

ABSTRACTS OF SIKH STUDIES

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EDITORIAL

TWO URGENT TASKS

I

STANDARD ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB

During the recent years we have observed centenaries (*shatabdis*) of a number of important events of our history. These include the fourth *shatabdi* of the installation of Guru Granth Sahib at Amritsar, and the third *shatabdi* of its completion at Damdama Sahib, besides the fourth *shatabdi* of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev who compiled it. Guru Granth Sahib is the Guru Eternal of the Sikhs, which lends special significance to these *shatabdis*. As expected, the Sikhs have displayed very keen interest in the celebrations. They turned out in large number in the processions organized by the SGPC and other religious outfits, and even political parties. A number of seminars have been held, and the series still continues. Fireworks and illuminations on a grand scale added colour to the occasions. Large gatherings were organized in which dignitaries from other communities also adorned the stage and paid rich tributes to the Gurus.

Common Sikhs were certainly thrilled, and the occasions will be remembered for a long time. Hopefully, some political parties and their leaders were able to extract some mileage out of this exercise. But, if you are looking for any tangible and lasting results, you will meet only disappointment. Such occasions come only once in a hundred years, and demand introspection. These should have been used to consolidate the earlier gains and to launch new programmes to share the divine word and the message of the Gurus to promote universal brotherhood and peace and prosperity of the entire mankind. Unfortunately, no visible efforts seem to have been made in this direction.

Guru Granth Sahib is, no doubt, the Guru of Sikhs for all times. Its *bani*, however, addresses the whole world, Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike, and, therefore, it is our responsibility to make it accessible to all through translation in all major Indian and foreign languages. In fact, this is a job that deserves topmost priority. Some Sikh scholars, on their own initiative, have made commendable efforts, and have come out with English translations which are indeed helpful. It must be remembered, however, that these are individual efforts, and often project contrary interpretations, leading to confusion among readers. In the very first verse of the first *bani* (*Japuji*) in Guru Granth, (ਸੋਚੈ ਸੋਚਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਸੋਚੀ ਲਖ ਵਾਰ), the word ਸੋਚਿ has been translated as ‘pondering’ by Manmohan Singh, ‘thinking’ by Macauliffe, and ‘meditation’ by Trumpp. On the other hand, Talib translates it as ‘ritual purification’, following a similar earlier interpretation by Bhai Vir Singh and Prof Sahib Singh. The list of verses subjected to varying interpretations is long, and need not be reproduced here. It is obvious, however, that the differences need to be resolved academically.

More and more scholars want to undertake translations of Guru Granth Sahib, not only into English, but other languages also. Very few of them have any knowledge of the Punjabi language or the Gurmukhi script in which the original *bani* has been recorded. They, therefore, adopt one of the extant English translations, as basis for their exercise, so that the mistakes pass on to the new translations, adding some more in the process.

To this, may be added the possibility of motivated distortions, and deliberate misinterpretation by enemies of the Panth, so that the new version presented in translation might deviate considerably from the original text. This is something that needs to be avoided at all costs.

In view of the above, it is absolutely necessary that a Standard English translation, acceptable to all scholars and major Panthic organizations, be prepared for use as a basis for translations into other languages.

We are now looking forward to the third *shatabdi* of the anointment of Guru Granth Sahib as Guru Eternal, in 2008. It is imperative that the proposed new English translation be completed in time for release during the *Shatabdi* celebrations. This can be done, if the project is

taken in hand without delay.

The Institute of Sikh Studies has prepared plans for this project. All known scholars and major Panthic organizations will be involved in the exercise. Existing translations will be studied carefully. The differences will be discussed in panel(s) or conclave(s) of scholars in order to arrive at a consensus, keeping in view the dictates of grammar, context and the basic tenets preached by the Gurus.

The responsibility for such an exercise squarely devolves on the SGPC and/or DSGMC, being two major and most representative of the Sikhs. We should hope, therefore, that they will sponsor this project and provide the funds required. In fact Sardar Avtar Singh, President, SGPC had assured in a meeting with the Editor, that funds would be released to the extent required. Their involvement will also facilitate acceptance of the translation.

Another thing that demands immediate attention of the Panth, is the custody of the original *bir* of the *Adi Granth Sahib*, prepared by Guru Arjun Dev *ji* with Bhai Gurdas as Scribe. This sacred *bir* is an invaluable treasure, and is in the custody of Sodhis of Kartarpur. Its existence makes Sikhism the only religion with its scripture written by the founder of the religion himself. This is a distinction that is envied by other faiths. This *bir* has to be preserved at all costs and provided a fool-proof security.

Its present custodians have taken good care of it, and the Panth is grateful to them for this service. While we are confident that they will continue to look after it in the future also, it will be imprudent however, to rely on this hope alone. We lost some most valuable treasures in the Sikh Reference Library in the Golden Temple Complex at Amritsar during the infamous Blue Star Operation in 1984. We had hoped that no government would attack our sacred shrines. But it did happen, and can happen again anywhere including Kartarpur. All risks to the security of the *bir* must be eliminated. No individual can be entrusted with this responsibility indefinitely. It should be a responsibility of the Panth. We would, therefore, request the SGPC to take the required initiative in this direction. We also hope that the present custodians will oblige, in the interest of the *bir*, the Panth and eventually their own interest. For, security of the *bir* is the common concern of us all.

The third *shatabdi* of the anointment of Guru Granth Sahib falls in the year 2008. Every effort should be made to get the transfer of the *Adi Bir* effected to the Panth. The celebrations should include a big *nagar kirtan* procession with Kartarpur as its destination, and a big function should be held there to pay homage to Guru Arjun Dev and the *Adi Bir*.

Learning from past experience, the need for topmost security for the *Adi Bir* can hardly be over emphasized. Simultaneously, it is necessary to make a few exact copies of the *bir* and to keep them at selected places in different countries.

II

STATE OF SCHOOL EDUCATION IN RURAL PUNJAB

About three quarters of the Sikh population live in rural area of the Punjab. Future of any community is in the hands of its youth and children of today. While we celebrate *shatabdis*, it is necessary to have a look at the state of education available to our children in the villages, which, according to Dr S S Johl , Deputy Chairman, Punjab State planning Board, is alarming. He says, "The present situation is quite alarming. Majority of the Sikh population in Punjab lives in villages. Educational facilities in villages are worth nothing. There are very few higher secondary schools in the rural areas that have science subjects. Those that have science or commerce subjects, have very poor teaching infrastructure. Teachers do not stay in these schools and absenteeism is rampant. As a consequence, students do not opt for science or commerce subjects. They are not, therefore, able to compete for professional higher education. Surprisingly, even the Punjab Agricultural University does not have many students from rural areas or farming families. This agricultural university has almost all the students from urban non-farming families. Further, it is the girls from the urban families that excel and capture top academic positions and win medals. Concern is not that students from these non-farming urban families get this education; the concern is that agricultural/rural youth is being left behind and majority of these youth in the villages are from the Sikh families. If this is the situation in the subjects of agricultural stream, one can well imagine the situation in respect of

engineering, medical and other professional subjects.”

The data on School results submitted by PHRO report in 2006 mentioned that the results of 79 senior secondary schools for 10th and 10+2 classes was 0%, of 219 similar schools was less than 10%, of 40 schools 10% for the last 10 years. These results have emerged despite the mass scale copying in these examinations in majority of centres in Punjab schools.

The findings of two studies conducted in Patiala Block III by the Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council were also shocking. A carefully selected sample of 384 students in Class VI from rural and urban secondary schools revealed that only 2% boys and 4% girls passed in Mathematics and only 12% boys and 14% girls qualified in Punjabi.

In May 2001, the Punjab Elementary Education Board Project Committee, Patiala working under the aegis of the Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council (Regd.), New Delhi, decided to hold a District Scholarship Test for all such children as secured 70 % or more marks in the SCERT conducted Class V Annual examination, 2001 to select 20 students on merit basis for award of scholarships of the value of Rs. 150/- per month for three years covering Classes VI to VIII. The results were dismal, as students who had secured 70% or more marks in their annual examinations through government schools managed to secure on average mere 4.7% in Punjabi, 2.3% in Hindi, 5% in mathematics, 8% in Social Science and as low as 2-3% in general knowledge.

Things could not be worse, and if this state of affairs continues, the day is not far, when Punjab will be reduced to a mere breeding ground for illiterate or semi-literate low paid labourers to work in factories or farms owned by others. one shudders to think of such a prospect. The IOSS has been sounding the alarm bell earlier also. In order to focus attention on this problem the Institute is holding a seminar on the theme “School Education in Rural Punjab” on the 1st and 2nd October, 2006 at its headquarters in Chandigarh, to which eminent educationists and the public agencies engaged in education have been invited. It is hoped that their deliberations will yield practical suggestions for improvement. Side by side with long term plans to provide quality education in rural areas, through better infrastructure, increased and motivated teaching staff, liberal allocation of funds,

effective supervision, etc, it is necessary to provide crash courses in rural areas to prepare selected students for competitive exams for admissions to universities and for recruitment to coveted services in the public and private sector.

It is heartening that the Punjab Govt has decided to set up an Education Commission to deal with the problem. All the Vice-Chancellors in the State universities have been nominated as its members. This has raised the expectations of the people, which, we are sure, will not be belied by these eminent personalities. They are all dealing with higher education. It may be advisable to add some members with experience of School Education also, since it is at this level that the rot has taken deep roots.

In the end, we trust that the government is serious, that this is not just a pre-election platitude, and that the recommendations of the commission will be implemented, unlike some earlier reports gathering dust in secretarial shelves.

**GURU GRANTH SAHIB
– A UNIQUE SCRIPTURE –**

DEDICATED TO THE TERCENTENARY OF
COMPLETION OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB

KHARAK SINGH*

All major religions of the world have their scripture(s). In fact, having a scripture or to be *Ahl-i-kitab* is considered an essential requirement for laying a claim to the status of a valid/genuine religion. The scriptures contain the message of God revealed to the prophets. These are, therefore, sacred.

Sikhism, with Sri Guru Granth Sahib as its scripture, is the youngest religion among the half a dozen recognized religions of the world. Its scripture, therefore, is the latest revelation of God. The fact of its being God's Word has been repeatedly testified by the Sikh Gurus themselves in the *bani*. Some relevant verses are reproduced below :

"O, Lalo, I express what the Lord conveys me to speak".¹

"Nanak says the word of Truth; he expresses it, since, it is time to convey the truth".²

"I have expressed only that You made me say".³

"I have no voice of my own; all that I have said, is His command".⁴

"Consider the bani of the Satguru as the word of truth. O, Sikh, it is the Lord who makes me convey these".⁵

There are several features that distinguish Guru Granth Sahib from other scriptures. It preaches a practical way of leading a whole some religious life based on strict monotheism, fatherhood of God and brotherhood of mankind. Its concept of a loving God, a real world

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and a positive view of life is different from other faiths. It decries asceticism, and advocates active participation in temporal affairs as a householder engaged in honest means of learning one's livelihood (ਧਰਮ ਦੀ ਕਿਰਤ), and sharing one's earnings with others in need (ਵੰਡ ਛਕਣਾਂ), with one's mind constantly fixed on God (ਨਾਮ ਜਪਣਾ). The goal it preaches is also different, viz., to be linked with Him⁶ and the love of His lotus feet, in this life, and not heavens or *moksha* after death⁷. Its methodology to achieve this goal is active life of love, service and sacrifice, altruistic deeds, and highest ethical and moral conduct.

There are three features, however, which make this scripture unique:-

- It enjoys the status of an eternal Guru.
- It embodies the doctrine of *Sabad Guru*.
- It was recorded and authenticated by Guru Arjun Dev himself, its original compiler.

The discussion in this article, is confined to these three features, since there is not sufficient awareness among non-Sikhs and even some Sikhs, in these areas. As a result, doubts continue to be raised on the authenticity and integrity of the Granth, and clever individuals continue to exploit the innocent masses by posing as Gurus.

1. GURU ETERNAL OF THE SIKHS

There is ample indisputable evidence to show that the tenth Lord, Guru Gobind Singh, had put an end to the tradition of the personal line of guruship (spiritual leadership), shortly before his demise, and conferred the guruship of the Sikhs on Guru Granth Sahib. His command to this effect was recorded by Bhai Nand Lal and others like Prahlad Singh in *rahitnamas*, and the following couplets are sung by all Sikh congregations after *ardas* every morning and evening in all the Sikh gurdwaras, the world over :

‘With the command of the Timeless Lord, has the (Khalsa) Panth been established.

