal arrow in the lonely wilderness of a Gir forest. And his brother-in-law, the invincible and brave Arjun, while escorting the ladies of the family from Dwarka, was waylaid and looted by the Bheels. The teachings of the Great Geeta, that brought Arjun back to fulfil his duty and protect his honour, have been forgotten; and the Geeta, to uphold the ideals of which the greatest battle of India was fought at Kurukshetra, has been pigeonholed in some freezer and replaced by the lifeless self-humiliating non-violent Buddhistic ideals of renunciation of the Gandhian brand, which were themselves thrown to the winds in 1962 and 1965. That was the great tragic failure.

The life of great men with a mission, the life of martyrs, of service and sacrifice, is apparently beyond the perspective and understanding of such people as the examiner who can only look low to the base.

The reason "which led Guru Gobind Singh to come in conflict with the Mughal Empire was the word given by his father, Guru Teg Bahadur to the distressed, persecuted, and helpless Hindus at the hands of bigoted Mughal rulers, that their Dharma will be protected and Mughal tyranny extirpated. Guru Teg Bahadur and a band of his devoted Sikhs laid down their lives for the cause of those Hindus at Delhi and for no cause of their own. In the History of martyrs, this sacrifice, offered for the principles of others and not one's own, is unique and stands unequalled. This link was taken up by his son and successor, the 10th Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh. If he did not meet with immediate 'worldly' success, and a long drawn conflict had to be fought, it was because the Hindus themselves let him down.

It were the Hindu Hill Chiefs who started to harass and attack the Guru. The first battle he had had to fight was against the attack of these Hindu Chiefs at Bhangani near Paonta Sahib. Being routed by the Guru, these Hindu Rajas approached the Emperor at Delhi and brought the Mughal Forces to help them against the Guru. So these Hindus lighted the fire, and the conflict with the Mughal Empire began.

It should be interesting to note that Mohammadans, like Rai Bular and Bhikhan Shah, were the first to see the Light in the Satguru and had always been exercising their influence in the Mughal Court to bring about rapprochement, understanding and peace with the Gurus. Some

of them like Sayyad Budhu Shah, Said Beg, and Maimu Khan have even been fighting against the Mughal Forces on the side of the Satguru as they appreciated his rightful stand.

On the other hand, there has always been an important element among the Hindus that has invariably opposed the interests and the very existence of the Sikhs who have always been burning their fingers in picking up chestnuts from the fire for them. Although they have been professing to be brothers and calling the Sikhs as one of them, yet in fact they have never been able to tolerate their existence. By calling them as one of them, "they have, in reality, meant the denial of any separate Sikh Identity."

During the first Holocaust, the Lahore forces were under the personal command of Lakhpat Rai, and it was at his instance that the proclamation for extirpation of the Sikhs in 1746 was issued.

Ghani Khan and Nabbi Khan, the two Pathan brothers of Machhiwara, took the Guru on a planquin on their shoulders and with the timely assistance of Qazi Pir Mohammad, got him through the enemy lines to safety after the escape from Chamkaur, when the Hindu and Muslim Imperial Forces were in his pursuit. They risked their own lives for him, while Gangu Brahmin, an old servant of the family, to whom the two youngest sons of the Guru, innocent children of 7 and 9 years, along with their grandmother were entrusted, betrayed them to the Mughal officials; and they were cruelly tortured and put to death at Sarhind by Wazir Khan in spite of the protest of the Nawab of Malerkotla. The Sikhs have always remembered with appreciation the noble part played by the Nawab and demonstrated their grateful feelings as late as even in 1947 by respecting and sparing the house of Malerkotla as ever before.

We know the majority of the Hindus are clean and above it, and are dear and close to the Sikhs. Some of them are close relatives and some even intermarry. A great part of the devoted Sikhs, even who are called Sehajdharis, are in Hindu shapes. But their voice being noble is gentle and is not heard amidst the loud din of noisy slogans and propaganda of the bigoted communalists. As this intolerant and bigoted element belongs to the majority community, they, in a democratic set up, masquerade and pass off as nationalists, while the minorities when asking for even their bare necessities for survival are dubbed as communalists. This intolerance against the Sikhs has been so from the beginning and continues to be so to this day.

It has been the Hindus, like Chandu and Suchanand, who kept up

a sustained propaganda in Mughal parleys and worked up the wrath of the Mughal rulers against the Sikhs, while Muslim men of God, like Hazrat Mian Mir, Bhikhan Shah and Budhu Shah had been exerting their influence to bring about rapprochement and goodwill. It was this class of the Hindus which brought the Gurus in conflict with the Mughal, and later the Sikhs with the Britishers and now again with the Muslims, whilst keeping themselves back in safety.

The painful fact worth noting is that even some top class Hindu leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru, also treated the Sikhs with contempt and displayed rank communalism when dealing with them. I give below just two instances to bear me out.

(In the middle thirties of 20th century, alarmed by the spate of conversions of the untouchables to Islam and Christianity, the great Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr Ambedkar realized that the salvation of the depressed scheduled castes from the unjust oppression and cruel, grinding tyranny at the hands of the Higher Castes since times immemorial, could only lie in their wholesale conversion to Sikhism. In their wisdom and farsight they drew up a scheme and agreed to a pact and started to implement it. Dr Ambedkar paid visits to Amritsar and left some of his fellow workers there to study and understand Sikhism and its Institutions. The Khalsa College at Bombay is one of the outcomes of this very fact. But to the misfortune of all concerned, this scheme was confided to Mahatma Gandhi on a strict and definite understanding not to let it out till the proper time. But unless the Mahatma was swept by communalism and prejudice against the Sikhs, why should he have thrown the confidence reposed in him to the winds and without any qualms of conscience committed a breach of faith by a premature condemnation of the scheme, saying "It would be far better that the *crores* of untouchables of India get converted to Islam than they become Sikhs." Eventually, at his threat to fast unto death the whole effort flopped)

Having lost that opportunity, the followers of the Mahatma now, when they observe their people being converted to Christianity and Islam, in their chronic helplessness, begin to supplicate the Government to stop these conversions and banish the missionaries. This is like old Hindu gods who approached the Goddess Durga and beseeched her to protect and save them, when they could not on their own defend themselves against the onslaught of the Demons. But they should not forget that the presiding Deity these days is a secular 'Goddess'. They had better study the thoughts of Pandit Malviya and Dr Ambedkar

again with unprejudiced seriousness.

(In 1929 Sikhs were given a solemn assurance by Hindu Congress leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and Pandit Jawahar Lal and also by a formal resolution of the All India National Congress at Lahore, that no Constitution of free India shall be framed by the majority community unless it is freely acceptable to the Sikhs. This was repeatedly reiterated from time-to-time until August 1947. But when later on Jawaharlal Nehru was reminded about it, he blandly told the Sikhs that circumstances had changed now. As if pledges are given to be eaten away when convenient. It is in common knowledge that a circular was passed on in the Punjab soon after the partition of the Country that an eye be kept on the Sikhs, who have since been looked upon as if they are aliens.)

It will be worth comparing here the words uttered by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in Calcutta in July, 1946. He then said, “The brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set-up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom.”

If *Geeta* had been there as the guiding star, the *Mahabharata* story of Gian would not have been forgotten. Gian was an old pampered servant of Lord Krishna. Once his insolence and insubordination annoyed Shri Krishna, who wanted to behead him. Gian ran for safety and Krishna followed in hot pursuit. It was a long chase. At the suggestion of Narada, Gian rushed to Arjun and sought his protection without disclosing who was after him. Protection was promised and the word given. Arjun did not try to wriggle out of the word given, when he came to know that it was Shri Krishna who was after Gian. So a fight between Krishna and Arjun ensued and it became so fierce and gruesome that Brahma had to come down to intervene.

In 1965, this class of Hindus forgot the sacrifice and martyrdom of their Saviour, Guru Tegh Bahadur and threw stones at his mausoleum, Gurdwara Sis Ganj, in Delhi.

When after the conflict with Pakistan, Prime Minister Shastri and some other Central leaders decided to form the Punjabi Punjab, the perfidy of a bigoted Home Minister and this element in the Centre manipulated to present a torso of a State (Suba) without head, arms or legs.

I have written these lines with a very heavy heart as I have some very close and dear relations with the Hindus. But when brought to notice, the question was such that I felt duty-bound not to let it go

without being dealt with.

The Malady

In spite of all what is stated above, we find the saner elements amongst the Hindus have always predominated. They have considered and treated the Sikhs as their big though younger brother. During the conflict with the Mughals, most of the recruits to the Sikh forces came from Hindus. Later on, we find, even conversions to Sikhism were mostly from the Hindu folds. In fact some wise and far-seeing Hindus have been advocating that at least one member of every Hindu family must become a Sikh. On the part of the Sikhs, they have been fighting the battles of the Hindus ungrudgingly and have always been suffering for their sake. When the steel clashed and flashed they cast their die with the Hindus and when the time to raise arms and show hands came, they took their sides. Then why should they still have been invariably let down, and their work and support and sacrifices go unappreciated and never recognized? On the contrary, suspicion and bitterness against the Sikhs have increased and are becoming acute day by day, specially since last two decades. Space does not permit here to narrate the shameful story of continuous and callous betrayals of the Sikhs throughout these years and the discrimination made against them in all walks of life. The communal Hindus of the Punjab in collaboration with like-minded Hindu leaders at the Centre have been trying to keep the Sikhs under their political subjugation. Their treatment and behaviour in dealing with the formation of a Punjabi-speaking State and falsely declaring that Punjabi was not their mother tongue are just some instances. The treatment meted out to the Sikhs outside Punjab, specially in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are other eye-openers.

This attack has taken another shape lately. (The Sikh culture, Sikh History and tradition, the Sikh religion and Way of Life are being subtly and surreptitiously run down, ridiculed and belittled in books, papers, and text books, etc. The University Examination Question under reference is an instance. Patronage and promotions of the apostates (*patits*) is another set of instruments with which attempt is being made to tarnish and disfigure the Sikh figure and image.) It leads sometimes one to sit up and think whether all these services rendered, sacrifices suffered, and valuable and noble blood shed for ungrateful lot of people were worth their while.

On the part of the Sikhs they have never been found wanting, then why should the Hindu majority community not have trusted the

Sikhs and taken them into their confidence? On the other hand, why have they always nurtured mistrust and animosity against the Sikhs? That is the question which poses a challenge to the majority community to provide an answer, find out the reasons and provide the solution. Impartial, unbiased and deep probing is called for to find out where the virus lies. Let the saner and wiser elements rise to the occasion and arrest the spread of the poison and prescribe some remedy *before it is too late*.

It is always for the majority community to win the confidence of the minority and keep it so satisfied that it may also be able to feel the glow of Independence and be proud of being counted as an important factor of the Country.

If the national integration brought about by the Guru, which every thoughtful Indian so very much longs for, cannot be preserved and maintained, then all and everything will end up in 'failure', for which the responsibility will be squarely with the majority community.

I hope what I have said will be taken in the spirit in which it is stated and will lead to some searching of hearts and creation of good will.

May good sense prevail everywhere !

❧

*God is like sugar spilled in the sand;
It cannot be picked by an elephant
Says Kabir:
Renounce thy lineage, caste and false honour,
And be an ant to pick and eat the sugar.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 972

THE MCLEOD CONTROVERSY

ISHWINDER SINGH*

Western scholars have been writing on the Sikhs and their religion since the end of the eighteenth century. Ernest Trumpp's *Adi Granth* (published in 1877) was the first work by a western writer that 'mortally offended' the Sikhs. In the recent past, the writings of Prof W H McLeod have probably generated the maximum amount of controversy and excitement. Ever since McLeod came out with his first book *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* in 1968, his findings and interpretations have been the subject matter of heated debate.

McLeod has offered a new perspective / interpretation on several fundamental issues in Sikh history, often diverging sharply from established tradition. Rebuttals to his formulations have been the subject matter of many books and seminars in the 1980s and '90s. McLeod has usually chosen not to reply to these rebuttals except for a few articles here and there.

Recently, McLeod has come out with his autobiography *Discovering the Sikhs: Autobiography of a Historian*. The autobiography comprises of two parts. While Part 1 is autobiographical, Part 2 contains his answers to the specific charges made against him and his interpretations.

The purpose of this paper is to look into some of the controversial points made by McLeod in his books, the rebuttals by other scholars and his response to these rebuttals in his autobiography. An attempt is made to take a dispassionate look at the merits of the points made by both sides. Finally an attempt is made to understand the reasons behind the whole controversy and whether the controversy could have been avoided.

Janamsakhis

In his first book *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, McLeod tries

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to reconstruct Guru Nanak's life on the basis of the *Janamsakhi* accounts available about his life and also his *bani* in the Guru Granth Sahib. He asserts that *Janamsakhi* accounts (hitherto used frequently to reconstruct Guru Nanak's life) are highly unsatisfactory sources for writing his biography.¹ In his book, McLeod critically examines the popular stories connected with Guru Nanak and rejects most of them as impossible and improbable.

In response to McLeod's critical analysis of the *Janamsakhis*, articles have been written to prove the authenticity of some of these stories (e.g., Baghdad, Panja Sahib). In his autobiography, McLeod stands by the conclusions in his book. He briefly mentions some of these articles while he ignores others. With regard to the Baghdad episode, where the competence and conclusions of his source have been challenged, he provides no fresh evidence in support of his theory except for mentioning a conversation with Dr Ganda Singh.

Nevertheless, the biographical part of *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* has generally been ignored, and most publications from within the Panth continue to treat the *Janamsakhis* as acceptable sources for the life of Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak's Teachings

Some scholars have criticized McLeod for stating that "Guru Nanak did not originate a school of thought, or a set of teachings, and he cannot be regarded as the founder of Sikhism."² They feel that by connecting Guru Nanak to the Sant-tradition, McLeod fails to recognize the originality of Guru Nanak's work and treats Sikhism as another Hindu sect.