All Sikhs are directed to own the Granth Sahib as their Guru.

Own the Granth as the visible person or body of the Guru.

Those who seek shall find him in the sabad’’⁸

There is abundance of historical evidence supporting this fact. The Guru's court poet, Sainapat, tells in his *Gur Sobha*, completed in

1708 CE barely three years after the Guru's passing away, that a day before the incident, the Guru had, in reply to a question, said that he had bestowed his physical form on the Khalsa,⁹ and that the limitless and Eternal Word was the Satguru.¹⁰ This was Guru Gobind Singh's last message and his final commandment saying in unmistakable language and clear words that he was not appointing any particular individual as the succeeding Guru, and that the Khalsa under the guidance of the Divine Word – *Gurbani*, was to be the future spiritual representative of the Guru¹¹

Bhai Nand Lal, a devoted Sikh and scholar known for his numerous works in Persian and Punjabi, who was at Nanded at the time of Guru's demise, endorses the above version of Sainapat. He says in his *rahitnama* that the Guru replied, in response to a question from him, that his two forms were the Granth – *mera rupa Granth ji jan* – embodying *Gurbani*, and the Sikhs (the Khalsa) deeply absorbed in it.

In *Gur Bilas Patshahi Chhavin* written in 1717-18, the author (Sohan Kavi) invariably uses the prefix 'Guru' to the Granth, and reproduces the Guru's message thus :

“Hear ye all, this precept of mine as true, and certain. Recognize the Granth to be the same as the Guru. Think not of any difference (between the two).

In the Kaliyuga, the Granth has assumed the form of Sri Guru Granth.

Recognise Guru Granth to be the very self of the Ten Gurus.

He who wishes to see the Guru let him see the Granth.

And, he who wishes to speak to the Guru, let him read the Granth with a devoted mind.”¹²

Koer Singh in his *Gur Bilas Patshahi Dasvin*, describes the actual ceremony of anointment of the Granth Sahib as the Guru :

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

with all reverence, and said:

‘He who wishes to talk to me,
Should read the Guru (Granth Sahib) and receive the peace
of mind.

There is no other Guru equal to it.

Without any hesitation, I utter this truth.

There is no other Guru like it anywhere.

Therefore, it should be accepted as the True Guru.

With its study (*darshan*) sins disappear.

And by realising its Word in practice Salvation is obtained.’

“He then bowed to Sri Guru Granth Sahib in all reverence, made offering to *rababi* musicians, and was absorbed in the Word of the Granth Sahib.”¹³

Confirmation of the fact of anointment of Guru Granth Sahib is available in several subsequent writings including *Bansavalinama* by Kesar Singh Chhibbar (1769-70), *Mehma Parkash* by Sarup Singh Bhalla (1801), *Bayan-i-Khandan*, *Karamat Nishan-i-Bedian* by Munshi Sant Singh, a lawyer of Baba Sahib Singh’s family (1865), and other historical works of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, like Mirza Mohammad Harisio’s *Ibratnamah* (1705-19 AD), Sayyad Muhammad Qasmi Husaini Lakauri’s *Ibratnamah* (1722) and *Ibrat Maqal* (1731), Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari’s *Tarikh-i-Muzaffari* (1810) and *Tarikh-i-Babr-ul-Mannaj*, etc.

Muhammad Ali Khan writes, “after him (Guru Gobind Singh), according to the faith of these people (the Sikhs), the descending of guruship and of internal spiritualism came to an end, and the book, the Granth, was established in place of Guru.”¹⁴

Dr Ganda Singh has quoted the views of several other Muslim and European historians confirming reports of the decision of Guru Gobind Singh to end personal guruship and to vest it in the Granth Sahib. The well-known historian Syed Muhammad Latif writes:

“Some time before the death of Guru Gobind Singh, when Sikhs asked him as to who would be the Guru after him, the dying apostolic hero, told them, ‘I entrust my Khalsa to the bosom of the everlasting Divine Bani. Whoever wishes to behold the Guru, let him offer *Karah Parshad* worth Rs 1-4 or less and bow before the Granth and open it, and he shall be given an interview with

the Guru. The Granth shall support you under all your troubles and adversities in this world and be a sure guide to you hereafter. The Guru shall dwell with the society of disciples, the Khalsa and wherever there shall be five Sikhs, gathered together, there shall the Guru be present’.

“The Guru also gave them sundry warnings, telling them that there were impostors in the world who would try to dissuade them from the right path, but that his disciples should be on their guard against them and give no ear to what they say. They must have belief in One God and look to the Granth as their inspired law... He then closed his eyes and began to pray, and expired in the performance of his devotions.”¹⁵

Incidentally, it is the above warning against impostors that the Sikhs need to heed today more than at any other time before.

Narbud Singh Bhatt records in *Bhatt Vahi Talauda distt Jind*, as follows:

“Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjun, of the family of Guru Ram Das, Surajbansi Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, parganah Kahlur, now at Nanded, on the Godavari bank in the Deccan, asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Wednesday, Shukla Chauth of the month of Katik, 1765 B.K. (October 6, 1708) to fetch Sri Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the sangat, “It is my commandment: Own Sri Granthji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth.”¹⁶

Mata Sundari’s *hukamnama*, issued during the time of Banda Singh Bahadur is also relevant, and is partly reproduced below:

The Khalsa must believe in none other than the Timeless One. There have been only Ten Masters in human form; to believe in the eleventh and twelfth, Banda (Banda Singh Bahadur), Ajita (Ajit Singh, adopted son of Mata Sundari Ji), etc. is a mortal sin. Every other sin can be forgiven by repeating the Guru’s name, but this sin of believing in human form will not be pardoned. “The faces turned away from the Guru are faces perverted.” Khalsaji, you must believe in none other except the Timeless One.

Go only to the Ten Gurus in search of the Word. "Nanak is the slave of him who by seeking the Lord's Name obtains his goal." The Guru resides in shabad. "The Lord hath merged His own Self in the Guru through whom He hath revealed His Word." "The Word is the life of all life, for, through it, one experiences God." Victory to the Lord. Bhai Mehar Singh, the messenger, son of Bhai Bula, keep the letter secure in your custody. You will gain the Guru's favour.¹⁷

Another authority that may relevantly be quoted is Devaraja Sharma's *Nanaka Candrodaya Mahakavyam*, an old Sanskrit manuscript which has recently been published by Sanskrit University, Varanasi. It records Guru Gobind Singh's proclamation that the Scripture would be the Guru after him :

"While the Master lay on his deathbed, Nand Lal (?) came forward and asked the following question : 'Who shall be our teacher now? Whom shall we salute and see, and what shall be the object of our discourses ?' The Master replied, 'The Granth, which itself is the doctrine of the Guru, shall be your teacher. This is what you should see; this is what you should honour; this is what should be the object of your discourses'."

The original, in Sanskrit, reads as follows :

*Nandalalas tadaprchat ko asmakam adbuna gurub kam namena ch
pasyema kasmai varta vadema ca uce gurutu yusmakam grantha eva
gururmatab tam nameta ca pasyeta tasmai varta vedeta ca.*

– *Nanaka Candrodaya Mahakavyam*, XXI, 227-229.

This point has been laboured somewhat lengthily for the reason that doubts are sometimes raised regarding the authenticity of Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru of the Sikhs. Certain cults among Sikhs still owning personal gurus ask for authentic evidence to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh had named Guru Granth Sahib his successor. No archival testimony can be presented, unless the Bhatt Vahi entry be included in that category. But, evidence bequeathed through tradition, written as well as oral, supports this fact. This is what has come down through Sikh memory. Had there been the 11th Guru, the name could not have been effaced from the pages of history. Guru Gobind Singh brought to an end the line of personal gurus and declared the Holy Granth as Guru after him.¹⁸

To conclude the evidence, we may quote M.A. Macauliffe, who studied Sikh history for several years and had the benefit of assistance from eminent Sikh scholars of his time like Bhai Hazara Singh, Bhai Sardul Singh, Bhai Dit Singh and Bhai Kahn Singh:

“When the Sikhs came again to take their last farewell of the Guru, they inquired who was to succeed him. He replied, ‘I have entrusted you to the Immortal God. Ever remain under His protection, and trust to none besides. Wherever there are five Sikhs assembled who abide by the Guru’s teachings, know that I am in the midst of them. He who serveth them, shall obtain the reward thereof of the fulfillment of all his heart’s desires. Read the history of your Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak. Henceforth, the Guru shall be the Khalsa and Khalsa the Guru. I have infused my mental and bodily spirit into the Granth Sahib and the Khalsa.’

“After this the Guru bathed and changed his dress. He then read the Japuji, and repeated an *ardas* or supplication. While doing so, he bestowed as alms in his name. He then put on a Muslim wasteland, slung his bow on his shoulder and took his musket in his hand. He opened the Granth Sahib and placing five kauri and a coconut before it solemnly bowed to it as his successor. Then uttering *Wahguru ji ka Khalsa Wahguru ji ki Fateh*, he circumambulated the sacred volume, and said, ‘O beloved Khalsa, let him who desireth to behold me, behold the Guru Granth. Obey the Granth Sahib. It is the visible body of the Guru. And let who has desired to meet me, diligently search its hymn.’”¹⁹

It should be clear from the overwhelming evidence presented above that the Granth Sahib is the Guru Eternal of the Sikhs and that there is no place for any personal gurus. Anybody who makes a claim to guruship is an impostor.

II. THE DOCTRINE OF SABAD GURU

It needs to be pointed out that anointment of the Granth Sahib as Guru was not a new concept. The *bani* was revered as message from God from the times of Guru Nanak. When the *Adi Granth* was completed, Guru Arjun showed to it the utmost reverence due to a Guru. History shows that he and the subsequent Gurus, always installed

the Granth Sahib at a higher level. In fact, Guru Arjun would sleep on the floor of the room where the Granth Sahib was housed.

Designation of Granth Sahib as Guru gives practical shape to the doctrine of *Sabad Guru*. The *bani*, as the word of God, was intended to be the Guru from the very beginning. Several verses of the Gurus and Bhai Gurdas bring it out clearly, some of which are reproduced below:

- The *bani* is the Guru and the Guru is *bani*.²⁰
- Hail, Hail, the word of the Guru, which is the formless Lord Himself.²¹
- The word of the Guru is His form (person).²²

Not only the Sikhs, but also the Gurus showed utmost reverence to the Granth Sahib. After the *bir* was ready, “it was decided to spend the night at Ramsar and return to Amritsar the next morning. The Granth Sahib rested at a seat under the canopy, whereas the Guru and the Sikhs slept on the ground.” ... After its installation in the Harmandir Sahib, Guru Arjun directed that during day time the *Adi Granth* should remain in the Harmandir and by night, after the *sobila* was read, it should be taken to the room he had built for himself in *Guru ka Mahal*. ... The Granth Sahib was placed on the appointed seat and the Guru slept on the ground by its side.”²³

III. AUTHENTICITY OF THE GRANTH SAHIB

The *Adi Granth* (the original *bir*), prepared by Guru Arjun Dev, has a history, which is well known. As stated earlier, it was originally compiled at the spot known as Ramsar in Amritsar. It was completed in 1604, and installed in Harmandir Sahib. This *bir* was scribed by Bhai Gurdas. It was later taken to Kartarpur by Guru Hargobind, and remained there even after the Guru shifted to Kiratpur Sahib. It was taken over by Dhirmal Sodhi and is still there in the custody of his descendants. This *bir* is known as *Kartarpuri Bir*.

The *Damdami Bir* is the final version of the Granth Sahib, prepared by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib. It was scribed by Baba Deep Singh. It is an exact copy of the original *Kartarpuri Bir* with *bani* of Guru Tegh Bahadur added to it. Its copies were reportedly sent to Amritsar, Patna Sahib and Hazoor Sahib. It was this version that was apotheosized as the Guru at Nanded by Guru Gobind Singh. The

printed *birs* in gurdwaras during the present times are copies of the *Damdami Bir*.

As pointed out in the beginning of this article, Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture of a world religion which has been compiled and authenticated by its prophet himself. Macauliffe, who studied and translated large parts of it, wrote :

“The Sikh religion differs as regards the authenticity of its dogmas from most other great theological systems. Many of the great teachers the world has known, have not left a line of their own composition, and we only know what they taught through tradition or second-hand information. If Pythagoras wrote any of his tenets, his writings have not descended to us. We know the teaching of Socrates only through the writings of Plato and Xenophon. Budha has left no written memorials of his teaching, Kung fu-tze, known to Europeans as Confucius, left no documents in which he detailed the principles of his moral and social system. The Founder of Christianity did not reduce his doctrines to writing, and for them we are obliged to trust to the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Arabian Prophet did not himself deduce to writing the chapters of the Quran. They were written or compiled by his adherents and followers. But the compositions of the Sikh Gurus are preserved, and we know at first hand what they taught. They employed the vehicle of verse, which is generally unalterable by copyists, and we even become in time familiar with their different styles. No spurious compositions or extraneous dogmas can, therefore, be represented as theirs”.²⁴

However, chauvinists of some other religions, are not willing to accede this unique feature of Guru Granth Sahib. They question this claim on one pretext or the other. In order to settle this issue, two classic studies have been conducted. The first one was done by Dr. Bhai Jodh Singh, whose report has been published by Punjabi University, Patiala.²⁵ He conducted a thorough examination of the *bir*, page by page and its editorial details, which proved that this was indeed the original *bir*. The second study was undertaken by Sardar Daljeet Singh which has also been published by the Punjabi University, Patiala.²⁶ He has listed a number of facts which, individually or coupled with other

evidence, are conclusive in confirming the authenticity of the *bir*.

G. B. Singh who had earlier suspected the originality of the *Kartarpuri Bir* without carefully examining it, had laid down three criteria to identify the original *bir* :

- It should record the copying of *Japji* from the writing of the fourth Guru who had collected it.
- The dates of the demise of the first five gurus only should be in the hand of the original scribe.
- On the *bir*, the words *sudh* and *sudh keeche*, should be in the hand of Guru Arjun Dev *ji* who supervised the compilation.

It has been shown in both studies mentioned above, that *Kartarpuri Bir* is the only *bir* that meets all the three requirements. Besides, Sardar Daljeet Singh has listed a host of other facts relating to the mode of compilation, the blank pages, corrections, obliterations, numbering of verses and hymns, references to the *bir* in historical writings of Bhai Santokh Singh, Bhai Gurdas, *Gur Bilas Patshahi Chbevin*, etc, writings in the margins, paging of the *bir*, *tatkara*, etc. All these facts conclusively point to the originality of the *bir*. Finally, the *nishan* of Guru, the fifth Guru, leaves no doubt about it.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded from the foregoing discussion that Guru Granth Sahib is the direct revelation of the God's Word to Guru Nanak and his successor Gurus, recorded and authenticated by the fifth pontiff, Guru Arjun Dev himself. It is the embodiment of the doctrine of *Sabad Guru*, so that there is no place for any personal guru in Sikh thought. It was formally anointed as the Guru Eternal of the Sikhs. It is not just a scripture or an object of worship. It preaches, as a Guru, a practical whole-life religion with emphasis on love, service, sacrifice, highest moral and ethical conduct. In the words of Macauliffe, 'it prohibits idolatry, hypocrisy caste-exclusiveness, the concremation of widows, the immurement of women, the use of wine and other intoxicants, tobacco smoking, infanticide, slander,... and it inculcates, philanthropy, justice, impartiality, truth, honesty, and all the moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest citizens of any country.'²⁷

Guru Granth Sahib is a priceless treasure of the entire mankind. We are lucky that the original *bir* prepared by Guru Arjun Dev himself

is extant in the custody of Sodhis of Kartarpur. While we celebrate its *sampuranta Shatabdi*, it is in the fitness of things that the Panth make sure that this treasure is preserved through eternity.

We should also share the lofty ideals preached in the Granth Sahib with the rest of the world, through its translation in other Indian and international languages. For this purpose, and to guard against pitfalls of mistranslation, a team of Sikh scholars should come out with a standard translation in English which is the international link language, and which would inevitably be used as a basis for translation into other languages.

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SIKHS – A SYNTHESIS OF INDIAN CULTURE*

PRINCIPAL TEJA SINGH

The question whether Sikhs are Hindus should have no place in decent times. It is always asked when there is trouble between Sikhs and Hindus; and as I desire peace between them I do not feel comfortable in having to answer this question. But as it is being forced upon Sikhs, and perhaps also on Hindus, I wish to state bare facts, historical and religious, which may help the sincere inquirers in understanding the true relationship between the two great communities.

What is meant by Hinduism? Is it to be taken as a Culture, or a Religion?

Most people take it as a culture, to which all those people are supposed to belong whose ancestors were Indo-Aryans or were influenced by the Indo-Aryan institutions. Some would simplify it by saying that all those whose religions were born in India are Hindus. If we take Hinduism as a culture; then what is the position of Sikhs. Some Sikh leaders too have keep expressed the view that they are not Hindus by faith, but they belong to the Hindu type of culture. This comes of not understanding the meaning of culture, which is often confused with civilization or the manner of life. It does not mean civilization but the intellectual side of civilization. It means the peculiar training of the mind which makes a people think, feel and do things in a peculiar way. In practice it refers to the modes of thought, as expressed in Philosophy and Religion, and ways of taste, as expressed in Art and Literature.

If we examine the fundamentals of Sikhism and the evolution of Sikh history, we find that this movement was a rapprochement

* Reproduced from his book *Essays in Sikhism.*, pp 78-98

between the Hindu and the Muslim types of culture, and was not identified with any one of them. The whole genius of the time was moving in the same direction, and the Sikh Gurus were no exception to the rule. The whole Bhagti movement was the work of Gurus and Saints who combined in their thought culture not only what was inherited from the Hindu past but what was best in the Muslim outlook also, with its freedom from monistic and polytheistic ideas and a strong sense of joy in life and worldly duty. Even at the basis of Sikh theology was working the same synthesis between the Hindu and the Muslim thoughts. The idea of the unity of God itself underwent a tremendous change. He no longer remained an abstract entity of the Hindu philosopher, or a being outside and above nature, as conceived by the Muslim divines, but a personal being at once immanent and transcendent (*vide* pp. 41-42). The similarity of views had become so common that Guru Arjun felt no difficulty in incorporating the writings of Hindu and Muslim saints in the Holy Granth prepared by him.

Another feature of this synthesis was the use of a common vernacular even for religious purposes, instead of Sanskrit or Arabic which exclusively belonged to one community. In the Punjab the clearest proof of the Hindu culture being distinct from the Sikh culture is the fact that the two people are not agreed on the question of vernacular, the Hindus adopting Hindi and the Sikhs Punjabi as the medium of their thought-expression. Punjabi adopted by Sikhs has been culturally so developed by the combined efforts of Sikhs and Muslims that in it references to the Muslim tradition are as frequent as to the Hindu and Sikh traditions.

In music also some adjustments were made by musicians like Tan Sen, who is credited by Abul Fazl with having introduced 'great developments' into his art. He is accused by conservative Hindu musicians of having falsified the traditional *Rags*, which means that he made some necessary departures from the old modes in order to suit the Muslim taste. The Sikh Gurus also made some modifications in the same way, as is evident from their omission of certain measures like Hindol, Megh, etc. – because they led people to wild transports of joy, and Deepak, Jog, etc. – because they made people too sad. Both these extremes were against the spirit of Sikhism which work for *Sahj* or a steady vision of life. They therefore avoided the use of these

Rags, except when they could be used to modify other *Rags*; as for instance, Hindol was combined with Basant to vivify its serene joyfulness, and Deepak was used to heighten the seriousness of Gauri and to make it more vigorous. In Tilang, Asa and other frontier *Rags* a visible combination was made, not only in the execution of music, but in the composition of the pieces set to music also, Arabic and Persian words being used as frequently as Hindi words.

Besides Music other arts also show the same combined development. In architecture the Sikhs adopted the Indo-Sarcenic style, which was a mixture of the Hindu and the Muslim styles. The Rajputs, who were under the influence of the Mughals, may have continued the mixed tradition, but the recent Hindu renaissance has fallen back on the archaic Hindu style, and carefully avoids any medieval mixture. The Sikhs, however, still stick to the synthesis adopted in the days of the Gurus. The difference can be realized if we compare the styles used in the buildings of Hindus and Sikhs. The Hindu Colleges, Gurukulas and the Benares Hindu University are built in the pure Hindu style; and if any mixture is allowed, it is of the cheap P.W.D. style, but no trace of Muslim arches or domes, is allowed to contaminate the purity of the square brackets and pointed *shikharas*. See, on the other hand, the buildings of the Sikh temples at Patna, Nander or any other far-flung place or of the Golden Temple; Saragarhi Memorial and the Khalsa College, Amritsar. They are in the mixed style made current in the Mughal days.

In Painting the Hindu artists are still emphasising an expressionless art, which may be classically Hindu and perfectly in keeping with the meditative mood of old India, but it is un-Indian in so far as it omits to take cognisance of the change in the spirit of India brought about by the virile West. Muslim painters like Chughtai, on the other hand, seem to be fond of colour and are less deep and suggestive in expression. The Sikh painters, like Thakur Singh, Sobha Singh, etc., are combining the two effects and are more realistic. In this they are following the tradition of their forbears, who even in the days of the Sikh rule were in the forefront of those who were for realism in art. In the Punjab they were the first to cultivate the sense of perspective in drawing distances, to depart from mere symmetry and to introduce variety and fine shading in colour.

It would appear from these observations that while Hindus and Muslims are tearing up the old solder set by their medieval ancestors and are reviving their individual past, Sikhs are still trying to keep the happy synthesis intact. They refuse to be drawn to this side or that, because they believe that the evolution of a unified nation is possible only on the lines followed by them.

If we take Hindusim as a religion, we have to determine what its essential features are. It has been found very difficult even by great Hindu thinkers to ascertain and fix upon even one thing common to all Hindus. Even the word *Hindu* is not acceptable to all those who go by this appellation. Arya Samajists, Jains, Brahmos, Budhists, etc. have, at one time or another, rejected this name and have resented its application to them. Perhaps the belief in the *Vedas* is shared by most of the Hindus. Next to it is the doctrine of transmigration of souls. Caste system is another thing that distinguishes Hindus from all the rest of people. Respect for the cow is another feature of Hindu life. Tiraths or holy places are also respected by the different denominations of Hindus. Untouchability, in one form or another, enters into their daily behaviour, and does not allow them to have 'free intercourse with people of other denominations. Even when converting people of other religions they have to subject the new converts to 'a process of *Shuddhi* or preliminary purification, which is not thought necessary in the case of those who come from higher castes.

Guru Nanak began his career with the declaration. "There is no Hindu, no Muslim". In *Var Ramkali* he says, 'It is nonsense to be called a Hindu or a Muslim.' Bhai Mani Singh in his *Gyan Ratnavali* says, "The pilgrims asked Baba Nanak at Mecca whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim, and he replied, 'I am the witness of both'." When he died, both Hindus and Muslims quarrelled over his remains, one party thinking that he was a Hindu and the other that he was a Muslim.

Guru Arjun too declared boldly in his Book:

I don't keep the Hindu fast, nor that observed by Mohammedans in Ramzan.

I serve Him. and Him alone, who is my ultimate refuge.

I believe in the same Gosain who is also Allah.

I have broken off with the Hindu and the Muslim.

*I won't go on Hajj to Mecca or do worship at the Hindu places.
 I shall serve only Him and no other.
 I won't worship idols or read Namaḥ;
 I shall lay my heart at the feet of the One Supreme Being.
 We are neither Hindus nor Mussalmans :
 We have dedicated our bodies and souls to Allah-Ram.*

(Bhairo)

The mission of the Sikh Gurus was to approach all people and to make them one: Guru Nanak says, 'The true Guru is one who can unite all sorts of people' (*Sri Rag*). At first converts came from Mohammedans as well as Hindus. Guru Nanak left a host of followers in Mesopotamia, Persia and other countries visited by him. We learn from the *Janamsakhi* of Seva Das (1588) that Kiri of Pathans and many other places in India, inhabited by Mohammedans, came over to the faith of Nanak. Bhai Gurdas (1629) in his 11th *Var* mentions many Mohammedans, among the prominent Sikhs living in different localities. Examining the cases of these conversions it appears that Pathans, Sayyads and Shias, whose races had been defeated by the Mughals were more inclined to accept Sikhism than the Mughals who had too much pride of the conqueror in them to adopt the religion of the conquered. The chief complaint of Jahangir against Guru Arjun, as recorded by the Emperor himself in his *Tauḥak*, was that 'so many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by his ways and teachings.'