However, the critics seem to have missed the point that the Sant-tradition, as presented by McLeod, is too broad and cannot be tied to any specific religious ideology. This tradition can easily incorporate any and all seekers of the Transcendent. As a bundle of theological generalities conceptualized metaphysical, the tradition can be linked to any important seeker of the medieval period.

In his autobiography, McLeod clarifies that he does regard Guru Nanak as the founder of the Sikh faith in the organizational sense, because the original nucleus of the Sikh Panth gathered around him. He further adds that no religious teacher ever speaks without manifesting influences from the beliefs that surround him. This was abundantly true of Jesus and it was also true of Guru Nanak. According to McLeod, the important components of Guru Nanak's teachings were present in

the Sant Movement of Northern India, yet the system he propounded was unique both in its composition and its beauty.³

Essentially, McLeod does not insist upon anything more than the commonality of ideas in the system of Guru Nanak and the so-called Sant-tradition. But his insistence that Guru Nanak can be squarely placed in the Sant-tradition confuses the issue. It emphasizes the importance of similarities in ideas at the cost of the differences. It becomes a case of confusing the part with the whole.⁴

Sikh Institutions

McLeod has also been criticized for stating in his book *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* that “the ten Gurus never preached one set of religious doctrines or system and particularly the third Guru created new institutions (e.g., pilgrimage center, festival days, distinctive rituals, collection of sacred writings, etc) on the old Hindu lines, the very thing Guru Nanak had spurned.”⁵

Dr J S Grewal is of the opinion that by assuming that Guru Nanak was opposed to institutionalization *per se*, McLeod misses the basic significance of what Guru Nanak did in his lifetime.⁶ We know that Guru Nanak assumed the formal position of a guide, started congregational worship with his own compositions, introduced the practice of *langar* and appointed one individual as his successor. In other words, he rejected contemporary institutions only in order to clear the ground for his own. Guru Angad carried forward this process of institutionalization by keeping up the congregational *kirtan*, enlarging the *langar*, composing his own *bani* and adopting the Gurmukhi script. Thus, Guru Amar Das was not the first Guru to create new institutions.

In his autobiography, McLeod states that the ten Gurus assuredly did preach one set of doctrines and this had been made perfectly clear in his book. He further clarifies that the institutions introduced by the third Guru were additions and not changes. He feels that his critics have objected to his statement about the introduction of customs taken from Hindu society because they want to get across the message that “Sikhs are not Hindus”. However, in his opinion there was nothing wrong in introducing these customs provided that Guru Nanak’s emphasis on *Naam* was preserved.⁷

McLeod’s use of the term ‘Hindu’ is unjustified in connection with what Guru Amar Das did. To have pilgrimage centers was not a peculiarity of Hindus. Gurbani was already being used for

congregational as well as individual worship; its compilation was only a logical step. The days of *Baisakhi* and *Diwali* were chosen for Sikh festivals not as a reversion to Hindu tradition but as alternatives to contemporary practice. One could participate in one or the other but not in both at the same time. The introduction of new rites was a corollary of the rejection of the traditional rites. The use of *Gurbani* in Sikh rites made them distinctly Sikh, imparting a new significance to them.

Jat Influence

Like many historians, McLeod takes notice of the large proportion of Jats in the Sikh Panth. He attributes many developments in Sikh tradition to Jat influence.

In his book *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, he suggests that the arming of the Panth was not the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind. In his opinion, the growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems that prompted a militant response.⁸

Many scholars have challenged the Jat theory put forward by McLeod. Prof Jagjit Singh has argued: if Jahangir felt concerned about Guru Arjun's growing Jat following, then why does he say in his *Memoirs* that he ordered the Guru's execution because he blessed the rebel Prince Khusro? Also, why was no action taken against the Minas and Hindalis, whose following also included Jats? He also feels that there is no basis for the assumption that the Jats were armed and the Khatriks were not.⁹ Moreover, despite the martial tradition attributed to the Jats as a class, there is no indication that the Jat *zamindars* of the Mughal province of Lahore were *zor-talab*, that is, they had to be compelled by force to submit the revenues they collected. There is no indication that the Jats of Punjab rose against the state except as members of the Sikh Panth.¹⁰

In his autobiography, McLeod states that Guru Hargobind's policy of open warfare must be traced to the hostility that the Mughal authorities in Lahore showed at that time. The presence of a strong Jat constituency made his policy possible, but it certainly cannot be held to have caused it. He further adds that the effect of Jat cultural patterns within the Panth is a theory and not an established fact. However, he is yet to be persuaded that there is a better theory.¹¹

McLeod's rebuttal is based on the assumption that Jats were present in the Sikh Panth in considerable numbers during the time of Guru

Arjun. However, the proportion of Jats in the Sikh Panth in the late sixteenth or the early seventeenth century cannot be estimated from the evidence available at present. It is possible that Guru Hargobind's military policy could have been the factor responsible for their increased number in the Panth.

In the same book, McLeod states with absolute certainty that the Five K's reflect the complex of Jat cultural patterns and contemporary historical events. He maintains that keeping uncut hair and bearing arms were Jat customs that received ample encouragement from the events of the eighteenth century.¹² With these two symbols, he pairs the comb and the bangle, respectively. He, however, has no explanation to offer for the *kachchera*.

Probably no Sikh scholar has endorsed this rather mundane explanation for the institution of the Five K's. Many have stated that no supporting evidence has been given which indicates that uncut hair was a Jat custom. In his autobiography, McLeod draws their attention to the footnote wherein he has given his sources. Dr J S Grewal feels that the evidence on *kes* suggests that the Jats at one time used to keep their hair long. But the Jats attached no sanctity whatsoever to their hair. Long hair is not the same as uncut hair. For Guru Gobind Singh, the sanctity of the *kes* was all-important.¹³

Others who have studied the sources feel that they are not credible. They assert that the point is so crucial to McLeod's hypothesis that it demands more reliable and acceptable evidence. Grewal states that the *kirpan* does not appear to have been popular with the Jats and Guru Hargobind was the first Guru to make it important.¹⁴ He rejects McLeod's explanation by saying that it is not even an 'informed' conjecture.¹⁵

Sikh Scripture

McLeod has drawn lot of criticism from Sikh scholars for his suggestion that the Sikhs might have later on deleted a portion of the *Ramkali* hymn in the Kartarpur Manuscript of the Guru Granth Sahib, because it mentioned the hair-cutting ceremony of Guru Hargobind. In his opinion, this feature was in obvious contradiction to the later prohibition of hair cutting and hence the reference in the hymn would be intolerable.¹⁶

Responding to this criticism in his autobiography, McLeod states that the above quoted portion was his 'earlier speculation', which he had gone on to disown after a few lines.¹⁷

However, this is not the impression that the reader gets on reading the relevant pages. After the paragraph containing the above quote, one whole paragraph is devoted to Jodh Singh's testimony about the authenticity of the Kartarpur Manuscript. In the paragraph that follows, McLeod states "that the issue should still be regarded as open" and goes on to renew his suspicions about the *Ramkali* hymn.

Even if one is to accept the argument that the 'earlier speculation' was disowned in the lines that followed, one question still remains unanswered: why was the earlier reasoning mentioned at all, especially since it made very serious accusations on the Sikhs?

McLeod is now of the opinion that research on the compilation of the Sikh scripture is a subject better left to Sikh scholars for detailed research.¹⁸ Probably this is the reason why two of his Sikh students undertook their research projects on the Sikh scripture. Interestingly, their hypothesis [which McLeod is believed to support] that the *Goindval Pothis* provided the source material used by Guru Arjun in compiling the Guru Granth Sahib has not received much support from other scholars. Scholars who were thought to be supporters of this hypothesis have unequivocally stated that sufficient internal evidence exists in these *Pothis* to disprove any borrowing by Guru Arjun.¹⁹

Guru Granth- Guru Panth

McLeod has also been criticized for making the suggestion that Guru Gobind Singh had not conferred personal authority on sacred Scripture and the corporate Panth at the time of his demise. It was subsequently adopted by the Sikhs to meet the needs of the Panth for cohesion.²⁰ Many scholars have cited evidence from the *Gur Sobha* to disprove McLeod's theory.

In his autobiography, McLeod states that he had put forward the above hypothesis as a possible theory and not as a definite conclusion. At that time, he was an adherent of the view that *Gur Sobha* had been composed in 1745. But others had subsequently convinced him that it had been composed in 1711. He is now of the opinion that near-contemporary evidence suggests that Guru Gobind Singh might have conferred personal authority on the sacred Scripture and corporate Panth at the time of his demise. Hence his theory might have been mistaken. However, he adds that no firm evidence exists for the belief that a pronouncement to the effect was made by Guru Gobind Singh.²¹

It is evident from the above statement that McLeod is convinced that his theory is probably wrong. But rather than completely retracting

his statement, he keeps a window open by putting a rider. However, there appears to be little room for suspicion as the idea of Guru Granth-Guru Panth was in currency even during the times of the earlier Gurus.

The compositions by Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjun [Guru Granth Sahib pp. 635, 943, 982, 1226] make it abundantly clear that the Word was equated with the Guru from the very beginning. From the literature of the early seventeenth century it is evident that the idea of *sangat* as the Guru, in the absence of the personal Guru, had emerged well before the death of Guru Gobind Singh. McLeod has explicitly referred to this fact in his book *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*.²² The injunction of Guru Gobind Singh can be seen as the culmination of the above two ideas, which were current during the times of the earlier Gurus.

Misinterpretation of Gurbani

In a recent article, Dr Baldev Singh has pointed out that McLeod has misinterpreted many verses from the Guru Granth Sahib to justify his assumption that Guru Nanak accepted the doctrine of *karma* and transmigration.²³ While interpreting *karmi aavai kapra nadri mokh duar* (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 2), McLeod translates *karmi* as actions or *karma*. Dr Baldev Singh quotes Prof Sahib Singh and Macauliffe to show that the adjective *karmi* merely refers to the Almighty as the Kind or Gracious One and has nothing to do with *karma* (action).

On his part, McLeod maintains that in his opinion Guru Nanak did indeed accept the reality of transmigration, but only for those who failed to follow the leading of the divine Name. He feels that Guru Nanak does not devote much time to transmigration. His principal emphasis instead goes on the power of the divine Name whereby transmigration is overcome.²⁴ Further, he prefers not to comment on the charge of misinterpreting Gurbani and feels that the readers should judge for themselves.²⁵

Intellectual Arrogance

McLeod has often drawn a distinction between his 'historical' method and the approach followed by many who do not agree with him. Even in his autobiography, he repeatedly refers to The Institute of Sikh Studies as 'traditionalist' and Balwant Singh Dhillon's *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition* as a 'conservative' book. The implication is that the traditionalist-follower of the religion is perhaps not intellectually rigorous enough.

I.J.Singh feels that this is a bad distinction and not good science. Historians are also a product of their social milieu, limited in their vision of the truth by the fragmentary records available to them and by their own biases. Complete objectivity is an ideal that simply does not lie within any scientist's or historian's grasp.²⁶

McLeod's former students have often suggested that the 'historical' approach is Western and thus more to be admired for its intellectual integrity and rigor. I J Singh feels that this is intellectual arrogance. He says that he is unable to discern any loss of objectivity or honesty in the writings of Kapur Singh, Kahn Singh Nabha or Vir Singh just because they happen to be Sikhs or because they wrote in India.

Western Historical Methodology

McLeod has always maintained that being a Western historian he has been taught to doubt all historical evidence and to accept it as accurate only when it answers sceptical questions concerning the sources – tradition alone will never serve the purpose.

Dr I.J.Singh is of the opinion that this position is tantamount to claiming that everyone is assumed guilty unless proven innocent or that everyone's fatherhood is in doubt unless direct proof accompanies the birth certificate.²⁷ He feels that a desirable starting point for a rigorous historian would be to assume that traditional lore is generally true unless proven otherwise by the overwhelming weight of unimpeachable evidence. Such an approach, in his opinion, is consistent with the modern scientific method.

In his autobiography, McLeod accepts that his research suffers from all the limitations of the Western historical method. He admits that there might be truth in the claim that he fails to fully appreciate the mythical nature of many of his sources because he is not trained in Eastern patterns of thought. He, however, believes that the Western concept is fully justifiable.²⁸

Sceptical Historian

McLeod has frequently referred to himself as a sceptical historian. In response to this, some have asked – is it not the place of a scholar or historian to be objective rather than sceptical?²⁹

In his autobiography, McLeod admits that he might have chosen wrongly to address himself as a sceptic. A 'sceptic' is generally understood to be someone strongly biased towards doubt and disbelief,

and this is the meaning that the critics have read into the word. This, however, is not the meaning that McLeod wanted to get across.³⁰ But he is unable to choose an alternative. He examines two other words – ‘critical’ and ‘objective’, but feels that they are also inappropriate.

Readership

In his autobiography, McLeod tells us that as far as the religion of the Sikhs is concerned, the object of his research is not to tell the Sikhs what they should believe, but rather tell the inquisitive Westerner what Sikhism apparently means in terms they can understand.³¹

However, Prof Noel Q King is of the opinion that McLeod’s intentions differ widely from the expectations of his readers. An educated person in the English-speaking world wanting to learn about Sikhism turns to the books of McLeod, which are published by Oxford University Press and command a world market and world publicity. To an uninitiated reader, however, his books seem to reiterate the notion that ‘a great amount of Sikh belief’ is based on ‘uncritical religiosity’. Furthermore, these books disappoint the reader by not tapping ‘the wellsprings’ of Sikhism, something that made Guru Nanak ‘tick’, ‘the heart of Sikhism’. Instead, what they find in his publications is ‘meticulously and exhaustively carried out drills in certain methods of Western criticism’.³² Therefore, he feels that McLeod’s books don’t satisfy the expectations of his targeted readers.

Controversy and Regret

In his autobiography, McLeod wonders why his recent work as also that of others, who have come to be linked with him, has not attracted much criticism. He feels that it might be because Sikhs are now concerned with more immediate issues like visible Sikh identity, Akal Takht, etc., and their interest has largely shifted away from foreign academics.³³

A possible explanation that seems to have been overlooked by him could be that due to past controversies these authors have been more careful in their later writings. Even in McLeod’s case, his later works have not raised any new controversial issue. His recent books only further elaborate some of the points that he has previously made in earlier publications.