With conversions made from all quarters, it was difficult, if not impossible, for caste restrictions or untouchability to remain. It is held by some Hindu writers, like Indubhusan Banerji (in his *Evolution of the Khalsa*), that the earlier Gurus, particularly Guru Nanak, never meant to attack the institutions of caste, sacred thread, or holy pilgrimages. Whatever else great prophets may or may not have been, it is certain that they were sincere. You cannot imagine Guru Nanak saying, with his tongue in his cheek, that 'Caste is nonsense' (*Sri Rag*), that it is blindness of the soul on the part of a Brahmin to twist a sacred thread and put it round the necks of others (*Var Asa*), and that 'pilgrimages, austerities, formal acts of mercy, alms-giving and religious gifts are all dispensed with, when one gets even a grain of the honour of God's Name' (*Japji*). It is certain that the Gurus wanted to destroy these

customs root and branch. If they did not succeed completely, it was not their fault. It takes two parties to effect a reform: the reformer and the party to be reformed. The Gurus knew what sort of material they had to handle. The corruptions which had taken centuries to gather could not be expected to be removed at once. "It took the Gurus ten generations to effect some of the reforms they had initiated. And yet some remained uneffected upto the last. One of them was the abolition of the 'caste system'. The difficulty of the task may be gauged from the fact that Islam and Christianity too have tried to break this steel-frame, but who can say that they have succeeded? The Sikh Gurus did succeed in the beginning, when hosts of Mohammedans and low-caste people were assimilated in the fold of Sikhism. But when the forces released by Sikhism brought on religious persecution by Mohammedans, the Sikhs and Hindus found them selves in the same boat, and as would happen in such cases they had to club their resources together, and to suspend all their inter-communal controversies. The caste system could not be broken in these circumstances, although the pride of caste which was a hindrance in the way of true religion was totally removed. The Jats who were considered Sudras enjoyed the greatest prestige along with the Khattris, and the Brahmins were no longer held in esteem. 'All the four Varnas were equalised'. (Bhai Gurdas)

In order to remove the Hindu prejudice against Mohammedans and Sudras, who were considered untouchables, Guru Amar Das obliged all his visitors to dine together in his free kitchen* before he would talk to them. The Raja of Haripur as well as Akbar had to do the same.

In order to show that a man born among Mohammedans or Sudras could rise to the greatest spiritual heights as much as any high-caste Hindu, Guru Arjun included in his *Granth* the compositions of Kabir, Farid and Bhikhan, who were Mohammedans by birth, and Ravidas, Namdev, etc., who were considered untouchables. This was a practical way of securing the highest honour for them, because the Book in

* "The whole Congregation would Come to the kitchen and, without considering any distinction of caste or creed, were seated in a line. They were treated as if they were all equally handsome and clean."

which they got a place was considered divine and was held in greatest veneration by Sikhs, even the Guru taking a lower seat than the Book prepared by him.

Mohsin Fani, the author of the *Dabistan-i-Maṣāhib*, who visited the Punjab in the Sixth and Seventh Gurus' time, writes about the Sikhs:

The Sikhs of Guru Nanak condemn idolatry and believe that all the Gurus are identical with Nanak. They do not read the Hindu Mantras, nor do they pay any regard to their shrines. They do not believe in the Hindu Avatars, and do not study Sanskrit which, according to Hindus, is the language of gods.

The Sikhs do not have any faith in the ritual and ceremonies enjoined by the Hindu Shastras, nor do they observe any superstitious restrictions about dining. A learned Hindu named Partap Mal, seeing that a Hindu boy was inclined towards Islam, said to him, "There is no need for you to turn Mohammedan. If you want to get freedom in eating and drinking, you may better join Sikhism.

The only restriction they followed was, and still is, about the eating of beef. Like Hindus they would not *kill* the cow or eat *its* flesh. They did not, however, worship the cow or hold it sacred.

Guru Arjun made the *Sikh* community well-organised and self-contained, having its own scripture and its own temples.

The Sikhs from the beginning observed no elaborate ceremonial in their temples. "We worship the Name, believe in the Name, which is ever and ever the same and true" (*Sri Rag*), Guru Amar Das declared the Guru's Word to be superior to all the scriptures of the world, and the Sikhs were enjoined to use only the Guru's Word in worship. See his *Anand*. He held that 'the same superstitions that had created the Smritis and Shastras was at the bottom of the belief in gods and goddesses' (*Majh*). Guru Nanak was of the opinion that 'all the four Vedas talk of the Phenomenal nature and describe the three conditions; but the fourth Unconditioned state is known from the true Guru' (*Gauri*). Guru Amar Das rejected the *six* systems of Hindu philosophy and declared that the Guru's system was the best: 'This system of God is obtained by fortunate ones through the Guru's Word by means of true detachment. The six systems of the Hindus are in vogue nowadays, but the Guru's system is profound and unequalled. It

provides the way of salvation, and the True One comes to reside in the heart. This system, if adopted with love, can save the whole world' (*Asa*). Guru Arjun said, 'Men ponder Over the Vedas and Shastras to secure deliverance, but superior to all the religious ceremonies and observances taught therein is the practice of the Name' (*Asa*). 'Nobody can get salvation by reading the Vedas and Western Books, Smritis and Shastras' (*Subi*). Guru Gobind Singh was more denunciatory. He said, "Those who attach themselves to God give up their belief in the Vedas' (*Vichitra Natak*). He would allow no compromise with Hinduism. He insisted that in Sikh temples nothing but the Guru's Word should be recited or sung. Sujan Rai of Batala, writing about Sikhs in 1697, says in his *Khalsa-tul-Tawarikh*: "The only way of worship with them is that they read the hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments."

There was a need of clear definition, especially because the Khalsa was to be made self-governing after the Tenth Guru. So far the Sikhs, under the guidance of the Gurus, had been able to keep their doctrines distinct from Hindus and Muslims, and, while liberally benefitting by their association, had taken care to maintain their growth free from obsession from either side. But the opportunities for the operation of this balanced spirit began to decrease, when the Sikhs had to fight against the tyranny of the Mughal government. The growing antipathy of the Muslims against the Sikhs began to tell upon the work of Sikh mission among the Muslims, until, with the intense religious persecution started by the later Mughals against Hindus as well as Sikhs, the scope of conversions to Sikhism came to be confined solely to the Hindu masses, who brought to the contemplation of the new moral forces revealed by Sikhism an imagination saturated with the spiritual convictions of the old era.

Guru Gobind Singh had to take strong measures to restore unity and distinctness of the Sikh Mission. When the Guru entered on his mission, he called upon the Sikhs to rally round him. But such was the fear of persecution by the Government that many of the Sikhs denied their Sikhism and declared that they had never departed from their old faith. It was so easy for them to slide back into Hinduism. Anybody among the Sikhs, in a moment of weakness, might say, "My

name is Ram Chand. Look at me, Don't I look like a Hindu ?" The Guru, astonished at this illusiveness of the so-called Sikhs, said, "Now I shall create such Sikhs who, in spite of themselves, will not be able to hide their religion." He ordered that:

The Sikhs should wear long hair and come to me.

Once a man becomes a Sikh, he *should* never shave himself,

He should not touch tobacco,

And should receive baptism of the sword (*Suraj Parkash, iii. 21*)

He insisted that the Sikhs, in spite of their sympathy and love for other communities, should not confuse their ideals with those of others:

The Sikhs is to keep his observances distinct from those of other people of all the four Varnas. He should have dealing with everybody, but his belief and programme of life should be different all the same (*Suraj Parkash, Rut iii, Ch.50*)

The Khalsa should be distinct from Hindus and Muslims.

(*Rabatnama* of Bhai Chaupa Singh and also of Bhai Daya Singh).

He created the Khalsa as the crown of Hindusim and Islam.

(*Gurvilas*) Now I shall create an infinitely strong Panth, distinct from Hindus and Muslims. (*Panth Prakash*)

Previously there used to be only two communities, Hindus and Muslims. Now there shall be three. (*Suraj Prakash*)

The Guru laid down definite rules of conduct to be followed by Sikhs, e.g.:

He who keeps alight the unquenchable torch of truth, and never swerves from the thought of one God;

Who has full love and confidence in God; and does not put hills faith, even by mistake, in fasting or the graves of Mohammedan saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Jogis' places of sepulcher ;

Who recognises only the one God and no pilgrimages, alms, non-destruction of life, penances or austerities;

And in whose heart the light of the Perfect One shines, – he is to be recognised as a pure member of the "Khalsa. (*Swayyas*)

Similar rules are to be found in the *Rabatnamas* left by certain veteran Sikhs of those days. Some of them may be cited here:

A Sikh should have marriage connections with Sikh families (*Chaupa Singh*)

A Sikh should have nothing to do with *Janou* or frontal mark. (ibid)

He should not put on a *Janou*, or perform marriage, *saradh* or death ceremonies of the Hindus, but should perform all ceremonies according to the Sikh ritual which consists of prayer. (Bhai Daya Singh)

A Sikh should avoid worshipping Jogis' sepulchres, idols, *tiraths*, gods and goddesses and should have nothing to do with fasts, spells, charms, Pirs, Brahmins and their incantations and *Gayatri*. (Ibid)

This phase of pure Sikhism, however, lasted only for a short time. After the death of the last Guru when most of the veteran Sikhs disciplined by him had been martyred and their descendants forced to live in exile, away from their homes, the rump congregations began to drift back to the old customs and beliefs. Those who came from low castes began to be distinguished from those who came from the so-called high castes. Some who in the days of persecution could not dare to confess Sikhism openly were allowed to go about without the outward signs of Sikhism. Such men were called *Sahjdharis* or slow-adopters. In those days, when to wear *keshas* was to invite death, nobody could have the heart to question the disguise adopted by the *Sahjdharis*, who believed in Sikhism but could not afford to die for it. The *Sahjdharis* who had adopted this apologetic attitude never pretend to be representative Sikhs. They always looked up to the spirit and form of their brethren in exile whom they helped in every way.

The spirit and form were, however, kept intact in the ranks of the Khalsa even after it had been slackened in towns and cities. The *Panth Prakash* of Rattan Singh (1809) bears ample witness to the fact that in spite of hard times the fighting Sikhs still conformed to the rules laid down by Guru Gobind Singh. They still kept aloof from idolatry, performed the *Anand* form of marriage, obeyed the Panth as the highest authority, conducted themselves by resolutions passed in their assemblies, did not believe in the sacred thread, incarnations, caste or the pollution of food. And freely reclaimed those who had gone over to Islam. Many notable Sikhs married Mohammedan women converted to Sikhism. Some converts from Mohammedanism* were

* See my *Sikhism*, Chapter vii

appointed to the holy places of Bhaliani, Phul, etc.

When Ranjit Singh came to rule, Sikhism received a rude shock even in the ranks of the Khalsa, where it had been preserved more or less in its pristine purity. Hindu influences began to work even in religion, and in court ceremonies strict regard to the spirit and form of Sikhism was not observed.

After Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when kingship became a thing of jewels and clothes, Sikhism too, with the higher classes became a mere fashion of the turban and the beard, until a people with sterner ways and better discipline struck the sceptre from their hands. It was the people who still retained some semblance of the old spirit, but they too, with the change coming over their temples along with the shock they had received on the battle field felt paralysed for the time being. They declined in numbers too. The English, however, forgot their late enmity in admiration for the noble bravery of the Sikhs, which now began to be used on their side and tried to befriend them. This friendship put some heart again into the Sikhs, and they began to enlist in the British army, where they could keep their baptismal forms intact. But in all other ways the Sikhs showed no life, religious or national, in them. They worshipped the same old gods, indulged in the same old superstitious practices from which their Gurus had so heroically worked to extricate them. Their baptism and five symbols became a mere anomaly. They were Hindus then, and it would have astonished them, if anybody had suggested to them that they were not.

It was towards the end of the last century that a new movement was started among the Sikhs, of which the object was to study the original sources of Sikhism, and to restore it to its pristine purity. Those who undertook this task found that much of the true Sikhism was overlaid with Hinduism, and that the work of restoration would require the rejection of the Hindu excrescences. I shall describe this process in a separate chapter, which will show that the cry '*We are not Hindus*' is not the creation of the present-day reformers, but is an echo of the old slogan which had better been left unraised in these days.

SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB AND HUMAN RIGHTS

TEJPAL SINGH*

Sri Guru Granth Sahib preaches humanism. It projects humanity as one, because it is created by One God. It is a philosophy of monotheism. It does not adore any deity. God is both transcendent and immanent. According to its fundamental Creed:

‘God is sole Supreme Being; of eternal manifestation; Creator, Immanent Reality; Without fear; Without rancour; Timeless form; Unincarnated; .Self-Existent; Realised by grace of the Holy Preceptor.’