McLeod further tells us that he is not surprised that his works generated controversy. Neither does he regret the controversy that has arisen over his writings, at least not in the general sense.³⁴ He, however,

deeply regrets the fact that the promising undergraduate course in Sikh Studies at the University of Toronto was discontinued because of the controversy surrounding him. He further regrets that many Sikhs conceal their relationship with him and their approval of his work because they do not want to get 'tainted'. Even though he does not say so, it is evident that he regrets not receiving due recognition from the Sikh community, whom he spent his lifetime studying.

Conclusion

The question which then arises is why have McLeod's works generated so much controversy?

Many explanations have been offered, e.g., missionary zeal, Eurocentrism, etc. McLeod on his part has always maintained that he has a concern for sympathetic understanding.

The question is not too hard to answer, if we recognize a basic human trait – the desire to be innovative. The desire to discover new lands had spurred many adventurers to undertake dangerous voyages without worrying for their safety. Historians are also humans and have the same psyche. The urge to say something new has caused many historians to rush to conclusions without putting their theories through the same rigorous analysis as they employ in the case of others. It would be quite clear from the above discussion that while McLeod has been overly critical in examining the traditional accounts, the same amount of criticality has not been extended to his own theories and interpretations. As a result, many times half-baked theories have been served after rejecting the traditional accounts.

He has also been guilty of sensationalizing issues to catch the attention of the readers, e.g., referring to Guru Amar Das' innovations as "reintroduction of traditional Hindu customs". On some occasions, he has made serious accusations on the Sikhs, but has not cared to quote any evidence to support his statements. His statement that "Jats commonly bewail the fact that there was never a single Jat Guru"³⁵ is a very serious accusation but no study has been quoted to support it. All that he writes is that this is "uttered often enough in conversation".³⁶ However, I have never ever heard such an 'impertinent' suggestion – what to say of hearing it often enough! Trying to attract the attention of the readers in this manner is the *modus operandi* of journalists, not of responsible scholars.

One wonders if the controversy could have been avoided?

Research and controversy go hand-in-hand. Controversy can be resolved amicably if the author responds quickly to the objections raised by the critics. McLeod could have avoided the controversy over his writings from flaring up, if he had immediately addressed the contentious issues through publications or by inviting his critics to a seminar / meeting. Instead, at that time he kept on saying that he was a sceptical historian, who was here to ask questions and it was for Sikhs to answer the questions.

If the clarifications given in McLeod's autobiography had been made ten years ago, in all probability, 'The McLeod controversy' would have been a dead issue today!

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*Such alone are reckoned God's true servants,  
As for the Lord yearn.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 578

KOMAGATA MARU  
– RIOT OR MASSACRE ? –

MALWINDER JIT SINGH\*

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It should be appropriate to recapitulate the chain of events which culminated into the bloodbath of 29th September, 1914.

During the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee in England in 1897, the Government sent Sikh Lancers and Infantry Regiment to London to attend the Jubilee. After the celebration these stalwart Sikh Soldiers were to return home by way of Canada. After crossing the Atlantic by ship, they travelled from Montreal to Vancouver by train. On the way they saw fertile lands, great rivers and lakes, open skies, the mountains, forests and wild life. They had left their small pieces of lands in India to the big landlords and moneylenders. They were land-hungry sons of Punjab. Hunting wild animals was one of their hobbies. They thought of settling in Canada to fulfil their dreams.

On the way back they told their dreams of the new world to their compatriots, posted at Shanghai, Hongkong, Singapore, Penang and Rangoon.

After reaching home, some of these soldiers returned to Canada in small batches and brought with them some of their friends from Hongkong and Shanghai.

There are unconfirmed reports that some of the soldiers from their Regiments deserted their Regiments and stayed behind in Vancouver. Another unconfirmed figure is given that there were about 100 Sikh soldiers in Vancouver in 1900. But there are pictures available in our records to show that there were a good number of retired Sikh soldiers in and around Vancouver in 1904.

During the years 1904-07 hundreds of such migrants settled in the Canadian province of British Columbia on the western coast having a climate not much different from that of Punjab, to work as workmen in timber factories and for laying of railway lines, thus acquiring a distinct identity of their own in Canada.

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The jealousy of their entrepreneurial skills and technical achievements had a fallout in the form of racial jealousy which impelled the white bigots to found Asiatic Exclusion League on 7th Sept, 1907 pledged to maintain Canada as 'purely white state'.

Consequently, on 8th January, 1908 the Canadian Government bowing to the lobby of racialsists promulgated an 'Order in Council' making the entry of Indians well nigh impossible by stipulating the condition of continuous journey and through (direct) ticket from one's native country since no such facility existed then at least so far as Indians were concerned. Subsequently in June 1908, one further hurdle was placed in the way of prospective Indian immigrants of making the possession of \$200 in cash mandatory while landing in Canada.

Soon after, i.e., in 1909 Indians started raising voice against these discriminatory provisions instanced by an article in monthly *Modern Review* published from Calcutta (August 1909 issue) by Sant Nihal Singh titled *The Triumph of Indians in Canada*. The Indian community based in Canada on its part also reacted by holding congregations in gurdwaras, passing resolutions on the issue which were then published in the monthly *Swadesh Sewak*.

To lobby for their cause, a delegation on behalf of United Leagues of India and Khalsa Diwan Society representing Indians in Canada was sent to the Canadian capital Ottawa, but the Canadian Government refused to budge from its stand on the matter of immigration laws.

The proposal to charter a ship by Indians themselves was first mooted in 1911, but failed to materialise primarily for want of necessary resources.

In the meanwhile in Dec 1912, a deputation of leading Indians from Canada was sent to seek redressal of their grievances from governments in London as well as Delhi. So the delegation sought time from British Minister for Colonies on 14 May, 1913 who refused even to entertain them and instead deputed his ADC to receive them. He, expectedly, refused to do anything in the matter. Then on Dec 20, 1913 the delegation submitted a memorandum to Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, in person, this being their Charter of Demands. In para 15 of the Memorandum it was pointed out that, "While the Chinese and Japanese found no difficulty in getting their naturalisation papers after 3 years stay in Canada, no Indian has yet been able to do so owing to obstacles thrown in their way."

Ironically, the Canadian Government, instead of redressing these grievances, deported Giani Bhagwan Singh, a *granthi* at Hongkong

who had been forced to leave that place for propagating 'sedition' in the gurdwara, and had then come to Vancouver to continue his mission of educating Indians to struggle for their rights. It was done on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1913 in violation of all the laws of the land.

Ultimately on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1914 the Viceroy of India 'responded' to the Memorandum of 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1913 by bluntly refusing to 'interfere' in the matter.

The delegation had then no other option than mobilising public opinion in the wake of the bland refusal of both the Governments in London and Delhi by holding meetings at London in England and at a number of places in India. These legal and purely peaceful measures too aroused the ire of the rulers who considered the leaders of the move as dangerous men who utilised the opportunity as far as possible to stir mischief in India.

So in January 1914, Baba Gurdit Singh (Sarhali, Amritsar) an enterprising businessman founded Indian Steamship Company titled Guru Nanak Steamship Company, and chartered a Japanese ship S S Komagata Maru for the purpose of transporting Indians to Canada to circumvent the *de facto* ban on the entry of Indians in Canada.

Interestingly, as a foreboding, *The Tribune* of 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1914 published a news item titled *The Four Hundred Hindus* highlighting the predicament of Indians intending to emigrate to Canada mentioning that the costly and difficult risk they had taken will not, we hope, be summarily turned back. Such an exclusion will create trouble for the Government and the time has come for the Canadian Government to remove the irrational prohibition against Indians contained in the continuous journey clause. It is this offensive clause that has led the Sikhs to face the Government opposition and those who are inclined to blame the 400 (passengers) evidently lack the moral courage to condemn the indirect manner in which Indian subjects of His Majesty are insulted and prevented from joining their friends and relatives now settled in thousands in Vancouver.

During the voyage of the ship from India to Vancouver (29<sup>th</sup> April to 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1914) various Indian leaders addressed the passengers on board making them aware of the 'reception' being devised for them by the Canadian Government and exhorting them to resist the impending challenge with all their might while pledging full support to their cause by the Indian community already settled in Canada.

Not unexpectedly, the ship on its arrival at Victoria port of Canada on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1914 was not allowed to touch the shore and was forced

to remain stranded in the sea till 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1914 when it was forced to return along with all the passengers to India. All legal steps to get the passengers land in Canada were tried but to no avail. The passengers had to do without food for many days, and they were often assaulted by the police resulting in injuries on both sides. Even a threat to sink the ship was given by the Canadian authorities which was withheld, presumably because the Indian community threatened that in that case they would set fire to the entire city of Vancouver!

According to the intelligence reports of the Indian Government, Baba Gurdit Singh on both the voyages, to and from Canada, ‘posed as a revolutionary leader’. Revolutionary literature too was freely distributed among the passengers inciting them to raise the standard of revolt on their return to India. This presumably refers to the literature smuggled into the ship by the Ghadar Party through its president Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna who had been deputed from USA to contact the ship leaders while they were in Japan.

The ship on its arrival at Budge Budge port of Calcutta was accorded a ‘reception’ which became a symbol of brutal oppression and suppression of the legitimate grievances of a subject race.

(Note – The above account is based primarily on the compilation by Giani Kesar Singh Canada, published under the title *Canadian Sikhs* (Part One) and *Komagata Maru Massacre* (Second Edition 1997, published by the author himself).

### **Events following the arrival of the ship at Budge Budge**

#### ***The Official version which failed to wash***

The status of Passengers as on 11th Oct, 1914 :

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Total                            | 321 |
| Left for Punjab in special train | 59  |
| Left behind, women and children  | 3   |
| Balance                          | 259 |
| <br>                             |     |
| Killed at Budge Budge            | 16  |
| Died from wounds in hospital     | 2   |
| Found drowned                    | 1   |
| Balance                          | 240 |
| <br>                             |     |
| In hospital in Calcutta          | 9   |
| In jail in Calcutta              | 168 |
| In jail outside Calcutta         | 24  |

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Total                             | 201 |
| Balance still to be accounted for | 39  |

***Damage on the Official Side due to riot***

Killed = 3 police personnel + 1 Railway employee, presumably due to army firing.

Injured = 16 (5 due to bullet injuries and others due to non-firearm injuries).

**The scenario of firing — A melee**

In a communication from Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, to the Bengal Governor in connection with the release of detenues, it was observed that those who had been detained primarily because they had suffered injuries in the occurrence, may in fact be innocent since in a melee such as took place, it is quite as likely as a guilty man to have been wounded, perhaps more so”.

**Unfolding of the event**

“After some conversation with Sir William Duke, who had gone out and persuaded the Sikhs to return to Budge Budge, we went forward on foot and arrived at the Railway Station just as the Sikhs reached it and were sitting down. They occupied the road parallel to and on the west side of the railway, from which they were separated by an iron railing about four feet high. Mr Donald, on arrival, asked for Gurdit Singh who was pointed out to him at the end of the crowd next to the station. It was rather dark by this time, but it was possible to see a man’s features if one looked closely. Gurdit Singh showed no disposition to move, and one or two European sergeants stepped forward, I presume to fetch (read apprehend) him. Immediately all the Sikhs near Gurdit Singh sprang to their feet and closed round him. The excitement seemed to be spreading to other people who were farther away and who could not possibly have known the cause of it. I moved off several paces to my own left, attempting to pacify these people and asking them to sit down and keep calm; immediately a shot was fired. The flash caught my eye and I should say it came from behind Gurdit Singh and to his right that is nearer to the level-crossing. No sooner had the first shot been fired, than a large number of others followed. The European sergeants started firing. The crowd broke and swayed, some of them charging forward to attack the police. I had a Browning pistol in my pocket and I drew it and fired seven shots at people who were advancing on me. I was standing near the level-crossing and a

good deal of hot hand-to-hand fighting took place between Sikhs and some men of the Punjab Police. It was in this early part of the scuffle that I received two bullet wounds, one in the right forearm and other one in the upper thigh. The next impression I have is that the Sikhs were gathered in force round the huts on the left hand side of the road as one goes from the level-crossing towards the river. They were tearing away the ‘bamboos’ of which the huts were composed, presumably to use them as *lathis*. A good many shots were fired from about these huts. After making one or two abortive rushes forward, the Sikhs broke and fled. The troops had been standing in columns of fours some short distance behind at the time the riot commenced, and from the confident and the daring way in which the Sikhs attacked I feel sure that they were not aware of the presence of soldiers. In my opinion some 40 or 50 shots might have been fired by the rioters and they may have used about 10 or 12 pistols. I saw no Winchester rifles and no swords, but as the rioters were grappling with men of the Punjab Police it is quite possible they succeeded in capturing one or two swords from injured policemen.” (D Petrie)

### **Were there any firearms with the passengers?**

From the perusal of the entire report, all that had been found in evidence regarding recoveries, one 38 pistol from the spot with some empties of the same bore, which according to the report could have belonged only to the passengers since neither the troops nor the army had any weapon of that bore. Additionally one pistol of the same bore was recovered from one of the passengers at Midnapur which could have no palpable link with the said ‘riot’.

But what is left unsaid is that none from among the police officials including D Petrie had seen any of the passengers wielding a firearm. The simple recovery of a particular weapon from the spot could mean many things. Above all, had the passengers such kind of weapons, and had then fired from point blank range, as per the scenario of a melee, the casualties on the government side would have been many more. In the facts and circumstances of the case, the officials hit by firearms were so hit, primarily because in a melee a bullet having hit one man can penetrate through and through causing injury to a second person particularly in case of high velocity weapons like a rifle. Besides, the accuracy of a weapon like a pistol is very limited. Hence, the bullets which hit the officials were in all likelihood fired from their own side. Expectedly, there is no word about the kind of bullets

recovered from the bodies of victims on the official side which indeed is the clinching proof in the realm of ballistics.

### **The context bares it all**

The bare facts narrated above shall fall into place once we peep into the mindset of the authorities in the matter :

1. The steps taken from time to time to meet the purpose of the Government, led to the riot. From the statement of the objects it can be seen that these steps were well calculated to give effect to the 'wishes' of the Government.
2. According to D Petrie, the Punjab police Chief had heard Gurdit Singh arguing (on 29<sup>th</sup> September morning) "that none of them (passengers) would go ashore at Budge Budge; he also said if they had done anything wrong, a judge should be sent for to take their statement, after which the government could shoot them or do what it chose; if there was any question of dying they would all die together, and so on".
3. "It is a question of common experience that Indians too often return from abroad with tainted political views and diminished respect for their white rulers". And finally,
4. "That while some of the more ignorant (passengers) may have been persuaded that the disembarkation at Budge Budge was for some sinister purpose, yet the ring leaders and Gurdit Singh used it simply as an excuse because they had been foiled in their attempt to make a demonstration at Howrah, as they had sent telegrams from Singapore expecting a demonstration when they arrived at Calcutta."

So all the sinister design the government in its discretion aimed at foiling, was a demonstration of sorts on the arrival of passengers at Calcutta, which possibly in the eyes of the authorities had to be pre-empted 'at any cost'. So the passengers must have to be huddled into the prison bogies of the railways to be dumped at chosen places in India at scattered places so as to prevent them from lodging even a peaceful protest over an issue in which they were nursing a legitimate grievance.

*Note : The second phase of this writing is based on the material which the present writer is accessing from the National Archives for compiling a publication incorporating the core documents relating to the saga of Komagata Maru.*

## PURDAH – THE SECLUSION OF BODY AND MIND

PRAHLAD SINGH\*

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Ancient Hindu scriptures make a clear distinction between respectably married wives who conform to the social and religious norms and the single women like ‘Devdasis’ ‘Nagar Vadhus’, ‘Ganikas’ etc., – the public women who had their own specific roles. The presence of a wife was essential at any religious or social function, and she participated freely in such activities. No woman covered her face, and it is difficult to find any mention of purdah which word is of Persian origin. Draupadi not only had her face uncovered in the Pandavas’ court but also untied her braided hair to take a vow of vengeance.

Jawaharlal Nehru in *Discovery of India* writes, “There is no record of purdah during the Hindu period. With the advent of Muslim rule it was accepted by Hindu society partly in imitation of the manners of the rulers and partly as an additional protection for Hindu women.”

Sudhir Jain in *Feminine Identity in India* observes that social status of a woman is determined by the degree of adherence to the code of behaviour. “To be a good wife is to be a good woman.” He quotes Manu, the lawgiver : “Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be worshipped as a god by a faithful wife; by violating her duty towards her husband a wife is disgraced in this world, after death she enters the womb of a jackal and is tormented by punishment...”.

Purdah is specially observed by Hindu women when they join the last rites of a dead body and perform mourning by breast-beating (*siapa*) and loud wailing (*vain*) soulful rendering of folksongs of sorrow (*dirges*) which recount the good attributes of the departed soul and the gloom inflicted upon his near and dear ones. Such public demonstration of grief is called *moonh kajna* (covering the face).

According to *Matsya Purana*, mistresses and concubines were viewed as the property of one man and enjoyed social acceptance and

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respectability. The legend of Amrapali states that she was born in the mango grove of Mahanama of a plantain tree, and was a comely damsel who remained independent as it was decreed that she was not made for marriage to one man, but for the pleasure of the community. Such independent women had access to learning of all traditional faculties including dancing and singing. Amrapali is said to have been blessed with sixty four arts (*kalaas*) whereas the *sudarshan-chakradhari* Lord Krishna, the Colossus, has been given the epithet of *solah-kalaa-sampooran* (blessed with sixteen arts).

-2-

*Ghoongat* or veil for covering the face is common among the Hindu married women. A chaddar may be used to cover the head and the upper part of the body. A white chaddar is usually worn by a widow or a woman in mourning. In upper class Hindu homes only the daughter-in-law observes purdah. When a widow is married to the younger brother of her deceased husband this union is called "Chaddar *dalna*" because the husband takes over the duties of her protection. In Bengal there is a practice of *anta pura*, the interior house, where the women are secluded, the men keeping to the front portion. There are purdah-clubs and purdah-hospitals for exclusive use of the females.

Lord Rama, eulogized as the personification of ideal code of conduct (*Maryada Purushotam*), in his discourse to Vibhikhan, advises that even better than a veil of cloth or physical seclusion by high walls, is the ethical conduct of a woman.

Mirabai, the renowned saint-poetess, pleads for discarding the mental veil of duality and opening the doors and windows of the inner self to have a vision of the beauteous Lord.

Seclusion is woven into the woof and warp of a number of novels – Bankim Chandra's *Raj Mohan's wife* and *Indira*, Tagore's *Home and Abroad* and *Gora*, Sharat Chandra's *Parineeta* and E M Forster's *Passage to India* – to name just a few.

The main reasons that prompted the custom of seclusion are :-

1. The myths of creation project woman as secondary and man as the primal being. Among the Jews and Christians it is believed that a male God who created the Heaven and the Earth along with all forms of life in six days, first created Adam and then Eve from the ribs of the male, who was considered Primal (*Genesis* I, 1-3).
2. In the *Rig Veda* also, creation is the outcome of separation or dismemberment, "The second is created to form a pair<sup>1</sup>."

3. In Greek mythology, Zeus, the male god is depicted as the Father of Heaven<sup>2</sup>.
4. In the Quran while projecting the paradise of after-life (*jannat or paradise*)<sup>3</sup> a woman is depicted as an instrument of male sexual gratification and in this Shahida Latief<sup>4</sup> traces the sanction of purdah to the verse from the Quran enjoining modesty “Say to the believers that they cast down their eyes and say to the believing women that they cast down their eyes (77).” It is enjoined on all the Muslims to desist from coming face-to-face with the Prophet’s wives. “And when you ask them for anything, ask them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and also their hearts.”

- 3 -

In the kings’ or *nawabs*’ harems (*zanan-khana*) only eunuchs were detailed for security duties. Chastity belts, a locking system for the middle portion of the female body were commonly used and their sale is still booming in Arabian countries.

Sir William Muir refers to the story about Mohammed’s surprise coming face-to-face with Zainab, the wife of his adopted son Zaid, and exclaiming, “Gracious Lord! How thou turneth the heart of men !”, When he heard about it, Zaid volunteered to divorce his wife for the sake of his father. But *Rafiq Zakaria*<sup>5</sup> observes that Zainab, who became the prophet’s seventh wife was unhappy because Zaid had been a slave before being adopted. But this interpretation makes the confusion worse confounded because the Quran enjoins all Muslims to treat the slaves on equal terms.

Virgin *houris* (*hoors*) are promised as a reward for the faithful believers.

“Therein will also be chaste maidens (virgins) of modest gaze whom neither man nor *jinn* would have touched before..... as if they were rubies and small pearls. (hence such most precious commodity must be kept covered)”.

Uprati H C and Nandni in *Women and Problems of Gender Discrimination*, Pointer Publishers, Jaipur, 2000 observe, "It is a matter of great sorrow that Islam came to India in its bigoted form specially with purdah, the prominent hallmark of feudalism. Its enforcement became so pervasive that any woman found without a veil was ruled as shameless and outside of decent society. It has become difficult for Muslim women to make significant contribution to the expenses on their own upkeep and education or improvement of economic condition.

The purdah-bound woman is a poor educator (except, of course, in the field of theology) of her children and generally fails to motivate them towards higher goals, restricting their aspirations and achievements.

"In Muslim countries whenever a women has to go out she must be escorted and she will refuse to answer questions to any unknown person which renders the task of systematic surveys for collection of essential data almost impossible." (page 132,133).

-4-

Asghar Ali Engineer (*Problems of Muslim Women in India*) writes, "Women who observed purdah were thought to be chaste while those who violated it were dubbed 'immoral'. In Saudi Arabia, even today women are not allowed to travel unescorted although there is no Quranic injunction against it. During the medieval times, the period necessitated this and it later became an essential ingredient of the *Shariat*."

Naseem Rahman (*Blue of Noon - Cosmopolitan* May 13, 2002) referring to Afghanistan, writes, " Every Muslim society has its own version of the veil, but the hooded *burqa* is reducing woman to a ghostly anonymity. The Iranian chaddar fully reveals the face and allows hands and eyes to be exposed, but the *burqa* is an all-encompassing garment, with the face flap making even casual eye contact impossible. All this expresses a widespread anxiety - that the Islamic fanatics haven't really been routed, that they are just lying low to fight another day. Some have modified its design by cutting away the front portion, retaining the cloak and the draconian hood, so you can be startled on the street by two brightly coloured trouser-legs on high heels briskly walking towards you in a powder-blue haze."

Purdah is also promoted by the Indian constitution as the election commission has waived the provision of photographs in the voters' identity cards of *parda-nashin* (*burqa*-clad) women, accepting their thumb impression as a proof of identification

It seems that the women were free to visit mosques in the early period of Islam. This practice was later condemned as good men found it difficult to concentrate their minds on prayer in the presence of women. Levy, in *Social Structure of Islam* says that Mohammed himself was not averse to allowing women to pray in his company and declared that they could go to the mosque, if their husbands permitted. However, certain conditions had to be fulfilled. "Women should not be dressed up and perfumed while visiting the mosque, the woman should not stand amongst the men but always seven steps away from them, the

women are asked not to join in the prayer with a loud voice" (Levy-131).

Sayyad Abdul Alla Maudodi adds another restriction saying that in the state of menstruation, a highly personal and private matter would be revealed to people and, hence, she should abstain from visiting the mosque during the period of pollution.

-5-

Shibani Roy in a study on the *Status of Muslim Women in North India*<sup>6</sup> observes: "It (purdah) is a male imposed symbol of domination and seclusion symbolizing the eclipse of a Muslim woman's identity and individuality." The woman, by wearing it, submits to male domination and gives up claim to personal liberty. In her poem *Grace* Imtiaz Dharkar<sup>7</sup> expresses her protest and anguish on seeing an elderly Muslim accusing a woman of defiling the mosque.

Dharkar's *Purdah I* and *Purdah II* are a means of projecting the shame and dishonour of women. It has become a symbol of culture by elevating the position of the male in the pyramid of patriarchy.

The politically suppressed and the under-developed intellect is compared to a dead body and the *burqa* to a coffin.

*The cloth fans out against the skin much like the earth that falls  
on coffins after they put the dead men in.*

The purdah is like closing the doors and windows of the mind and constructing a wall between the women and the world.

*A light filters inward,  
through our bodies' walls.*

*Voices speak inside us,  
echoing in the spaces we have just left.*

But disobedience to tradition can prove fatal or lead to total rejection. The irony of her being remembered only on Moharram saddens her.

*The table is laid at Moharram  
and you are  
remembered among the dead  
No going back; the prayers are said :*

She sums up her poem by the anticipation that some day the 'coin of freedom' will drop in and bring about the metamorphosis of a dead larva transforming it into a free flying butterfly to make a new beginning. She longs for :

*At least a sign*

*behind the veil, of life.*

This new sign of life is awaited by the better half of human society so that a whiff of fresh air blows away the bondage of the body and opens the doors and windows of the mind.

-6-

The Sikh Gurus rejected the ideas of inequality of any kind on ground of caste, color, gender or geography because :

*Saith Nanak, the Guru has lifted the veil of illusion,  
Whichever way I turn, O brother, I see my Lord  
The veil of ignorance is thrown asunder ,  
The restless mind has ceased to wander (Rag Suhi)*

The ideology of all humans being the spouses of the *Akal Purakh*, the Timeless, Deathless Creator, struck a death-blow to the idea of gender bias.<sup>8</sup>

The gender difference perishes with the physical body when all human beings strive to mingle with the Ultimate Reality. The august audience is achieved only if the aspiring micro-soul possesses the affinity and has been able to retain the purity at par with the All-Pervading Supreme Soul. Thus, instead of degrading or denouncing the women folk, the Gurus declared themselves as the *suhagans* (spouses) of the Eternal Lord to reinforce the concept of equality of genders.

The use of purdah or veil is prohibited in the Sikh code of conduct (*Rahit-Maryada*)<sup>9</sup>. From the very inception of the *Panth* women have been given responsibilities in the *manjis and peerhas*, the chairs of authority, where they performed the dual role of administrator and religious preacher – a position equivalent to the bishop-cum-parson in a Christian church. Hence, the problem of purdah has never existed.

In Guru Granth Sahib there is no mention of purdah, although most of the other matters and issues under the sun that concern humanity at large have been dwelt upon. The insitution of *sangat* (congregation) and *pangat* (common kitchen) succeeded in promoting an open society. A woman is entitled to the highest rank in the Sikh religious as well as political hierarchy. The recent controversy about rights of Sikh women to perform religious services in accordance with the tenets of the faith reinforces their aspirations for a review of attitudes regarding their status and rights.

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*That woman alone is beautiful,
Who adorns her forehead
With the jewel of love.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 54

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN SIKHISM

HARDIT SINGH*

Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), founder of Sikhism, was born in an age of strife between the Hindus and Muslims in India. In the name of God, poor and innocent people were being persecuted and exploited. In the words of the Guru, “The rulers had become ravenous, and love and amity had taken to wings”. A pure vision of God had been lost and replaced by futile rituals and ceremonies. Guru Nanak felt the need to stress the unity of God and oneness of humanity to correct these conditions.

Before embarking on his mission, Guru Nanak made two significant statements. One was concerning the concept of God defined in his creedal statement, known as the *Mool Mantra*. The second described the oneness of humanity — “*Na koi Hindu na Musalman*” — there is no Hindu, no Muslim, implying that mankind is one without caste or creed distinction.

The *Mool-Mantra* is the most precise, concise, and distinct definition of God, giving, in just eight terms, all of His attributes and characteristics. It expresses His transcendental and immanent aspect. The *Mool Mantra* also spells out the fundamental principles and cardinal tenets of Sikhism.