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the Scripture of Sikhism. Sikhism is a life affirming religion. It is householders’ religion. It is against monasticism, asceticism, escapism and withdrawal from life. Sri Guru Granth Sahib preaches Fatherhood of God and Universal Brotherhood of man and solidarity of mankind. It characterises the complete equality of sexes, races, high and low, without pride and prejudice.

Human Rights may be defined as:

‘The dignity of every human being, his inalienable fundamental rights, the inviolability of life, freedom and justice, the sense of solidarity and the rejection of discrimination.’

Guru Granth Sahib rejects the inequality created by *Varan Asharam Dharma*, where the Shudras, i.e., the under-class, are condemned to lead a depressed and deprived life. Guru Granth Sahib emancipates the down-trodden, gives them liberty and dignity:

He, whose heart is imbued with the Lord’s love, is emancipated.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 122

He, in whose mind the illustrious Lord abides is wealthy, of high family

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and honourable, and is emancipated while alive.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 294

The Lord, exalting the humble, of none stands in fear.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1106

Casteism, which is bane of Indian society, is outrightly condemned:

Preposterous is caste and vain the glory

The Lord alone gives shade to all the beings.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 83

Pride of high caste is like poison, which kills a person when eaten:

Of little worth is caste in the hereafter.

Judgement by truthful living shall be.

With poison carried in hand, whoever tastes it, must die.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 142

The high caste is challenged. There can be no demarcation between the high and the low:

If thou dost claim to be a Brahmin by thy birth from a Brahmin woman,

Why was thy birth not from a different source?

How are you Brahmins and we Sudras?

How were we made of mere blood, and you of milk?

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 324

As a matter of fact, it is God, the Creator, Who has created Mankind and the Universe, and as such none is high and none is low:

God first created Light; all else to His might subject.

Since from one Light is the whole world created –

Who is noble, who is inferior?

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1349

Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh was a great humanist, who treated all races and religions equally and stressed fraternity and solidarity of mankind. He established a classless society. He rose above the narrow bonds of caste, creed, colour or other divisions of mankind. He was a great revolutionary, who proclaimed:

Recognise all humanity as one.

Dasam Granth

Guru Granth Sahib condemns every kind of repression. Life was in a chaos. The clergy and polity had become corrupt and

repressive. Righteousness had been eclipsed by the all-engulfing darkness of corruption. There was no rule of law, in stead, law of jungle prevailed. It was a dark age, where human rights were out of question. The underclass was exploited. The high castes ill treated the low class as untouchables. Guru Granth Sahib rejects such type of life style: -

*Kali-yuga is turned knife, rulers butchers;
Righteousness on wings is flown.
This is the dark night of evil;
The moon of truth is nowhere visible, nor risen.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 145

The common people did not have .any political or civil rights. They were exploited, repressed and executed. They did not have any avenue for the redressal of their grievances. It was a total dehumanization of values. Kings became devouring maniacs and their assistants became petty bloodsuckers who were terrifying the common people:

*Rulers are turned beasts of prey, their officers hounds;
None do they allow in peace to rest.
The subordinates wound the people with their claws:
You dogs! Lick on the blood and marrow of the poor.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1288

The Muslim judge is telling a lie and eating dirt in the form of taking bribes; while the Brahmin is taking a bath in blood. The Yogi has gone astray. All the three lack substance and have deviated from the right path:

*The Muslim judge utters falsehood and eats filth;
The Brahmin guilty of slaughter of humanity, makes show of pious bathing;
The Yogi, blind of insight, knows not the true praxis;
The devices of all three ruin mankind.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 662

At the time of Babur's invasion into India in 1525, innocent Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, were put to sword. Women were raped and men were humiliated. Guru Granth Sahib delineates the heart-rending picture of the suffering humanity. Even a strong protest is lodged with God:

As in their agony of suffering the people wailed,

Didst Thou feel no compassion for them?

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 360

Guru Granth Sahib challenges the Divine Right of the kings; because instead of protecting their subjects, they usher in a reign of terror:

No king is 'great as God':

These monarchs, lasting four days, make false ostentation.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 856

Guru Granth Sahib sets rules that only the competent and benevolent kings should rule over their subjects:

Let such alone be seated on the throne as are fit therefor,

Such alone are true kings as realize righteousness.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1088

Guru Granth Sahib ordains the establishment of a welfare state, which respects the human rights:

Now is the gracious Lord's ordinance promulgated:

None to another shall cause hurt.

All mankind now in peace shall abide –

Gentle shall the governance be.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 74

Guru Granth Sahib portrays an ideal city, which respects the human rights and where people enjoy equal rights and are prosperous and free from any fear and anxiety:

The City Joyful is the name of that city —

Suffering and sorrow abide not there.

Neither is there worry of paying taxes, nor does any hold property;

Neither fear of punishment for error nor of decline.

This fine place of habitation have I found:

Brother! there neal perpetually reigns:

Eternally fixed is the kingship therein:

No second or third are there; all alike.

Those abiding therein are prosperous, opulent.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 345

Guru Granth Sahib declares Commonwealth of God, in which everyone partakes their share and none is alienated:

Thou Lord of all, our father,

In Thy possession lie unending stores, with the nine treasures

overflowing.....

In Thee are all sharers: to none dost Thou appear alien.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 97

Guru Granth Sahib infuses an element of fearlessness in humanity by declaring:

Other than the holy Lord for none else have they care.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 473

Bhai Gurdas, a savant of Sikhism, praises Guru Nanak who has created a classless society, where there is no divisions of first rate, second rate or third rate citizens. He has equalised all the four classes and has established a society of saints.

cf. Varan Bhai Gurdas xxxiv/4

The paradigm of human rights is very pivotal to Sikh ideology and praxis. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, declares the aim of his life and motivation by saying that he has come to establish righteousness and fight political repression, social inequality, economic exploitation and religious bigotry:

Hum ib kaj jagat mo aay; Dharm het Gurdev pathay –

cf. Dasam Granth

Guru Gobind Singh's manifesto and line of action were quite in line with Guru Nanak Dev's description of God as *asur sanghar*, destroyer of demons where he tells us about God's action of correctness to gods, demi-gods and destroying the demons to save His saints:

The Lord destroyed the demons and to His devotees granted liberation...

Demons in duality involved, He destroyed;

The God-directed, with sincere devotion, were saved.

– Guru Granth Sahib, pp 224-225

In Sikhism, ideology and praxis go hand in hand. They are inseparable. Guru Nanak Dev was imprisoned by Emperor Babur for calling spade a spade on his letting loose terror on the peaceful citizens. Guru Angad Dev, the second Guru, was threatened to be beheaded by Emperor Humayun, when he was retreating after being defeated by Sher Shah Suri.

Similarly, Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth guru, the compiler of the *Adi Granth*, was roasted alive, because he refused to submit to Jahangir, the Mogul Emperor, who could not tolerate the rising Sikh movement, which projected a superior and better way of life.

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, was beheaded by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1675, because he stood for the basic human rights. He laid down his life for man's right to freedom of worship as Dr Sangat Singh, a prominent historian of Sikhism, has written:

“Here was a martyrdom which was self-sought for the defence of basic human – rights, which centuries later were incorporated by the UN General Assembly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 1948.”

The Sikhs In History, pp 63-64.

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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– The Author

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#### **ANNUAL SEMINAR**

The Annual Seminar of the Institute of Sikh Studies will be held on the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> November, 2006 (*Katak* 28-29, 538 NS) at Chandigarh. The theme of the Seminar is :

#### **CONCEPT OF SRI AKAL TAKHT SAHIB**

All are cordially invited to attend. Scholars are requested to present papers on the subject, which should reach the Institute by the 1st October, 2006.

## REMEMBERING GURU ARJUN DEV ON HIS MARTYRDOM

ONKAR SINGH\*

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Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru (spiritual prophet), was a rare mix of a man of letters and spiritual wisdom. His vision, persistence and spirituality underpinning his poetic skills, came together to produce the Holy Granth, a sacred scripture of the Sikhs, though it's a spiritual illumination for the whole of mankind.

The spiritual light that illuminates the world begins in Amritsar which grew around the holy pool the Harimandir, the holiest of holy Sikh shrines, and, possibly, the most famous, known as the Golden Temple or Darbar Sahib, the divine court. It's majestic presence in the centre of the water tank called Amrit Sarovar, the pool of nectar, sets it apart. The temple with its golden domes dominates the city of Amritsar, which takes its name from the pool of nectar.

Guru Arjun had the construction of the tank and the temple completed before installing the Holy Granth called the *Adi Granth* (original edition) in the centre of the sanctum sanctorum of Harimandir in 1604 with due honour and ceremony. He had passionately worked for five years to compile the Granth.

The Granth preserves the holy word, *shabad* (hymns) of Guru Nanak, the first Guru and founding-prophet of the Sikh Faith, and four Sikh Gurus after him, including Guru Arjun, as also the spiritual verses of many medieval bards and *bhagats* (holy men) and saints of different religions and strata of society, like the Muslim Sufi saints, Sheikh Farid, and Kabir, and the Hindu saints, Namdeva and Ravidas.

Their spiritual quest and thoughts are closer to those of the Sikh Gurus, as for example, the concept of social justice, based on the

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\* # 181-Mount Kailash, East of Kailash, New Delhi

equality of all mankind. They spoke out against social injustice. Since their hymns are held in equal reverence with those of the Sikh Gurus, it shows the universality of the Sikh scripture.

An eminent poet and lyricist, Guru Arjun has the largest number of hymns, 2218, out of a total of 5894 hymns in the Granth. His poetic insights find finest expression in his long masterpiece, *Sukhmani*, a Psalm of Peace, devoted to the remembrance of the Lord. Next only to Guru Nanak's celestial *Japji*, it is reverentially recited by the devout. Guru Arjun set to music all the hymns in various Indian *ragas* (musical measures).

The *Adi Granth* was completed, in 1704, by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Sikh Guru, to include the sacred hymns of the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, without disturbing the pattern and order set by Guru Arjun.

Before his demise, Guru Gobind Singh, a true visionary, declared in 1708, the final volume of the holy scripture, Sri Guru Granth, as the "supreme living Guru of the Sikhs". "*Guru Granth Ji Manyo. Pragat Guru'n Ki Deb*". (Recon Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the visible living Guru) Thus, he ended the line of living Gurus.

Ever since, Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been revered as the embodiment of the revealed teachings of the Gurus and the spiritual and religious guide of the Sikhs for all time. The Gurbani (Guru's holy word), enshrined in the Granth, is regarded as sacred and revelatory. It's of divine origin and revealer of divine truth.

The religion that emerges from the Holy Granth is the universal religion of man. Its doctrines and concepts are progressive and pragmatic. It has a Catholic and tolerant attitude towards other faiths. It's free from any inhibition:

*'None is our foe nor any one is a stranger. With all are we in accord.'*

– Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p 1299

Towards the end of the scripture, Guru Arjun uses the metaphor of salver and heavenly food to underscore the universal application of the Granth to all mankind.

*'In the Salver Gurbani are lying the virtues – truth, contentment and contemplation.*

*Also lying in it is Lord's ambrosial Naam,*

*Sustenance of all existence.*

*Whoever partakes of it, consumes it,*

*Saved shall he be.* (Sri Guru Granth Sahib, page 1429)

As predicted by Guru Amar Das, his maternal grandfather, Guru Arjun's life was a gripping tale of self-sacrifice though he was destined to be a "universal saviour".

Prithi Chand, Guru Arjun's eldest brother, did not accept him as his father's choice to be the successor. He terribly annoyed him. Guru Arjun perforce left Amritsar and shifted to Wadali, a village close by where a son was born to him, named Hargobind, who was later to become the sixth Sikh Guru. Bhai Budha, a venerable old Sikh, predicted that he would "possess both temporal and spiritual powers, and crush the enemy."

There was a great rejoicing among the Sikhs. They persuaded the Guru to return to Amritsar, ignoring the antics of Prithi Chand.

Guru Arjun Dev brother's capriciousness, who had alleged that the Granth contained derogatory references to Hinduism and Islam. This was exploited by a resentful and wealthy Chandu Shah, whose offer of his daughter's hand in marriage to Guru Arjun's son, Hargobind, was turned down by the Guru. He intrigued to bring it to the notice of the Mughal ruler, Akbar.

When the hymns were read out to Emperor Akbar, he was delighted that the hymns inculcated love and devotion, and not hatred. He complimented Guru Arjun on his composing the "highly inspiring" hymns.