The *Mantra* appears as a prologue to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture and their Eternal Guru, and is repeated throughout its holy text in full or abbreviated form to stress its importance and vitality. The rest of the Granth Sahib is its exposition.

Ek Onkar (One Supreme Being)

The first letter of the *Mool-Mantra* is the numeral ‘1’ (One). This has been placed to stress the Oneness of God and humanity. The Oneness of God implies the one and the only God; the one without a second; the one of complete supremacy; the one unopposed. He is the one

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unequaled; the one Who is omnipresent, omnipotent, transcendent and immanent. He is one Who is absolute in all respects.

The numeral '1' precedes the word *oang* modified with the addition of a sign (*kar*) and the whole term is spelt as *oangkar*. It denotes infinite existence, infinite consciousness and infinite bliss. It also expresses that God is both *Nirgun* and *Sargun*, i.e., unmanifest and manifest at the same time. Before the creation, He was in His *Nirgun* state and after the creation, He also became *Sargun*. As *Nirgun*, He is *Nirankar*, i.e., without any form, shape or colour. Whatever is visible or *akar* is His *Sargun* personality. His *Nirgun* attribute can only be realized by His grace and through contemplation on His Name. God being immanent and absolute, He is ineffable, i.e., beyond any description, and dwells in every heart from an ant to an elephant. This is a significant point, because it establishes the relationship between man and the Divine.

Guru Arjun Dev (1563-1606) describes the *Nirgun* and *Sargun* state of God in his *Sukhmani Sahib* (the Psalm of Peace) in the prologue of canto 21 as :-

*The formless one is both Absolute and Related;
He Himself was in the Primordial trance,
And Himself stirred the Divine energy into the creation,
Through which He contemplates Himself.*

In the text of this canto, the Guru explains that God is the ultimate source of all the physical and moral distinctions which we take so seriously, and which cause so much human conflict. All our disintegrating social and religious tendencies could be transformed, if we understood that God transcends and unifies all. He is also the moral and spiritual force working in all beings. He is the Reality. Bhagat Kabir has described this Reality in one of his compositions "*Awal Allah noor upaiya*" :-

God first created Light; all else to His might subject.
Since from one Light is the whole world created —
Who is noble, who inferior ?
Folks, brethren! Be not lost in illusion.
The Creator is in the creation;
In the creation abides the Creator, pervasive everywhere.

Sat Naam – (Truthful Reality of Existence)

God has no name. If He is to be given one, that is 'Truth'. *Sat* is His Truthfulness, unchanging; the ultimate Reality, the eternal verity

of His existence — the absolute truth within and absolute truth without. *Naam* is His name. Name is God. As great as He is, so exalted is His *Naam*. There is no place where He is not present. “*Naam* sustains all life. *Naam* supports the whole of the universe. *Naam* is the totality of His Reality and Existence” (*Sukhmani Sahib*). *Naam* has three main functions. It removes darkness of illusion (*maya*), it illuminates divine knowledge (*gyan*), and it unites with God (*moksha*).

God is known by various names, such as, Ram, Rahim, Allah, Khuda, etc. But Guru Nanak Dev preferred to call Him as *Sat-Naam* which according to him is His primeval Name. In his prime composition *Japji Sahib*, he states that “God was True before the creation, was True in the beginning of the universe, is True now, and shall remain True for all time.” In his other work *Asa di Var* he states:

*True are Thy universes, regions,
Countries and created objects.
True are Thy works and Thy purposes,
Thy orders and Thy edicts,
Thy rule and Thy administration,
Thy mercy and the mark of Thy acceptance.*

Guru Nanak Dev maintains that not only God is true but whosoever seeks Him, worships Him, dwells on His Name and hears His Name also becomes true. The worship of His Name means the singing of His praises or remembering Him. The only thing that is untrue is the worship of the transient, which is impermanent.

Karta Purakh (The Ubiquitous Personality, The Creator)

He is the creator of the cosmos. *Purkh* is the universal spirit: Himself as the creator, with various souls emanating from Him, like rays of the sun.

Guru Arjun Dev qualifies what is stated above in his canto 11 of “Psalm of Peace” as under :

*God is the cause of all causes, and the ability to do is with Him.
Only that which pleased Him comes to pass.
There is no end or limit to His power.
He can set up or demolish His creation in an instant.
He supports it with His will, and,
There it stands without any prop.
It comes out of His will and will go back into His will.
It behaves high or low according to the workings of that will,
And passes through various phases and moods.*

*God lives in all things,
And working through them beholds His own glory.*

Nirbhau (Fearless)

God is Fearless. Devoid of fear means possession of qualities of intrepidity, and that He is beyond restraint.

“By remembering the Fearless, our fears also disappear” (*Sukhmani Sahib*). God is not to be dreaded. His dread, if any, should be like that of a benevolent father, who is outwardly harsh but loving within. A loving father’s retribution is of a corrective nature. He does not instil fear in His creatures. Likewise we should neither cause fright nor be afraid of any one.

Guru Nanak devotes the whole of the stave 4 of *Asa di Var* to describe the aspect of God’s fear to maintain equilibrium and unity in His creation. A few excerpts are :

*The wind blows in hundred blasts in fear of Him.
Hundreds of thousands of rivers flow in fear of Him.
And the earth remains pressed under its burden.
In fear the sun and moon travel millions of miles without end.
All are subject to His fear, Nanak;
Only the one Formless and True is without fear.*

Nirvair (Without Enmity or Hate)

God is the Father of His creation; He permeates every soul. Every one irrespective of caste, color, creed or nationality is equal before Him. He is loving, kind and benevolent not only to His devotees but also to atheists and agnostics who also receive their share of bread and other benefits. The attribute of *Nirvair* assures equality and justice for every one without any discrimination.

Guru Arjun Dev in one of his compositions illustrates the consciousness of a devotee who perceives God everywhere:

*Put away from my mind envy of others,
As company of the holy I have attained.
None now is our foe nor a stranger —
With all are we in accord.
All that the Lord does have we found good —
From the holy is such wisdom received.
The sole Lord in all creation is pervasive;
At this sight is Nanak in bloom of joy.*

Akal Moort (Immortal, Eternal Form)

Akal means immortal, *Moort* means a form, a shape. The word jointly means that God is outside the effects of time. "Established by no one, created by none, God alone is pure, the self-existent One." (*Japji, pauri 5*)

Ajuni Sehbhang (Unborn, Self-existent, Self-illuminated)

Since God is Formless, He is not subject to birth and death; He created Himself. He is self-existent, self-illuminated. Therefore, to equate prophets or gurus with God is not correct. They cannot be even called His incarnation. God's existence is independent. "God is self-created; so is His Name" (*Asa di Var*). This attribute is the very anti-thesis of the theory of incarnation (*avtarvad*).

Gurparsad (Divine Enlightener's Grace, Omni Benevolent)

Gurparsad means that God is embodiment of Divine Light and Grace. Guru is the preceptor and the divine enlightener who dispels gloom of ignorance. He is the beacon light to lead human beings to righteous and virtuous path. Guru is the conglomeration of right thoughts, behaviour, and action. His holy spirit inspires us to remember God and ultimately merge with Him.

In Sikhism, communion with God is obtained through *Shabad*. Only a formless spirit can merge with Formless God. This sets aside the belief that a living Guru is needed for salvation.

Parsad or grace means that God is bestower of all the blessings. He is benefactor, benevolent, kind and merciful :

*By His grace you live in comfort on the earth,
And enjoy the company of your wife and children,
Brothers and friends.
His grace provides you different pleasures to enjoy,
And all kinds of necessities to live with.
The blind fool has fallen victim to ingratitude;
O, Lord ! Save him by Thy own grace.*

(*Sukhmani Sahib*)

SPIRITUALITY

JOGINDER SINGH*

Guru Nanak sermons that contradictions of life, truth and false, virtue and vice, honour and dishonour are all a part of the cosmos created by *Akalpurkh* (God). The coexistence of the contradictions is Nature's law. They are the two sides of the same coin minted by God.

If we are to judge what is 'Truth', we can do so only if we are aware of what 'False' is. If we are to imbibe 'virtues', we must be able to identify what 'vices' are, to maintain distance from them. Then if we eradicate falsity and vices from within us, truthfulness & virtues are automatically generated in our being, projecting in us the glimpses of *Akalpurkh*, the truthful one.

Spirituality is as much a part of oneself as is the daily materialistic activity. Spirituality guides one towards the righteous action. Spirit, the vital principle of man is synonymous with God.

Spirituality means unfolding of one's hidden virtues by His grace and recede away from evil, marked by refinement of mind. The spark of spirituality is inborn in everyone. Blessed are those who protect the spark and develop it into a flame from their childhood. Others wake up as the years roll by. The secret of the achievement of spirituality is *sankalp*, determination to develop faith and follow the precepts laid down in the holy Scripture, giving an exalted state of feeling.

God And Spirituality

Since the ultimate destination of one's soul is to merge with the soul of God, constant awareness of God and His attributes is crucial so that spiritually one progresses in the right direction. For visualizing the right path, it is of utmost importance to cultivate 'faith' in the existence of God and 'His Word'. Unless and until one cultivates and develops faith, one continues to float aimlessly like the driftwood. Faith is essential not only when one desires to take a flight towards spiritualism, but it is

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fundamental to any successful endeavour. If you have faith in your effort, God comes to your help at every step. On the other hand, doubt and quandary lead to the malady of confusion within oneself, even though one may deceptively look calm from without.

God is omnipresent and pervades the universe. He is all around us. He permeates in every animate and inanimate being. A sculptor prepares his clay with water. After the clay is ready, if we ask where is the water, it is difficult to answer because it is saturated in the clay. A housewife mixes flour with water and prepares the dough. If we then ask where is the water in dough, it is difficult to answer because again the water is completely soaked in the flour to become one with it. Similarly God pervades the universe and is omnipresent like the water in the sculptor's clay or in the dough; He is not physically visible. It is only a question of getting aware of His presence. Routinely, we are so involved in our worldly activities that we remain oblivious of His presence. It is only when some esoteric happenings take place in consonance with our desires and prayers, that we are jolted out of slumber, gradually but surely moving towards 'faith', a motivating force to live a more intense virtuous life leading towards spiritualism.

God sends us to this world with some specific assignment. Surely He would not send us to hang around aimlessly and then go back. Life's struggles, pains and pleasures are all directed towards the achievement of the objective set forth by Him. The assignment can be to bloom forth and nurture our children who are destined to surface in this world at the ordained hour. You may be commissioned to look after and serve some person for the whole of his life with your heart and soul even at the expense of personal suffering. The mission can be to go out in the world and spread the truth to rein the evil, as in the case of Guru Nanak Dev.

The important thing is to identify the work assigned to you by God. This can be done by deep introspection and by understanding oneself. Once you grasp this, the tumultuous sea within you subsides. The feeling that you are doing what you ought to do without expecting anything in return automatically brings tranquility to our soul. He who does what he ought to do in life is a spiritually-realized person. He performs his obligatory duties without worrying about the fruits of his actions. He does not look for approbation from others.

Guru Granth Sahib, the holy Sikh Scripture, is universal in its application to entire humanity irrespective of one's caste or creed. For Sikhs, it is not only a holy scripture but also a living Guru. The Granth

also contains the *bani* of enlightened souls of other faiths, like Bhagat Kabir, Baba Farid, Bhagat Namdev, Bhagat Ravidas and others. Couched in a deceptively simple poetry, the beauty of Gurbani lies in the fact that it speaks and conveys its message to one and all. Even an uneducated person understands the *bani* when he listens to it and feels elevated. A poet laureate is able to beautifully interpret the message, as the Guru speaks and guides the learned person at his plane of consciousness as well. *Sant mahatmas* recite the same Gurbani and receive the Celestial communication of spirituality at the still higher plane of consciousness. Being the Word of God (*dhur ki bani*) conveyed through the Gurus, it is simple yet mystic, spiritually allegorical and esoteric. *Amrit vaila* and the rising sun make an obeisance to the Celestial *Bani* each morning.

Gurbani is alchemy. It transmutes a debased person to a noble soul. The Guru's word infuses spiritual awareness in the faithful, leading him to peace and bliss.

Understanding Gurbani

*Recite His name with understanding.
With understanding obtain honour.
Reveal Him to yourself with understanding.
With understanding become the donor.
Sayeth Nanak this alone is the path divine,
all others lead to the devil.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1245

Guru advises that since Gurbani has an oceanic depth, one should recite it with an understanding. We read and listen to Gurbani more as a ritual than with dedication and commitment. We continue to recite our daily prayers *Nit Nem* as a routine, usually without contemplating on what the Guru is conveying. By meditating on Gurbani, one understands the self. One develops the habit of searching within and recognizing one's own failings in the light of the truth revealed by the Guru. When your failings are truly recognized by the self, they start oozing out of your system, and virtues automatically start filling the vacuum.

When reciting Gurbani, it is of utmost importance to grasp the import of what the Guru is saying. Guru's word alone can reveal the path to spiritualism. *Akalpurkh's* grace, wisdom and intellect guide you towards the righteous ways and develop your spiritual perspective.

*O mortal one, you have come to hear,
read and recite the Guru's Word.*

*Abandoning the Naam, thou attachest to other temptations.
Vain is thy life.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1219

This Celestial precept is required to be understood if we are to achieve the assignment given to us by God. Guru does not mean that we should go on listening and reading Gurbani without commitment. Guru is indicating that we should follow the path which Gurbani shows for living a noble life. We must mould our life accordingly and always remember the guidelines of the Guru. This will, atleast harness the volatile mind to some extent and save us from many a pitfalls during our journey towards spiritualism.

By listening to Gurbani one acquires knowledge. By uttering, one commits oneself to act upon it. When one recites, the Celestial knowledge acquired permeates in one's being motivating the mortal towards spiritualism.

Spirituality and His Grace.

Simran creates awareness that *Akalpurkh* is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent (*sarab nivasi sada elaipa tohi sang samai*), thus making you God-conscious, carrying you towards spiritual exhilaration. His grace is then showered on you, virtues bloom and the door opens to let the sunshine in, the sunshine which was always there, but was barred by a closed door.

In essence, 'spirituality' means to develop complete faith in and surrender to the will of *Akalpurkh*. One has to shed off fruitless desires and cease pursuing illusory momentary pleasures to focus on oneself and adopt the life of 'Detached Attachment' moving on the path to salvation as shown by *Naam* (Gurbani). For spiritual evolution, one does not need to renounce the materialistic world. One must continue to live truthfully a life of altruism, endeavour and enterprise. Wisdom lies in remaining conscious of the illusions around. Then hopefully, with His grace, in this life, one imbibes in oneself the transcendental, immanent traits of *Akalpurkh* sparkling in the credal pronouncement of *Mool Mantra*, thus culminating in ecstasy of the self and merging with *Akalpurkh*, 'the celestial fount'.

REVIEWS

EXPLORING SIKH SPIRITUALITY & THE PARADOX OF THEIR STEREOTYPING IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SETTING

A REVIEW BY JASWANT SINGH*

Author : Professor Colonel Nirmal Singh – EME Advisor to UN

Published by : Sanbun Publishers,

Price : Rs. 200/- (\$12.00)

Pages : 168

The book discusses vital subjects concerning Sikhs-Sikhism, Human suffering, Pursuit of justice, Music and Sikh spirituality, Reminiscence of September 11, 2001 disaster at WTC, USA, Sikhs and Media. These and many other essential topics have been dealt with daintily and deftly by the author who is versatile Electrical and Mechanical Engineer with indepth knowledge of man and machine. His deep interest in inter-faith dialogues right from earlier years has given him the maturity and breadth of vision to view and discuss Sikhism from a mature and higher pedestal, especially in American setting. I will discuss six out of eleven equally important chapters.

Sikhs and Sikhism

It starts with Guru Nanak's pronouncement 'there is no Hindu and no Musalman' – they are all children of one God. He touches Guru Angad's promotion of Gurmukhi script, Guru Amardas' establishing 22 diocese (*manjis*) sending 94 men, 52 women as preachers, introduction of *Anand Karaj*, the Sikh marriage and a host of other sterling reforms introduced by the Gurus, besides compilation of Guru Granth Sahib, evolution of the Khalsa, social customs of the Sikhs, their respect for other religions, Sikhs' role in history, Sikhs in America, their gurdwaras, their identity issue, etc.

Human Travails and Suffering

Travails and joy are inseparable part of our lives. He emphasises that Sikhism considers sexual relations proper only in marital setting,

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deals with *ahankar*, *haumain* in its various hues, discusses human suffering, physical, mental, moral, social, pain-pleasure, genocide and ethnic cleansing of the 20th century. The plight of women under Taliban, Sikhs antagonism of social and political dominance, their opposition to caste hierarchy, Guru Gobind Singh's *nash* doctrine, equal status for women, Gurus' preaching in the spoken language (not Sanskrit), cordial inter-religious relations and freedom of the conscience are adequately covered. Author extensively quotes Gurbani : 'recognize the whole human race as one', 'neither be afraid, nor cause fear to anybody', '*dukh* (suffering) says Nanak is universal'.

Fear of the unknown death is another cause of suffering. Author exhorts *Sukhmani* as panacea for suffering. Sikh suffering in history and Sikhs' response has been brought out. It is a chapter in introspection.

Music and Sikh Spirituality

Music is human attempt at harmony with self and nature..... Sikh music tradition began in medieval Punjab, and has blossomed over centuries. He traces music in Jewish-Christian tradition. In Islam no congregational singing is mentioned in Quran..... Sufis use music for worship; *Qawali* is their devotional singing. He traces the development of *kirtan* in Gurus' times. Sikh Gurus themselves were very well versed in music..... Noted Sikh warriors Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Deep Singh were accomplished in *kirtan* also. Whole of Guru Granth Sahib is written in 31 *ragas*. *Kirtan* of *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and poems of Bhai Nand Lal are permitted. Spirituality of *kirtan* is highlighted and its popularity is on the rise. He laments that acclaimed *ragis* like Samund Singh, Santa Singh, Surjan Singh have not encouraged their sons to continue their tradition due to low social status accorded to them.

Reminiscing September 11, 2001

He gives graphic account of tragic happening of Sept 2001 at the World Trade Centre in New York, America. The role played by Sikh volunteers, taxi drivers, the wrath unleashed by Americans on turbaned and bearded Sikhs under mistaken identity as followers of Osama-bin-Laden, author's sterling role in explaining to Americans by inviting them to gurdwaras, participating in inter-faith discussions, are described. The account is both heart-rending and heartwarming. Reading is

believing. He has brought out the distinct lesson for American Sikhs, to wake up from deep slumber of alienation and aloofness.

Sikh Stereotyping in the US

He traces the history of Sikh stereotyping in India as 'brave martial race, chivalrous, always willing protectors'. In TV and movies they are depicted as taxi or truck drivers. In America Sikhs are often mistaken as Afghans, Arabs or Iranians. He details the harrasment, humiliation and even murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in the September aftermath, and his heroic efforts to clear the mist of suspicion in American minds through print / electronic media, inter-faith dialogues, etc.

Sikhs and the Media

There is paucity of efforts through electronic or print media about Sikhs, Sikhism and effort to reach out to the American mainstream. Sikh organisations were quite cool about these efforts, and had to pay a heavy price. He advises the community to be proactive and media-friendly, and to get involved in discussion groups. He exhorts the Sikh youth to get into journalism, communication, TV stream and quotes Khushwant Singh's stint as editor of *The Illustrated Weekly* being highly beneficial to the Sikh image. The participation in Punjabi Pop, Bhangra and performing artists by the likes of Jaspal Bhatti, Daler Mehndi, Malkit have done commendable service to Sikh image in millions of homes.

This beautifully printed book throws a flood of light on Sikhs, especially in America and other countries. This Colonel is not only an expert engineer, he is also a very systematic, analytical and dedicated Sikh Scholar.

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*O mortal one, you have come
To hear, read and recite the Guru's Word.
Abandoning the Naam,
Thou attachest to other temptations.
Vain is thy life.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1219

* Book # 330A, Section 10-D, Chandigarh

child prophet Baba Aja Ji and the battle fought on his Guru father on Gurus. The passing away of Baba Budha Ji, Bhai Gurdas Ji and his life by the will of the Lord, the ideas so prominent in the Bani of the two talks of the events in the early life of the Guru, that taught him to personify of a judge and the magnanimity of a spiritual leader, Chapter tenderness of a poet, resolve and courage of a brave soldier, analytical Bhai Chand Ji, helped him develop a personality that had the future Guru under the care of Baba Budha Ji. Bhai Gurdas Ji and Bhai

Chapter One of the book talks of the birth and education of the to the incidents related to the life and personality of the Ninth Guru. the time of Sixth, Seventh and the Eighth Gurus, with special reference martyrdom in 1675. While recording the history, the author recounts Ninth Guru right from his birth on April 1, 1621 till the time of his by him comprises of 12 chapters, which recount the life history of the several articles and books on Sikhism. The first part of the book written directors of Sikh Welfare Foundation of North America. He has written in the University of Southern California, and is one of the founding the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, was a visiting professor. Harkam Singh, a polymer chemist and an academician, who taught in martyrdom of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur. Sahib has been written by Dr divided into two parts. The first part dealing with the life history and

The Book India's Guru Martyr – Guru Tegh Bahadur has been

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Authors : Dr. Harkam Singh, Jaswinder Singh Chadda

A REVIEW BY PRABHJOT KAUR*

INDIA'S GURU MARTYR – GURU TEGH BAHADUR
PORTRAIT OF A SIKH GURU

found, the melody in the compositions, esay vocabulary and the themes varied where a strong influence of Hindi and dialects of Bihar are present, the main teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, reference to Gurbans. The first chapter gives the format of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in

Part II is divided into three chapters : Gurbansavahi, Gurbans and of Part II of the book.

religion, has translated the hymns of the Ninth Guru, which form a part science and piety and has spent last 12 years in the study of Sikh

Gurbans. Jashwant Singh Choudhary, who had a successful career in various student of history.

at Kanpur, advocating eating of meat, is not substantiated by any Guru Tegh Bahadur serving a non-vegetarian piece in every vegetarian food along with most of the Sikh scholars. Similarly, the incident of the Seventh Guru presided his last because of the said shock, does not a 'word, of Gurbans in Anandgar, court', gives the impression that was greatly afflicted by the shocking incident, of Ram Rai's changing Sikh history. However, the remarks that "Guru Hari Rai's tender heart

In all, the history recounted is quite familiar to the students of events leading to his martyrdom at Delhi.

at Anandpur Sahib finds a special mention, and finally it records the Brahamins. Birth of Guru Gobind Singh at Patna Sahib and his training divine personality had a magical effect even on some of the masters his clear explanation of Guru Nanak's philosophy, and his humble and (Fateh), Dhaka, Assam, Cutack, Burmestrawar and Calcutta, where made to his visit to Kanpur, Bhandara, Agra, Patna, Benares, Allahabad

In the chapter on Eastern Odyssey, special reference has been regarding nature.

Guru's visit to Amritsar, Masand Sheehan's attack on the Guru and his Raja of Kerli are described. The chapters also find mention of the Sahib at Makhowal, which he purchased for Rs 200/- from the hill Bede Nanaki, five month tour to Malwa and founding of Anandpur him to be an accomplished soldier. His retirement and marriage to spiritual and military training and the battle of Kartarpur which proved legitimacy to the places related to the Second and the Third Gurus, his

The succeeding chapters recount the life history of the Guru, his and permanence of death.

lasting impression on his mind of the uncertainty of life and inevitability the eye of his sister, Bibi Vero's marriage were the events which left a

And the Destroyer of Fear,
Of Him who is the King of Light
(Performed with all Nature participating in it)
What a wonderful form of worship this is
Becomes the temple-drum:
And the uncanned celestial music
All vegetation are the flower-offerings
The wind the crowns-of-*tan*:
The fragrance of the sandal-wood provides incense,
While the galaxies of stars are as scattered pearls:
The sun and the moon are the lamps,
The firmament becomes the altar:
For the Art (worship) of God.

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quite good, though it seems to be priced quite high at Rs 200/-
and the Bani of the Ninth Canto. Quality of printing and the paper is
In all, the book is quite helpful to a new student of Sikh history
two pages contain a glossary of the words often used in the Bani.
A list of prominent Sikhs of Guru's time has also been given. The last
and other mythological characters which find reference in Guru's Bani.
The last chapter entitled *Help Chapter*, explains the names of gods
carries easy and simple English translation of the hymns in poetry,
the reading easy for different groups of people. The opposite page
Devanagari and Roman scripts along with Gurmukhi script, which makes
Hymns from the Bani of the Ninth Canto, have been rendered in
of interpretation and value, have all been appropriately discussed.

NEWS & VIEWS

INSTITUTE OF SIKH STUDIES ANNUAL SEMINAR 2003

The annual seminar held on Maghar 2-3, 535 NS corresponding to November 15-16, 2003 had an impressive start with solemn recitation of *shabad kirtan* by girl students of Guru Gobind Singh College for Women, Chandigarh. The theme of the seminar was *Guru Granth-Guru Panth* which was discussed in four sessions, two sessions each day.

The inaugural session was chaired by Sardar Anup Singh, former Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Technical University. The Sikh elite particularly from Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula evinced keen interest as the *pandal* brimmed to its capacity.

Sardar Gurdev Singh, IAS (retd), President of Institute of Sikh Studies (IOSS) welcomed the Chairman, distinguished speakers and the audience. He expressed his gratitude for the impressive response to the call of the IOSS.

In his keynote address, Dr Kharak Singh explained that it was Guru Nanak who propounded the revolutionary idea that *shabad* or God's word revealed through the Guru was the real Guru, and not any individual or his body. Guru Arjun Dev compiled the *bani* into a *granth* and the 10th master, Guru Gobind Singh anointed it as the Guru Eternal of the Sikhs and vested his authority in Khalsa through *panj pyaras* for interpreting and implementing the tenets enshrined in Guru Granth. Dr Kharak Singh emphasised that the doctrine of *Guru Granth-Guru Panth* means that the *Panth* has to take decisions on temporal matters, strictly following the spiritual principles laid down in Guru Granth Sahib. He lamented that at present despite existence of numerous organisations and institutions in the Sikh Community there is no central authority to check, control, unite or coordinate their activities and to make sound decisions and enforce them. He advocated the formation of an apex body representing the entire global Sikh community, drawing its

authority from Akal Takht. He suggested that the SGPC should take the required initiative in this direction and convene a meeting of the representatives of the major Sikh organisations to create an apex body to resume the role of Guru Panth.

In the papers presented by Dr Kirpal Singh, Sardar Gajinder Singh, Prof Prabhjot Kaur, Dr Kuldip Singh, Prof Sarbjit Singh, Dr Harnam Singh Shan, Principal Ram Singh and Dr Gurmeet Singh, the call given by Dr Kharak Singh in his keynote address for the creation of an apex body of the Sikhs was welcomed.

Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, President SGPC in his special address to the seminar asked the scholars to define the method for the formation of the proposed Apex Body. He emphasised that institutions are created by years of toil. He cautioned, therefore, that SGPC and Akal Takht need to be strengthened. Efforts to improve their functioning are welcome. Let the proposed Apex Body be a source of strength to the existing Institutions so that the SGPC can play its expected role.

Most of the speakers shared the view that Akal Takht and its Jathedar hold a unique position in the corporate life of the Sikhs, and that any denigration of these institutions could not be tolerated.

Sardar Anup Singh in his presidential remarks endorsed the proposal for creating a Sikh apex body. He also felt that the initiative should come from SGPC, failing which one or more of the existing Organisations should come forward to do the needful.

The second session was presided over by Dr Inderjit Kaur, Chairman, Pingalwara Trust, Amritsar, the third session by Giani Harinder Singh, President of Kendri Singh Sabha, Chandigarh and the last session by Dr Brij Pal Singh, President, Academy of Sikh Religion and Culture, Patiala. Giani Harinder Singh appealed to the scholars to interpret the tenets of Gurbani in such a way as the general public can easily understand.