However, Akbar didn't live long and was succeeded by his son Jehangir. Chandu didn't fail to instigate him to summon Guru Arjun to Lahore.

Upon receiving the summons, Guru Arjun intuitively felt what was in store for him. He had Hargobind installed as the sixth Sikh Guru in the presence of leading Sikhs before leaving for Lahore.

Guru Arjun was asked to expunge the so-called derogatory references from the Holy Granth or else he would be tortured to death. The Guru's response was vehement, saying, "The Holy Granth is a revealed scripture and no one dare change it."

He was imprisoned and mercilessly tortured, made to sit on a red hot iron plate, burning sand poured on him and dipped in a boiling cauldron. But the Guru would not compromise.

It is said that Mian Mir, a Muslim divine of Lahore, whom Guru Arjun had invited to lay the foundation stone of Harimandir, the Sikh

temple, at Amritsar, came to meet him in prison. The Guru counselled against the use of mystical power saying, “One must accept the will of God”.

Guru Arjun suffered the inhuman torture stoically, as “ordained by God”.

Allowed to bathe in the nearby river Ravi, the Guru tottered in blisters and finally made it to the river, watched by thousands of devotees. He was heard chanting:

“Oh God ! Sweet is your will. The Gift of thy Name I seek.”

He never came up!

A great saintly life was brutally cut short. He was only 43 years old.

His martyrdom shook the Sikhs. They were stunned. It inspired them to fight tyranny. They vowed to sacrifice their lives.

Under compulsions of changing times, Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, was to take over the struggle against oppression and tyranny, after the martyrdom of his father, Guru Arjun in 1606. He conceptualised the authority of Miri (temporal authority) and Piri (spirituality). He took two swords: One was to smite the oppressor and the other to protect the virtuous and the innocent. Henceforth, the Sikhs were asked to arm themselves. It was a turning-point in Sikh polity.

No one can forget the heart-wrenching account of the savage treatment meted out to Guru Arjun Dev and how he died a martyr's death in the river.

The great prophets of mankind, according to the historian, APJ Taylor, are remembered for a book. Guru Arjun Dev, a spiritual prophet and a man of peace, will, forever, be remembered for the Holy Granth, which Professor Arnold Tonybee described as “part of the mankind's spiritual treasure.”

The wonder of the Golden Temple, the sacred Sikh Shrine at Amritsar, which has become a unique and indispensable of pilgrimage for people of all faiths, is another monumental achievement of Guru Arjun, to be cherished.

Guru Arjun faced death in a peaceful manner. He upheld the importance of Guru Nanak's message of universal love and brotherhood of man. His martyrdom raised world awareness of the enormous suffering of the people under unjust rulers. It was a source of inner strength. It made people courageous and fearless to check human oppression with implicit faith in God.

Guru Arjun is rightly regarded as the “saviour of humanity”.

## NANAK, NAAM, CHARHDI KALA, TERE BHANE, SARBAT DA BHALA

HARDIT SINGH\*

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The Sikh Ardas (supplication) which is recited before and after any religious function encapsulates Sikh history, its traditions, philosophy, tenets and ethics. The Ardas inspires and urges the Sikhs to mould their lives according to the standards set by their Gurus and the various martyrs whose deeds are recounted in the Ardas. *Nanak, Naam, Charhdi kala, Tere Bhane Sarbat da Bhala* is the concluding line and essence of the Ardas, but it is usually passed over without realising its true significance.

The first part of the Ardas from *ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹਿ ॥* to *ਤੇਗ ਬਹਾਦਰ ਸਿਮਰਿਐ ..... ਸਭ ਥਾਈ ਹੋਇ ਸਹਾਇ ॥* has been taken from 'Chandi-divar' which beseeches blessings of God and the preceding nine Gurus. The rest is said to be initially compiled by Bhai Mani Singh, a contemporary of Guru. Subsequent additions were made under the orders of the Akal Takht when any crucial or distressing Sikh event took place.

The concluding verse under discussion consisting of five terms determines three of our important relationships :

|              |   |                                     |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Guru and God | : | <i>Nanak and Naam,</i>              |
| Our selves   | : | <i>Charhdi kala and Tere Bhane,</i> |
| Humanity     | : | <i>Sarbat da Bhala</i>              |

### NANAK, NAAM

The term 'Nanak' here signifies Guru Nanak and his nine successor Gurus, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and their teachings. Guru Nanak's main message to the humanity was to worship one God

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\* Brig (retd), # 1380, Sector 33-C, Chandigarh

through the medium of *Naam*, to stress the unity of God and mankind, and to eradicate ritualism introduced by the priestly class. He had asked his followers, called the Sikhs, to live holistically with an inner awakening of God's remembrance and an outer service of His creation by noble and righteous deeds. The Guru is 'God in man' to impart divine knowledge, to dispel gloom of ignorance and to guide the devotees towards God realization. Guru is the conglomeration of *gurbani*, *shabad* and *Naam*.

*Naam* is the embodiment and manifestation of God's Divine Love, Light, Word and Wisdom. *Naam* covers all the cumulative attributes of God; infact God and *Naam* are synonymous. *Naam* is the only detergent that purifies the mind of its impurities like lust, anger, etc. *Naam* is the epitome of *gurbani* and the Sikh philosophy. To Guru Nanak, *Naam* was his life's breath – "I am alive when in *Naam* and die when it is forgotten." Lest the *Naam* be forgotten even for a moment, the person conducting the Ardas service repeatedly calls upon the audience to utter *Wahguru, Wahguru* – The Wondrous Guru for the Almighty is Himself the Great Guru.

### CHARHDI KALA AND TERE BHANE

*Charhdi kala* means effervescent spirit, and it is a stage when a devotee remains calm, cool and collected all the time even under adverse conditions. *Tere Bhane* implies willing submission to the will and command of the Almighty. These two virtues emerge from within when one realises that the cause of all causes is God alone and nothing is outside His pail. Only that which pleases Him, comes to pass, and whatever is happening is prompted by His will:

*"By divine command all forms manifest:  
Unfathomable, unthinkable, is the Lord's behest.  
Souls dwell in their bodies by His command;  
Some lowly, some exalted, and others grand.  
Divinely ordained, men are made higher or low;  
By His order they live in joy or sorrow.  
All the world by His law are controlled.  
None can escape His sustaining hold."*

*Japji - 2*

If all the evolutionary processes are governed by His command, one should then, get attuned to His command and shed the ego which

is standing in the way to realize Him. Surrendering the ego is living in harmony with the source of all the power. Human spirit being spark of the Divine Light will blossom forth like an electric bulb connected to the main power.

### **SARBAT DA BHALA**

The meaning of *Sarbat-da-Bhala* is the wishing of well being of all mankind. This ideal of Sikhism stems from its fundamental doctrine: the unity of God and the brotherhood of mankind. God being the sole Creator dwells in every heart, and the whole humanity without any religion, caste, colour distinction belongs to Him. Human beings are made of the same elements, i.e., earth, water, air, fire and ether, and are the sparks of the Divine Light. The Sikhs are humanitarians; they are enjoined to distribute the fruit of their labour all around (*Vand Chhakna*), for all wealth belongs to God. There can be no other law except to be good, do good and wish good for others. Whenever any call comes on account of any calamity like the tsunami or earthquake, the Sikhs go out to feed, clothe and house the sufferers. Bhai Kanahaiya made no distinction between friend and foe whilst providing drinking water to the wounded in the battlefield. On being asked by Guru Gobind Singh to explain his conduct, Bhai Kanahaiya replied that "He saw no other man; he saw only thee lying wounded." The Guru was so pleased to hear this that he gave him a tin of ointment to treat their wounds as well. Human beings are embodiment of God on earth; their relationship with the others ought to be the same as of God towards His creation.

Ardas is the opening of one's heart invoking God's grace and blessings for the acquisition of *Naam* and noble qualities like truthfulness, contentment, compassion, effervescent spirit and wishes for the well being of entire humanity. *Nanak, Naam, Charbdi kala, Tere Bhane, Sarbat da Bhala* is the summom-bonum of the Sikh philosophy and teachings. A devotee ends his supplication by praying:

"Holy, Guru Nanak *ji!* By your grace, grant us the boon of your teachings and remembrances of God. May we remain in high spirits forever and abide by His Divine Will. May we wish well-being, peace and prosperity to one and all, and enmity towards none."

## GURU SHABAD – ITS VERSTALITY AND POWERFULNESS –

TARSEM SINGH\*

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*The Lord, and the Name of the Lord, is the panacea, the medicine for the world. The Lord, and the Name of the Lord, bring peace and tranquility. Those who partake of the Lord's sublime essence, through the Guru's Teachings — their sins and sufferings are all eliminated.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 169

The name of God is ever pleasurable, by listening it Ajamal was saved and Ganika attained the higher state.

Hence if a man wants to be in peace in the world, he has to be with God or His *Naam*. One can acquire the comfort by remembrance of *Naam* of Lord. *Gurbani* enlightens that without *Naam*, the life is useless.

Without submission to Guru, those who get attached with the world, their mind is diseased with maladies and is under doubt, superstition and duality. Those who do not have a vision of Guru, they shall never have the blessed vision of the Primal Lord. Without the Guru's *shabad*, what use is human life? (Guru Granth Sahib, p 416)

It is to be noted that *shabad* '*Wabeguru*' bestowed to a seeker at the time of baptism is *Naam*, the name of Lord. Hence *Shabad* and *Naam* are the same, and are interchangeable, hence used in the text in this way.

Actually, without enjoining with *shabad*, one is unable to have the appreciation about the divine aspect of life. This is reflected as thus:

*People fail to appreciate the divine aspect of life without enjoining with shabad. Since they are totally blind about this. Only through the teachings*

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*of Guru, the heart is illuminated and in the end only Naam is of help.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 426

From above, it becomes imperative that one should know more about *shabad* or *Naam*. Guru Granth Sahib enlightens about *Naam* as thus:

Before the universal came into existence, God was all alone and there was none other than Him. Therefore nothing was known about Him and it is stated that God was in a state where He did not have any attribute hence called *Nirguna*. Under His will God desired to create the world, for this He first changed over to a state, which had attributes, called *Sarguna* State. Through these attributes God could be known. Prophets or Gurus and also the devotees of God, who contemplated on Lord, were enlightened about these attributes. Depending on the attribute signifying the task or action of Lord, a name was assigned to Him. For example, Gopal signifies the nourisher of earth. Since God is infinite, His attributes are also limitless and hence His names are also countless. Each name assigned to Lord signifies His personality, which in turn signifies all His attributes. This is as in the case of a man whose name brings into mind, all his qualities or his personality when his name is mentioned or uttered. Hence when the name of God is uttered, His personality's image comes into the mind of the one who utters it. Hence uttering of *Naam* of God fills one's mind with the attributes of God.

It is a characteristic of mind of man that with whatever it gets associated it becomes alike. Actually this is a divine Law expressed by *Gurbani* as thus;

*O mind, as you serve, so do you become, and so are the deeds that you do. Whatever you yourself plant, that is what you shall have to eat; nothing else can be said about this.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 756

From above it becomes clear that in order that God comes into the mind of the seeker, he has to be associated with the *Naam* of Lord.

But there is a difficulty in making the mind to be associated with *Naam*. This comes due to the inherent disposition of a man. A man can be considered to be constituted of four parts: three of these are on a subtler level which are two consciousnesses and a mind, and the fourth one is a gross one, the visible body. Actually the body acts as

housing for the other three. One of the two consciousnesses is soul or Shiva and is part of and parcel of God within a man. It can be said that it acts as a representative of God within a man. Since this is a part of God, it has all the characteristics of God and it is permanent and imperishable. The second consciousness is an ego and is a representative of *maya*, which generates within a man duality and creates within him a delusion that he is the doer and master of this world. This consciousness keeps a man entangled with the world all along. This also creates within him an individuality and also selfishness. This is temporal and can be subdued or eliminated totally.

In between the two, is the mind of a man, which can be considered as a very versatile and sophisticated computer. Since a computer works on the program fed into it, in the case of mind also. Out of the two consciousnesses, with whichever it is attached, accordingly it functions. If it attaches with *maya*, it works in a worldly way, however, if it gets attached with the Shiva, it behaves in a Saintly or Godly manner. In a common man, mind is associated with *maya*, hence the man is a worldly one. Since *maya* is a very powerful force, if mind has to be attached with the other conscious, it is not easy, since force of *maya* has to be overcome to do so. Unfortunately, against *maya*, a man is helpless and it has not got any power with him for transplanting the mind from *maya* to Shiva. This is reflected in the composition of *Sukhmani* thus:

*There is no power in the hands of mortal beings; the Doer, the Cause of causes is the Lord of all. The helpless beings are subject to His Command. That which Pleases Him, ultimately comes to pass. Sometimes, they abide in exaltation; sometimes, they are depressed. Sometimes, they are sad, and sometimes they laugh with joy and delight. Sometimes, they are occupied with slander and anxiety. Sometimes, they are high in the Akaashic Ethers, sometimes in the nether regions of the underworld. Sometimes, they know the contemplation of God. O Nanak, God Himself unites them with Himself.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 277

Only the Guru has the power to do so, hence it becomes absolutely necessary for a man to submit to Guru. Guru then provides the seeker a mantra or a *shabad*, which in Sikhism is called *Naam* or name of Lord. It is to be noted that God or His *Naam* is within a man but since mind of a man is engrossed with *maya*, it is not operative. For making it operative one has to go within. This is made possible by the *shabad*

or *Naam* given by the Guru. The power of Guru to subdue *maya* is also embedded within the *shabad*. In other words *Shabad* bestowed by Guru is very potent. With the practice of *shabad* as directed by Guru, gradually, the influence of *maya* gets reduced and more and more of *Naam* of God becomes operative within a man. It actually means that more and more of virtues of Lord pervade within one. Due to these virtues, he is able to do more practice of *Naam* by which more and more power of God starts working within him. By virtue of this power, he is able to subdue *maya* more and more till he comes to a state where he becomes a part and parcel of Lord when *Naam* of Lord becomes fully operative. In this state, he becomes perfect and gets fully absorbed within God and he becomes devoid of ego (*maya*). This state has its characteristics, which are covered at length by *Gurbani* but bringing them out here is beyond the scope of this work.

In Sikhs, the word (*Shabad*) is given to the seeker during the Baptization ceremony and is a single word, '*Waheguru*'. This is also Guru's Mantra. This single word has the capability to keep the mind of the seeker absorbed with *Naam*. Its spontaneity to act is expressed very beautifully by *Gurbani*.

Thus text brings out that a single *shabad* of Guru is very powerful, it has the power to completely transform a seeker. It not only makes the life of a seeker peaceful and comfortable but it provides many benefits to the seeker as indicated above. For having them, it is absolutely necessary to obtain the *shabad* from Guru or the persons authorized by him. In Sikhism, five beloveds or the *Panj Piare* act on behalf of Guru to bestow this *shabad* when one undergoes the ceremony of Baptization. For this *shabad* to be effective, a seeker has to come to a receptive state where he has faith on the *shabad* and has the inside urge to receive the word from Guru. Secondly, he has to practice it as per the instructions given during the ceremony. It is to be noted that one comes to the receptive state of obtaining the *shabad* under the grace of God. Therefore, when one gets inside urge to undergo the Baptization ceremony, one should consider it that God is beckoning him to obtain the *shabad*, hence, one should not ignore it. At the same time one should not undergo the Baptization ceremony without making the mind fully ready for the same since then the exercise may not be of any help.

## THE GURDWARAS – SCHOLARS’ FORUM

GAJINDER SINGH\*

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The literary renaissance in medieval India was brought about by the incessant efforts of Guru Nanak, who meticulously collected works of eminent saint-poets during his historic journeys throughout the length and breadth of India. But for his tireless efforts in searching the handwritten manuscripts, the writings of the eminent *bhakti marg* saints of India would have been lost forever. Today, the most authentic *bhagat-bani* is that which is included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak gave serious consideration to the writers’ and poets’ endeavours and is said to have handed these over to his successor, Guru Angad Dev, who, likewise passed these on along with his own compositions to the next Guru. The idea was to take steps at preservation of this spiritual literature for posterity. Guru Nanak’s yardstick for the selections was not confined to any language, region or culture, but the central theme of God and excellence of expression therein.

Much before the compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjun Dev, a literary foundation was laid by Guru Nanak, with his own sizeable number of hymns, sung in all congregations and his discourses with the Sufis, Yogis, Pandits and Mullahs. He involved the public as *sangat*, so that the literary and philosophical acumen of the Sikhs received a big fillip. Consequently, the Sikhs were found to be better informed and appreciative of the quest for religion and spirituality than others who served the dictates of the priests mindlessly. In fact, ‘Sikh’ was an apt term for scholars constantly engaged in exploration of truth and study of the Guru’s word. The impact was felt wherever the Sikhs formed colonies and settled down. In Iran, one such place came to be known as Zahidan, literally meaning the

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scholars' abode, which gradually became a flourishing centre of learning and trade.

The genius of Guru Nanak was imbibed by his successor Gurus, who expanded the operation of this essential aspect with the establishment of recognised centres where the Sikhs could assemble and contemplate on the Guru's words and exchange religious and social matters. The Gurus' sacred writings were memorised and orally reflected upon as well as written in booklet forms, *gutkas*, and circulated for personal use as prized possessions and for further propagation. In fact, writing of the *bani* booklets manually for distribution was held as a praiseworthy activity. This was the initial effort at publishing the spiritual and religious literature for the benefit of the Sikh congregations. The Sikh assemblies sprang up at far-flung places. The Gurus appointed persons of integrity to conduct discourses collectively based on the Gurus' hymns set to traditional music. It shows the high regard among the Sikhs in those times to the sublime *sabd* of the Gurus and distribution of the literature among the Sikhs.

During the Guru period, the deliberation on *Gurbani* was an essential daily function of the individual and the Sikh *sangat*. During the eighteenth century, the unending state repression and their constant movement to hide and keep away from the government agencies hunting for the Sikhs' heads, had severely affected the contemplation and meditation part of the Sikh ethos. However, their passion for the cause remained unabated, but the spiritual routine came to be influenced to a large extent by the influx of Brahminical rites.

The purity of the Sikh ethos remains a big task. The scholars are busy in the study and creation of views and ideas about the Sikh philosophy, but there is an absence of a cogent and viable agency to encourage and support them. There is need to regulate and engage their energies in the right direction. In the present scenario, there is no regulatory authority to evaluate the labour of the researchers and scholars. What started as a scholarly endeavour of Guru Nanak and should have been the pivotal creativity of the community, has been neglected to such an extent that the Sikhs are no more inspired by either the contemplation of Guru's word or a study of the scriptures. Their level of perception of the sacred hymns and musicology has almost vanished in the absence of a guiding and directing institution.

We have customarily blamed the *Mahants* who had, in the times of turmoil, usurped the control of the gurdwaras with their vast properties. But during the last eighty years, although the properties of these shrines and their vast incomes have been zealously protected by the successive managing committees, the quality of the service at the gurdwaras has nose-dived for which nobody has owned up the responsibility to render the desired services to the community. What should have been a unique institution developed by our Gurus with great effort and proper planning, has been lost by default and our meek compromise with mismanagement. Our Gurus organised the Sikhs into a formidable forum, and later as resistance groups who took on the successive governments to secure freedom for the performance of religious and community welfare activities. This has been reduced now to no more than an empty shell. The question of a regulatory authority to create a forum for the scholars remains a far cry.

What is direly needed is an encouraging and advisory body of intellectuals who may not only guide the Sikh scholars to produce quality research and imaginative literature but to assist them to publish and market it at all places, including the Diaspora, wherever the Sikhs have settled internationally. Such a body should explore Sikh talent all over the world and help the writers and the poets in getting their works published and set up a network to find their marketability.

The welfare organisation of the writers cannot be possible without the up-gradation of the gurdwara functions, so that the *sangat* is developed on lines as envisaged by our Gurus, with a scholarly, intellectual bent of mind. In my book, *The Armchair Sikh*, (page 112-113), I had suggested a blueprint for such emancipation of the gurdwaras which could lead to revolutionising the concept and revitalising the gurdwara functioning. I quote:

We must make our gurdwaras attractive to the youth and above the rut of routine:

- i) Provide well-stocked libraries and create a congenial atmosphere of scholarship and calm.
- ii) Each gurdwara to have free medical and lab facilities.
- iii) Modern well-equipped gyms as a compulsory attachment to the gurdwara and sport orientation, where the youth can get free training and sponsorship for competitions.

- iv) Instead of unnecessarily gilding the domes of our gurdwara buildings by expert *sants*, they should be advised to utilise the community's voluntary contributions for the welfare of the youth to inculcate in them values of spirituality and religion.
- v) Well lit auditoriums for lectures, debates and screening of educational and informative films on Sikhism. It means there should be audio-visual equipment in good condition and trained *bhaji* to use it. Animated 2-D and 3-D films based on the rich and heroic Sikh history will be readily absorbed by young minds as used to be done by grandparents earlier to tell stories which the children in the past remembered in good measure throughout their lives as adults.
- vi) Helpline for Sikh children and youth.
- vii) To form local committees to select, purely on merit basis, needy and economically weak students for scholarships for higher studies.
- viii) Last but not the least, our *granthis*, to be sagacious, scholarly with spirit and zeal for the Sikh cause, who can play advisory role in the community, with special drive to be in constant touch with the young boys and girls at a personal level, so that the new generation accepts the gurdwara as a necessity and develops a conscience for their participation with an objective and a goal to achieve certain distinction.

On the same lines, the writers' forum must have four divisions, namely,

- a) Literary evaluation committee, to guide young writers and act as a guide group.
- b) Publishing section: The forum may negotiate with willing publishing houses for attractive terms for the writers who join the forum. It is difficult for the individual scholar to persuade the publishers to provide favourable terms. No doubt, commercial viability of any project is the foremost consideration in every business, but the forum can exert pressure since it will clear any manuscript recommending it solely on its merit and have better response from the publishing houses.

It should be the final objective of the forum to ultimately take up the publishing work on its own, for which an infrastructure may be built step by step. It will require not only sufficient fund raising

exercise but experts as well to operate economically with small budgets. The trained persons, taking up this task, must be motivated by a sense of achieving the community’s intellectual promotion, helping budding writers as well as producing of literary works which could benefit the general cadres in the long run. Many excellent writers have not seen the light of the day as their works are lying neglected, unpublished and are getting lost. Most recent case is the loss of unpublished works of Prof. Puran Singh which were bequeathed to the Punjabi University, Patiala, and have disappeared due to unknown circumstances. The same fate also unvail many other eminent writers and poets who are not able to cope with the terms and conditions of professional publishing houses.

- c) Financial Sourcing: There must be an all out campaign to collect funds by mounting appeals and pressure on philanthropists among the international Sikh community because the objective is not commercial, but to raise the literary and scholarly levels of our people. It is a strenuous task, but repeated seminars and conferences may be organised to bring home the necessity of this task. It is the sacred legacy of Guru Nanak who spent his life in serving the intellectual needs of the common people and advised the successor Gurus to continue it culminating in the compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, finally sealed and stamped by the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh.
- d) Marketing strategy: The Writers’ forum will find more favourable response as compared to the efforts of a helpless individual writer and poet, when it approaches established Libraries, Universities and administration of the colleges and schools to give preference to the books recommended by them for addition to their libraries. There are funds available, which are generally spent by these Institutions on publications as recommended by the publishing houses which are obviously produced by them.

In this scheme, the main impetus will be on reorganising our gurdwaras on the recommended lines, where the basic action lies in improving and building the character of the Sikh youth, boys and girls, and to give special attention to the small children when the audio-visual aids, animated films and other productions of our glorious

history could be fully exploited to improve the services rendered by the gurdwaras.

In my book, *A God Made To Order*, (pages 102-3), I have once again stressed on this important matter:

Strong cultural renaissance and integration must be reinforced. As for the Sikhs, merely community eating, *langar*, or musical symposia is not enough. Our gurdwaras must be made the hub of all social activities, which they were supposed to be in the times of Guru Nanak, and not mere prayer halls. The sense of belonging and the pride of inheriting a superior religious and spiritual canon is the need of the hour. There must be provided reading rooms, libraries, video films, gymnasias, free dispensaries, Sunday schools, training courses for technical subjects and crafts for different age groups. People must utilise the gurdwaras and the priests for community services instead of mere booking of *Akband paths*, which encourage only *karamkand* rituals, strongly condemned by the Gurus. It also means that the quality of the priests must improve and require technical and spiritual proficiency, for which they must be paid honourable remuneration. They must have the ability to effectively manage the *sangat* and motivate the youth into constructive channels. Just imagine if all village gurdwaras set such standards of excellence, the community would make rapid progress and redefine its reverence for the Sikh values.