The following resolution was passed :

RESOLUTION

This gathering of Sikhs has noted with great concern that the Panth is passing through a crisis marked by disunity, challenges to Sikh identity and established institutions like the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, spate of apostasy, existence of schisms old and new, and unnecessary controversies created to divide and weaken the Panth.

In order to deal with these problems, to carry the divine message of

the Gurus worldwide and to lead the Panth to its destined glory in the service of mankind, it is imperative to invoke the Gurus' doctrine of *Guru Granth-Guru Panth*, which gives this responsibility to take decisions in the light of teachings of the Gurus with complete faith in *Shabad* as Guru.

This gathering feels that in the situation that prevails today, it is necessary to have a central body of the Sikhs with global representation whose deliberations will guide and assist the entire Sikh community.

The Sikhs are fortunate in having Sri Akal Takht as the Supreme seat of authority and the SGPC as an elected body of the Sikhs representing Sikh majority areas. These institutions cannot be ignored, and should rather be strengthened. Any attempt to denigrate these institutions is condemned.

This gathering, therefore, calls upon the SGPC to take the required initiative for creating an Apex Body, which includes representatives of all major Panthic organisations and Sikhs from across the world, with itself as nucleus under the patronage of Akal Takht Sahib.

This gathering also appeals to all Sikh organisations to cooperate in the discharge of this historic responsibility for the glory of the Panth and to achieve the goals of *Sarbat da Bhalla*.

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PWR TO SPREAD MESSAGE OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The Parliament of World Religions (PWR) has decided in principle to coordinate with Sikh institutions and various other organisations for spreading the message of oneness enshrined in the holy Guru Granth Sahib. This was disclosed by Mr Howard Sulkin, Chairman of the PWR. In view of the quadri-centennial celebrations of the installation of Guru Granth Sahib, which falls next year, NRI Sikhs and the PWR have made an ambitious programme to make the event a big success.

For the first time *langar* would be served at Barcelona, Spain to delegates of the fifth international conference of the PWR to be held from July 7 to July 13, 2004 CE. Special *kirtan darbars* would be held to mark the PWR conference. To spread the message of Sikhism in all corners of the world, the PWR had constituted two awards, named after Guru Tegh Bahadur and Bhai Ghanaya from next year.

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DRINKING ALCOHOL DOES NOT JUST BEFUDDLE THE BRAIN

Scientists at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA used magnetic resonance imaging to look at the brains of 1,909 volunteers aged 55 years and older. Researchers found that just a few drinks every week could be enough to cause a decline in brain matter by middle age.

The study showed that moderate drinking did not reduce the risk of strokes, despite some past statements to the contrary. Heavy drinking is known to be linked to the loss of brain cells, but the study links brain decline to moderate alcohol consumption as well. Brain shrinkage was seen in men and women, the researchers reported in *Stroke*. (Courtesy: *Daily Telegraph*, December 5, 2003)

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**NRI SIKHS WANT GREATER SAY IN AFFAIRS OF SGPC**

Ludhiana, November 4. Sikhs settled abroad now want a greater say in the affairs of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar.

Efforts are also being made to streamline the religious affairs in the adopted countries. And the UK Sikhs have taken the lead by setting up a National Sikh Gurdwara Council of UK. Its member and president-designate, Daljit Singh Shergill was here today to meet the SGPC president, Gurcharan Singh Tohra.

He said the Council, which consists of two members each from the 200-odd gurdwaras of UK, came into being after widespread disillusionment with the Sikh spokesmen in the UK Parliament.

The Council has taken another significant decision wherein any new gurdwara, before setting base, would have to seek permission from the Akal Takht through this Council. Also, the money collected from the UK gurdwaras would be used to run philanthropic institutions in Punjab.

Significantly, the UK Sikhs have denounced the setting up of various gurdwara *prabandhak* bodies like those in the USA. "There is only one SGPC and it alone has the right to decide the Sikh affairs."

But it isn't that they are blind to the shortcomings here. "Nepotism and factionalism do not have any place in religion and we should not allow them to plague the system," says this president of the Guru Nanak Sikh gurdwara, Birmingham. (Courtesy : *Indian Express*, November 5, 2003)

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SGPC FLAYS TOGADIA

Amritsar / Jalandhar, October 11. The reverbrations of the visit of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Dr Parveen Togadia could be felt in Panthic circles with SGPC taking a strong exception to his remark that “*main Sikh hoon par pehle Hindu hoon*” and thus trying to project that Sikhs are Hindus. Honorary secretary of SGPC, Manjit Singh Calcutta said Togadia’s remark that ‘Sikhs were Hindus first’ was “provocative, unwarranted, illogical and factually untrue.”

“Sikhs are Sikhs first and last. We have a separate identity, are independent and complete and thus would not tolerate anybody’s interference,” said Calcutta. Akal Takht *Jathedar*, Bhai Joginder Singh Vedanti also criticised Togadia for stating that Sikhs are a part of Hindu *kaum*. The *Jathedar* said Sikhs had different traditions and rituals from the Hindus. (*Courtesy : Indian Express, October 12, 2003*)

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NAMES OF SEHAJDHARI SIKHS TO BE REMOVED

Chandigarh, October 20. The Union Government has decided to remove the names of all Sehajdhari Sikhs from the voter lists for general elections of the SGPC.

Informed sources said today that as the Union Government had decided to deny the right to vote to the Sehajdhari Sikhs in the SGPC elections, hence the decision to remove their names from the voter lists. The SGPC elections were due to be held in October 1999, but these have not been held yet for unknown reasons.

The sources said while preparing fresh voter lists, around 8 *lakh* Sehajdhari Sikhs were listed as voters in Punjab. The total number of voters listed for the SGPC elections in Punjab was around 58 *lakh*. In Haryana, of the 31.5 *lakh* voters listed for the SGPC elections, around 55,000 were Sehajdhari Sikhs, and in Himachal Pradesh, around 9,000 were Sehajdhari Sikhs of the 25,000 voters.

The decision to remove the names from the voter lists had been taken by making a necessary change in the Section 49-A of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Besides the SGPC, a number of other organisations had opposed the inclusion of the names of the Sehajdhari Sikhs in the voter lists.

The draft of the voter lists were ready. These would be published by the end of December after carrying out necessary corrections on

the basis of objections filed by persons concerned. The decision of the Union Government had come at a right time. Otherwise, after the final publication of the voter lists, it would have been very difficult to remove the names of Sehajdhari Sikhs from the lists, sources said.

Interestingly, the Punjab Government had supported the voting right to Sehajdhari Sikhs in the SGPC elections. In fact, this issue had been hanging fire for the past four years. In 1999, the Union Government wrote to the then Punjab Chief Minister, Mr Parkash Singh Badal, whether his government supported or not the voting right to Sehajdhari Sikhs. Mr Badal had kept the file pending till he was voted out from power in the state.

However, a few hours before formally submitting his resignation to the Governor, he tried to convey to the Centre that voting right should not be given to Sehajdhari Sikhs, but he was unable to do so as the officer concerned, who was asked to write to the Centre in this connection, refused to do so taking the plea that the Badal government had already lost the elections. Later, the file was put up to the Chief Minister, Capt Amarinder Singh, who supported the voting right to the Sehajdhari Sikhs.

The sources said before the final publication of the voter lists, all such names would have to be removed from the lists. Otherwise, if these names were not removed, a lot of confusion would be caused during the elections.

Even Sehajdhari Sikhs will not be able to vote in the elections of the local committees of the gurdwaras managed indirectly by the SGPC. Under Section 92 of the Act, there are gurdwaras having monthly income of over Rs 1,00,000 which are managed by the elected local committees. Three members of such committees are elected at local level and one is nominated by the SGPC. And the *patit* Sikhs (with shorn hair on head and clipped beards) will also be having no right to vote. (*Courtesy : The Tribune, October 21, 2003*)

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GANDHI BRANDED RACIST IN S AFRICA

Johannesburg, October 17. It was supposed to honour his resistance to racism in South Africa, but a new statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Johannesburg has triggered a row over his alleged contempt for black people.

The 2.5 metre high bronze statue depicting Gandhi as a young human rights lawyer has been welcomed by Nelson Mandela, among others, for recognising the Indian who launched the fight against white minority rule at the turn of the last century.

But critics have attacked the gesture for overlooking racist statements attributed to Gandhi, which suggest he viewed black people as lazy savages who were barely human.

Newspapers continue to publish letters from indignant readers: “Gandhi had no love for Africans. To (him), Africans were no better than the ‘Untouchables’ of India,” said a correspondent to *The Citizen*.

Others are harsher, claiming the civil rights icon ‘hated’ black people and ignored their suffering at the hands of colonial masters.

The British-trained barrister was supposed to have been on a brief visit in 1893 to represent an Indian company in a legal action, but he stayed to fight racist laws after a conductor kicked him off a train for sitting in a first-class compartment reserved for Whites.

Some historians credit Gandhi as the progenitor of the African National Congress (ANC), which was formed in 1912. However, the new statue has prompted recollections about some of Gandhi’s writings. Forced to share a cell with black people, he wrote: “Many native prisoners are only one degree removed from animals and often created rows and fought among themselves.”

He was quoted at a meeting in Bombay in 1800 saying that Europeans sought to degrade Indians to the level of the “raw *kaffir*, whose occupation is hunting and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with, and then pass his life in indolence and nakedness”.

The Indian embassy declined to comment. Khulekani Ntshangase, a spokesman for ANC Youth League defended Gandhi, saying the critics missed the bigger picture of his immense contribution to the liberation struggle. Gandhi’s offending comments were made early in his life when he was influenced by Indians working on the sugar plantations, and did not get on with the black people of modern-day KwaZulu Natal province, said Ntshangase. “Later he got more enlightened.” (*Courtesy : Hindustan Times, October 18, 2003*)

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SIKHI IS THE SECRET OF REUBEN'S SUCCESS

Amritsar, October 11. At 27, Reuben Singh has achieved in business what most people take a lifetime to achieve, and he attributes it all to *Sikhi*. In Amritsar to receive the Sikh Gaurav Award in the International Sikh Youth Conference organised by Akal Purkh ki Fauj, he said: "I am a young man with young dreams. My achievements are because me being a Sikh and my aim is to promote *Sikhi*. He entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* at 18 years, for starting business at 17. The owner of 15 companies, of which at least five are investment companies, he said his net worth is over 200 million pounds. After getting the Microsoft Business of the Year Award for his Virtual office website as the largest service provider of the world, he continues to sell and buy companies. He said: "I was appointed the British Ambassador for Enterprise at 23. I am also a part of the PEER Review Task Force which entitles me to ask anyone any relevant questions about business."

Recognised for his business acumen, he is also the advisor to the UK government business issues. He attributes his success to *Waheguru*. With his company among the top 40 companies of the world, Reuben does not believe in partying. (*Courtesy: Indian Express, October 12, 2003*)

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ANOTHER PROUD SIKH

Amritsar, October 11. "The cards you have in hand do not matter. What matters is how you play the ones you have," says charismatic Jaspal Singh, the first turbaned Sikh model in the world. He was in Amritsar to get the Sikh Gaurav Award at the International Sikh Youth Conference.

Proud of being a *sabat surat*, Jaspal was the first turbaned Sikh to have become the runner up of Grasim Mr India and the first Indian to have participated in Mr Intercontinental contest in Panama, in which he won the best dressed and best national dress awards.

The Mumbai-born achiever has now stepped into designing clothes. "After the costume designed by me fetched acclamation in Panama, Grasim appointed me as their designer and I designed costumes of all the men in Mr Intercontinental last year." (*Courtesy : The Indian Express, October 12, 2003*)

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MINISTER CLAIMS PUNJABI NEXT ONLY TO ENGLISH

London. If the minister surprised himself with the claim that Punjabi is the second most spoken language in Britain, then he did not show it. It could so easily have been Welsh, a language native to Britain, if not to England, for many centuries.

But before a battery of VIPs at the launch of the British wing of the World Punjabi Organization last week, no one rose to challenge the claim that Punjabi is next only to English in England.

Mike O'Brien, minister in the Foreign Office, went out of his way to be generous to the language and its speaker.

"Punjabi is one of the most important languages in Britain," O'Brien said. "It is the second most spoken language in Britain, and it is so important for us to get our Punjabi right," he added.

O'Brien shared his dinner table on Sept 5 with a powerful Punjabi contingent, which included S S Dhindsa, Union Minister for chemicals and fertilizers, Tarlochan Singh, Vice-chairman of India's Minorities Commission, former cricketer Bishen Singh Bedi, lawmaker and former high commissioner to Britain, Kuldip Nayyar, and actor and lawmaker, Raj Babbar.

Tarlochan Singh told O'Brien and the 400 others gathered for the launch at Dorchester Hotel: "Don't forget that we gave our blood for the protection of democracy in Britain during the two world wars. And if in return they are doing us a few favours here, they are too few."

"The first ever book in the world, the *Rig Veda*, was written in the land of Punjab," he said, adding that if Punjabi is the second most spoken language in Britain, the British ought to feel honoured."

"Be proud of your heritage," he told the Punjabis gathered for the occasion. Taking cue from Singh, Om Prakash Chautala, the chief minister of Haryana, announced his Punjabi roots. He also delivered a speech in Punjabi. (Courtesy : e-mail by Bhai Harbans Lal, japji@comcast.net)

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APPEAL FOR CLEMENCY

(It will be recalled that Balbir Singh Sodhi was killed by Frank Silva Roque after 9/11 episode. The latter has been awarded death sentence. In an unusual gesture of generosity, the parents of Balbir Singh Sodhi have appealed to the Governor of Arizona for clemency to the condemned. Their letter is reproduced here. – Editor)

“Your Excellency, the President of United States of America and the Governor of Arizona, we, Sardar Jaswant Singh and Sardarni Inderjit Kaur, parents of immigrant Sardar Balbir Singh Sodhi who was shot dead by Frank Silva Roque on September 15, 2001 at Mesa in Phoenix, Arizona are highly grateful and appreciative of the sanctity and ethos of maintaining equal rights of all humans and also disseminating true and timely justice in Arizona which we cannot imagine even in our own country.

Mere pronouncement of death sentence to Frank Silva Roque has helped to sooth our agonizing souls, yet no power can bring back our son, a fact which is ordained by *Waheguru*, the God Almighty.

We are not in favour of “blood for blood” and another death in this gory episode, that too of a man who is younger to our son who has died. May be Frank did it under influence of acute post-traumatic stress and psychosis just four days after 9/11, as his complete act is not of a sane person and obviously not of a mature American citizen.

Sikh religion and our Ten Gurus have taught us to forgive a person whose actions are beyond his own control.

We, the aged parents of Sardar Balbir Singh Sodhi along with our family members humbly request the Governor of Arizona and the President of United States of America to let Frank Silva Roque live and let his family not undergo the trauma that we have had to suffer.

Execution of Frank will be seen by all of us as another depressing sequel in the horrid chain of events.

For the sake of God, please concede to our request and spare us any more agony. Kindly communicate your magnanimous decision through our family members at Phoenix, please.”

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US AIRLINES SAYS SORRY TO SIKH

Washington, November 5. After two years of litigation, a Sikh American has succeeded in getting a written apology from America's National Airlines for having barred him from boarding a flight because of his appearance, shortly after 9/11.

Entertainment producer Satnam Dhillon received a letter of apology from National Airlines last week which said “National Airlines sincerely regrets the incident of October 16, 2001, when you were denied boarding on one of our flights to Las Vegas, Nevada

as the result of an apparent misunderstanding”.

Producer for Rangeela TV, an Indian channel, Dhillon said: “That’s all I wanted from day one.” He has now dropped the case at the Airline. Dhillon was on his way to Las Vegas and had undergone all security checks but was asked to step aside by the boarding agent, as the pilot had seen him making an ‘obscene gesture’, said the daily *Alameda Times-Star*. He was taken to the ticket counter where he was questioned and searched for more than two hours before the authorities agreed to put him on another flight to Las Vegas. Dhillon, a US citizen since 1980, filed a lawsuit with the San Francisco federal court in March last year. “In the aftermath of the extraordinary events of 9/11, National Airlines’ only interest at that time was the safety and security of the flying public, including you,” wrote Raymond T. Nakano, senior vice president of National Airlines. The daily quoted civil rights groups as saying Dhillon’s victory may be a first. “We’ve heard of a lot of cases like this,” said Kavneet Singh, spokesperson for the Sikh Media Watch and Resource Task Force, an activist group. “This is the first suit I’ve heard (that has been settled)”, he added. (*Courtesy : Indian Express, November 6, 2003*)

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MARATHON WORLD RECORD FOR NONAGENARIANS

Britain’s 92-year-old Fauja Singh shattered his own previous world record for nonagenarians at The Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon. He finished jogging 42.2 kilometres in 5 hours, 40 minutes and 3 seconds. His previous best was 6 hours, 11 minutes and 9 seconds, set in London, England, in April. He has become the first non-American to be honoured with the Ellis Island Medals of Honour. Apart from Congressional awards. The Ellis Island Medals of Honour are the only awards recognised by Congress.

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BETTER KNOWN THAN THE PM

Papua New Guinean newspaper *The National* has claimed that VSA volunteer Tarlochan Singh is better known on the streets of

Arawa than the Prime Minister! Tarlochan recalls that during his first few weeks in Arawa he got used to young men unfamiliar with his Sikh headwear shouting out 'Hello Osama' as he passed by. However, as the first resident dentist in Bougainville since before the outbreak of the island's decade-long civil war in 1988, Tarlochan has now made impact. On his daily walks on the streets of Arawa, Dr Singh is greeted by Bougainvilleans, young and old, who have come to appreciate that they now have a full-time dentist they can call their own.

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### **GURU GRANTH SAHIB & INTER-FAITH UNDERSTANDING TO WORLD PEACE**

The Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, organised the 3rd International Conference on Guru Granth Sahib and Inter-faith Understanding to World Peace at Amritsar from December 3 to 5, 2003. Governor of Punjab, Justice (retd.) O P Verma, presided over the inaugural session. Justice Mota Singh, Queens Court, England presented the keynote address and Dr Balwant Singh Dhillon, Director of the Conference, gave a brief introduction of the theme of the Conference. Dr S P Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar welcomed the guests and Dr Satinder Singh, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University expressed vote of thanks.

A large number of scholars from all over the globe attended the Conference. Quite a number of them did not stick to the subject matter of the Conference. On the whole, the participants highlighted the relevance and importance of the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib toward improving inter-faith understanding which should lead to bring about peaceful co-existence.

First session following the inaugural session on December 3, 2003 was chaired by Dr Kirpal Singh and the second session of December 3 by Principal Gurbax Singh Shergill. Maj Gen (retd) Himmat Singh Gill presided over the third session on December 4 morning, and Sardar Gurdev Singh, IAS (retd), President of the Institute of Sikh Studies chaired the fourth session in the afternoon

of December 4. Dr N Q King, USA was President of the fifth session on December 5, and the sixth session which was the valedictory session on December 5, was presided over by Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald.

In his paper presented at the Conference, Sardar Gurdev Singh made the following specific suggestions:

- i. People should be provided with good education;
- ii. Conferences, seminars, debates on inter-faith issues should be frequently held to bring about healthy understanding and useful cooperation among people of different religions;
- iii. The Sikhs should play an active role in organizing the inter-faith seminars and conclaves, and to play this role effectively they should form an association of global range.

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### ***Letters To Editor***

#### **QUALITY EDUCATION**

Dear Sir,

It is a stark fact that Sikh youth has to perforce join Christian convents and DAV schools paying higher fees, building donations, etc. etc. because of their high standard.

Why Sikh schools cannot come up to their level is a serious question. In my view, all donations and offerings by Sikhs are spent on marble, deluxe buildings and free kitchen leaving nothing for improving the standards of existing schools and for opening new ones. It is necessary that our youth should have education in a Panthic environment. One of the main causes for apostasy is the environment in which they have to study.

In SAS Nagar, we have as many as thirteen gurdwaras having palatial buildings, *langar* halls, free kitchen. Barring a few, *sangat* is seldom visible in these gurdwaras. One gurdwara for two sectors would be ideal to attract good gathering, and buildings of the rest of the gurdwaras and *langar* halls can better be used for opening Sikh sacred schools / colleges to provide quality education better than the Christian and DAV schools so as to attract students of other communities also.

Your sincerely

J S Sodhi

# 542, Sector 53, SAS Nagar

### THE PANTH AND OUR PRAYER

Dear editor,

In the Sikh prayer, following words were added by the SGPC after 1947, "...benevolent Lord, bestow on the Khalsa the beneficence of unobstructed visit to and free management of Nankana Sahib and other shrines and places of the Guru from which the Panth has been separated."

Because of the attention paid to the gurdwaras after 1947 in Delhi and some other places, impressive buildings have been built. The Panth can feel proud of them. However, there are many Sikh historical places in Indian States and in neighbouring countries (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) and also some even in the erstwhile Punjab state which stand neglected.

In 1980, the author went to Puri, Orissa. He was eager to pay his homage to the gurdwara where Guru Nanak recited the *shabad, gagan mai thal*. However, the local accompanying officials could not locate it. Even the tourist office was not aware of the place. The extent of my disappointment was beyond expression.

When I again visited Puri in 1989, luck favoured me. A young boy, presenting himself as a *Kalyugi Panda* (also called Punjabi Panda) met the author at the railway station. He claimed to be the descendent of *Kalyugi Sadhu* of Behram whom Guru Nanak revealed the true path of holy life. The boy guided us to the Baoli Math located in the Swarg Dwar Bazaar.

In the veranda of the old building, we found many *pandas* squatting and an old *palki* with uncleaned *rumalas* covering Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Seeing us, the local *panda*, wearing only a *langoti*, covered his head immediately and did *parkash* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. After my wife recited one hymn from Sri Guru Granth Sahib, we descended the steps of the *baoli*. We found the water to be sweet in spite of the *baoli* being on the seashore.

During the Baisakhi of 1999 when *jathas* came from home towns of the *Panj Pyaras*, I met the *jatha* from Puri to talk with them about the Baoli Math Gurdwara. I was sad to be told that the *jatha* actually came from Jamshedpur (Tata Nagar) and not from Puri !

Are we not hypocrites when we pray for the un-restricted approach to do *sewa* in the gurdwaras which are not under our direct control, but ignore so many historical places related to the Gurus where there is no

restriction at all. The Panth has all the resources – look at the gold plating of some gurdwaras – to take care of the historical places connected with the Gurus. Surely, something is wrong somewhere.

Before I close let me state one more such case for the information of the Panth. As a boy (1940), we were told that there are five platforms built to commemorate the route adopted by Guru Nanak from Kurram Pass (Parachinar) to Kohat; one such platform being in a village about twenty kilometers from Parachinar on Kohat-Parachinar road. Baisakhi Mela use to be held in that village on the banks of the river Kurram. All these places remained ignored even before the partition in 1947.

Is it too much to expect the SGPC to nominate some local / regional committees to take care of such historical places before they are claimed and grabbed by non-Sikhs. Because of being neglected, some places have already been taken over illegally by people. Let the Panth come out of slumber. We should not let our historical places be forgotten and our history destroyed.

Er Harjot Shah Singh  
#1589, Phase 3B2  
SAS Nagar (Mohali)

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TRACING *DESH-DARPAN*

Dear Editor

I seek your kind help on the following:

Since the 1930s (throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and even today) the city of Kolkata enjoys the proud privilege of bringing out a daily newspaper *Desh-Darpan* (from its office in south Kolkata). Its old files are unfortunately not available in its Kolkata office. Even the National Library, Kolkata is not in possession of these invaluable files. Even the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (which perhaps enjoys the privilege of having the richest newspaper collection in India) does not possess its old files. The India Office Library and Records, London could hardly offer any different answer in this regard. This newspaper remained the most important forum for Sikh political and cultural activities in eastern India. It used to highlight the manifold problems of the Sikhs of the region, and its pioneering role could only be appreciated if some of its old files are seriously read and scrutinised. I have with me a few files of the *Desh-Darpan*. They are invaluable, if

anyone is committed to reconstruct the history of the eastern Indian Sikh activity of the pre-independence days.

The city of Kolkata had a small Sikh literary centre in the pre-independence days. Here we have Munsha Singh Dukhi, Saudar Singh Bikhari and many other Punjabi writers who did pursue their literary activity in the Kavi Press, Bhowanipur. They could carry on their literary activity after performing their normal duties. They also contributed to the pages of the *Desh-Darpan* during its early days. Its founder editor was Sardar Niranjana Singh Talib. He played a very significant role in organising the scattered local Sikhs against British rule. The fighting role of the Kolkata Sikhs during the days of the Simon Commission agitation and the Akali movement have so far received very little attention of the scholars. They were all closely associated with the national movement. Talib was also perhaps busy with the native Punjab state politics of Nabha in the pre-independence days. He was again linked with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's going out of Kolkata in the late 1940s. Since the 1920s, Baba Gurdit Singh of Komagata Maru fame had been in the city. All these factors gave a new dimension to the Sikh political and cultural life of the period. This newspaper no doubt highlighted these news in its different pages. Even the story of the Punjab politics of the 1930s and 1940s did not altogether miss the attention of its editor. But we need to know more about this phase of Sikh political activity beyond Punjab. The historic role of the Kolkata Sikhs in the Akali movement of the 1920s and other national political arena as well as their close link with the Punjab need no special mention. The city proudly remembers the role of a few Sikh leaders who had been and even today are playing an important role in the wider arena of the Sikh politics. We have heard about Mohan Singh Kalra. We have long seen Captain Bhag Singh's role in bringing out *The Sikh Review* during the days of the Operation Blue Star.

Even today we are proud to say that we have *The Sikh Review* in the safe hands of Sardar Saran Singh, its editor. In this sense, the *Desh-Darpan* of the pre-independence is invaluable. It is a part of the larger Sikh heritage and it tells about those Sikhs who had fought for the Sikh cause of the pre-independence days. I, therefore, request you if you kindly help in tracing the old files of this newspaper. It is needed for reconstructing the history of the Sikhs outside Punjab within India.

This newspaper may possibly have been preserved in some personal collections in Punjab (India and Pakistan). I do seek your kind help in this regard. Could you help me in any way in tracing the old files of this newspaper? I look forward to your kind reply.

Yours sincerely
Himadri Banerjee
<hbanerje@cal3.vsnl.net>

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#### ELECTION OF IOSS PRESIDENT

Chandigarh, December 26. Annual meeting of the Institute of Sikh Studies was held on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2003 to elect its President for the year 2004. Keeping in view the creditable performance during the current year, Sardar Gurdev Singh, IAS (retd) was unanimously elected President of the Institute for the year 2004.

Sardar Gurdev Singh thanked the members for the trust reposed in him and assured the members that he will leave no stone unturned in carrying forward the aims and objectives of the IOSS. He said that the resolution on *Guru Granth-Guru Panth* will be vigorously pursued with result-oriented efforts, besides research projects on Gurbani and Sikh history with cooperation of like-minded individuals and organisations.

He nominated the following executive committee for the year 2004:

|                               |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Bhai Ashok Singh              | Vice President   |
| Maj Gen Dr Jaswant Singh AVSM | Secretary        |
| Sardar Sadhu Singh            | Joint Secretary  |
| Bibi Baljit Kaur              | Incharge Finance |
| Dr Gurcharan Singh            | Member           |
| Brig Hardit Singh             | Member           |

Dr Kharak Singh was requested to continue as Editor of the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*.

## PUBLICATIONS OF THE INSTITUTE OF SIKH STUDIES

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## ABSTRACTS OF SIKH STUDIES

### OBJECTIVES

- 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 misrepresentations 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.**
- 9. To act as a forum for expression of readers' views.**
- 10. To advertise appropriate literature on Sikhism.**

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