We can start the experiment by choosing one gurdwara in each town and a group of neighbouring villages to provide this kind of infrastructure, especially gyms, libraries and free dispensaries. With the advent of the Chief Khalsa Diwan in the early Twentieth Century, emphasis was rightly put on establishing Sikh schools all over areas with a sizeable presence of the Sikhs. These institutions were very popular with the non-Sikhs too. The plight of the present-day Sikh schools is the result of the total negligence of the community managers, and due to lack of useful literature. It is not true that there is a dearth of funds. The funds are mismanaged and this can only be corrected by forming committees which are accountable to the auditors and take up jobs in a planned manner.

## SILVER LINING IN THE DARK CLOUD

KIRPAL SINGH\*

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The year 1947 will for ever remain a watershed in the history of South East Asia. It was the year which initiated liberation of many countries in the sub continent. In the history of Punjab, this year will be remembered for large scale massacre, abduction of women and mass migration accompanied by trail of misery and sufferings. About half a million people were killed, about forty thousand women were abducted, more than eight million people were uprooted. Surely it was the darkest cloud on the horizon of NW India. If we go through the records full of agony, misery and details of abduction of women and the refugee trains were derailed causing endless suffering and misery for the passengers and killing of men and abduction of women in large number by the policemen who were otherwise supposed to protect the women and children. This happened on both sides of the border. Amidst sickening details of loot and plunder, massacre and abduction at places, we do find a silver lining in the cloud.

One such example is given by a Sikh woman in the office of Recovery Officer, Lahore. She was the resident of village Kanha, District Lahore. In the beginning, she swears that what ever will she say, will be true. She records as follows:

“My entire family – father, brother – were living together. In the month of August, 1947 some people came from Okara and they wanted to take us to India. We all set out towards the road. Those were the rainy days. All of a sudden, we were attacked and my father was killed. My cousin was also killed. One man after showing sword got hold of me and wanted me to accompany him. He forced me to go to his village where four other girls were

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also confined. Three of the girls went near the well of Gurdwara and jumped into it. I also wanted to jump into the well. Some constable saw that a man was keeping the girl. But the woman fled away from the police van. The constables came to me and told me that they will take the girls to India. One of the policeman – Fateh Mohammed assured me that he will take me to India. He also assured me that he has two daughters and a wife in the house and he will keep me comfortably. After going home, he brought forth a copy of Holy Quran, placed his hand on it and assured me that he will treat me like his own daughter and serve her to any extent. He will also try his best to find out my relations in India and send me there safely. He gave me clothes and other necessary things alongwith Burqa and kept me in his house alongwith his daughters. I remained there for a number of months. When I fell ill he took me to a hospital and got me admitted there and looked after me well.

Sometime later, he came to know that one of my brothers was traceable in India. He brought me there a Burqa and told me to tell him frankly that the person who has to come to Lahore in the office of Recovery Office, was actually her brother. And if that person is not her brother, she should not go with him. And if that person is actually her brother, she may go with him. He would have no objection. Fateh Mohammed brought me to the office of Indian Recovery office and I recognized my brother – Mohinder Singh and I decided to accompany him to India. She said with tears in her eyes that Fateh Mohammed has done her great service and I can never forget him for whatever good he has done for me. I pray for his long life because he has done great service to me.”

sd/-

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Several such accounts are available. *New York Times* of the USA published an incident of Sardar Narain Singh of Bathinda. He got hold of a Muslim girl whose parents had been killed in the riots. He got the girl admitted in a school alongwith his children and grand

children for a number of years and when she became of marriageable age, he wrote a letter to Pakistani Embassy that he wanted to arrange the marriage of a Muslim with some Muslim boy. He and his wife prepared dowry items for this Muslim girl and alongwith dowry articles went to Wagah border to see her off as one of her relatives had come to receive her. The title of this incident in the newspaper was given as the *Sweetest Revenge*. The newspaper also published a photograph of S Narain Singh and his wife alongwith the Muslim girl as also a big trunk and other dowry items with the girl being seen off. The girl said she will never forget the great gesture of Sardar Narain Singh. Dr Khushdeva Singh of Patiala saved several Muslim families and they wrote him letters of thanks after reaching their home in Pakistan. Dr Khushdeva Singh compiled all these letters into a small booklet entitled *Love is Stronger*.

So there were miseries no doubt, the cloud was the darkest, but it had an equally shining a silver line as well.

## **SOME REFLECTIONS ON SGPC, AKAL TAKHT & ITS JATHEDAR**

**GURCHARAN SINGH\***

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Indian constitution, after its adoption in 1950 has been amended 93 times in a short span of 53 years. Despite its being quite comprehensive and based on the best tenets of world's best constitutions, it failed not only to provide direction in the case of some of India's post-independence problems and challenges, but also proved inadequate to encompass all the Indian ethos and national aspirations. For example, the word 'Secular' was added to its preamble many years after its publication. Similarly, amendments relating to certain fundamental rights, directive principles of State, adult suffrage at 18 years of age, etc., were made at different stages of its post-independence existence. Thus, every institution, organization or societal code of conduct, howsoever sound, comprehensive and based on the best traditions, principles and conventions, needs improvement, restructuring and redesigning in the light of changed and ever-changing socio-cultural changes. If it fails to change or if its upholders do not accept and acknowledge the new ground realities, it becomes stagnant, obsolete and irrelevant to the very basic purpose for which such an institution or organization was created.

The supreme Sikh body, the so-called 'Parliament of Sikhs', the SGPC, constituted under Govt. of India act in 1925, twenty

Opportunism, expediency, money and muscle power, casteism and electoral combinations and permutations play as dominant a role in the SGPC elections as they do in other political elections. Thus, the SGPC elected in this manner, is never a representative body of the whole Sikh community but of a particular faction. Majority of its

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elected members do not subscribe to the highest Sikh principles of earnest living, upright conduct and service to the society. As per the established Sikh code of conduct (*Reht Maryada*) initiated by the Sikh Gurus and practised and propagated by their ancient followers, only those with a life of dedication, upright moral conduct and excellent record of service to the Sikh faith and community were chosen as *Panj Piaras* or later on as *Jathedars*. Dedication and service were the touchstones when the Sikh Gurus chose their heir apparent. Tenth Guru's selection of *Panj Piaras* at the baptismal ceremony of the, Khalsa; of Banda Bahadur and his five associates, the Sikh *sangats*, selection of S. Kapoor Singh for the title of Nawabship in 1733, and, later on, declaration of S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as the supreme Sikh ruler of Lahore were all based on the sole criterion of devotion and service to the Sikh faith and Sikh community rather than on any political or electoral consideration. It is in this supreme Sikh tradition that members of the SGPC should be selected rather than elected. Mode of selection rather than of election of the SGPC members should be through the age-old Sikh process of *gurmatta*, the broad consensus, rather than through the electoral process of a political party. For this purpose, first the SGPC's constitution should be delinked from the government legislative Act and the governmental conduct of its elections. Once freed from this governmental interference, the SGPC should be constituted on the basis of traditional Sikh principles (*gurmatta*) built round a person or persons with a glorious record of service and dedication to the community. Personal attributes of the highest moral and Sikh values should qualify a person for the membership of this supreme Sikh body rather than his political clout or social and financial status. Such a process will not only be in line with the Guru-ordained *Panj Piara* Sikh tradition based on *gurmatta* but also rid the SGPC of all the present ills and distortions. This process is not impractical either. The smallest Sikh unit, the local 'Singh Sabha' of a township or a village can select a devout, service-oriented Sikh person or persons with an immaculate spotless character through a broad consensus of the Sikh congregation in the presence of holy Guru Granth Sahib and send their names to the common electoral college. This process can be duplicated all over the whole State, States, country and the world, wherever the Sikhs have their

shrine (gurdwaras) and their Singh Sabhas. The Electoral College, thus constituted of the best Sikh representatives, can further select an apex body of the Sikhs on the same golden principle of selection of *Panj Piaras* through a *gurmatta*. There is hardly any chance of an ego clash or factionalism in the Electoral College since it will consist of persons of the highest integrity. No narrow, vested interest is likely to motivate these well-chosen individuals. Where service and self-sacrifice are the main motivations, ego and vanity take a back seat. Thus, the immediate need of the times is to take the SGPC out of the govt-controlled Act and its electoral system. Its constitution, under the govt Act in 1925 has served its historical purpose of ridding the gurudwara management of the erstwhile *Mahants* and their foreign collaborators. Now under the changed circumstances, both in the post-independence Indian political context and the world-wide Sikh diaspora, SGPC needs to be redesigned & recast on the fundamental Sikh principles of service (*sewa*) and Sikh way of life. It will, indeed, be Herculean task to dismantle this well-entrenched system supported by governmental patronage, but a determined campaign by well-meaning enlightened Sikhs can bring about this transformation. A public movement like the one launched by the Sikhs in 1920 needs to be launched once again. Progressive Sikh community will surely respond to such a campaign launched through the modern electronic media and the press.

Democratic electoral system, despite upholding the principles of equality on rights including the right to vote for all citizens, very often elects leaders of dubious character, mainly on the basis of majority, even if that majority consists of the ignorant and the indiscrete. The present breed of Indian political leaders governing the nation, barring a handful of clean and upright individuals, consists of tainted, and unscrupulous politicians. This is the direct result of democratic electoral system and artificially created vote-bank politics. It is well said :

*"Jamhooryat who tarzey hakumat hai  
Jahan gina jata hai, tola nahin jata"*

It is, thus, quantity (the number of heads) rather than the quality (the intrinsic worth) that elects and constitutes a body which governs a state. How can such a system be suitable for an organization like

SGPC which has to deal with the noblest concerns – the religious and the spiritual concerns of community. Only those who uphold and practise the highest standards of morality and Sikh code of conduct in their personal and public life deserve to be the members and custodians of this Parliament of the Sikhs. Thus, the very system by which the SGPC is constituted at present is flawed. So, the need of the times is to review the present stage-managed electoral system and make suitable amendments. Thus, constituting the SGPC through the hierarchical system of forming an electoral college through the Sikh principles of *Gurmatta* and *Panj Piaras* at every stage, through the natural process of churning (*manthan*) and crystallization from among the best, can bring out the best dispensation for the Sikhs. Means and ends must be inseparable in religious, spiritual and even cultural matters. There is no place for politics and manipulation in matters of faith and religion. Sikhs, throughout their glorious history, have always managed their politico-social affairs through the concept of *Gurmatta*, *Panj Piaras* and representative consensus (*Sarbat Khalsa*). Establishment of *manjis* and *dharmshals* by the Sikh Gurus, election of supreme Sikh leaders like Nawab Kapoor Singh, S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, 65 Sikh *jathas* and later on 12 *misals* by the Sikh *sangat* in the 18th century, have vindicated the validity of these principles. Whenever the Sikhs abandoned these principles, they have come to harm. The collapse of the Sikh Empire after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was mainly due to the abandoning of these principles by the Maharaja and his descendants. Present ills of the main Sikh institutions like the SGPC and the whole Sikh diaspora are also the product or the same structural deviation from the established Sikh principles and adoption of a political electoral system. Sooner we abandon this manipulative approach and return to the merit-based-on-service approach, the better. India being a secular state, its constitution under section 26, guarantees every religion and its followers complete freedom to manage their own religious affairs, independent of the government. No other religion or religious community holds its religion's elections under government management and supervision. The Sikhs should also review and revise the functioning of their fundamental institutions like the SGPC, Akal Takht and its *jathedar* and his mode of issuing *bukamnamas* (religious edicts), both in the light of established Sikh Principles of *Panj Piaras*,

*Gurmatta* and *Sarbat Khalsa* and the prevailing socio-cultural scenario. A few suggestions in this regard deserve attention:

The position, status and role of the *jathedar* of Akal Takht must be clearly defined in the light of its history and Sikh conventions. Akal Takht was established by the Sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib for safeguarding and monitoring the temporal and political interests of the Sikhs in the changed circumstances following Guru Arjun Dev Ji's martyrdom. The militant power of the Khalsa was galvanised around this supreme seat of Sikh power to meet the threat of Mughal intentions of decimating the Sikh Panth and its identity. Since then, Akal Takht has been a rallying point for the Sikhs whenever their religious and temporal existence has been threatened and challenged. All the Sikh crusades, throughout the Sikh history upto 'the modern times', have been launched from this supreme seat of Sikh power. Thus, the role of Akal Takht as an institution and centre of Sikh power and identity is beyond any controversy. We must preserve and strengthen its unique position, since it is a symbol of the glorious history of the Khalsa Panth.

But the role and relevance of its *jathedar* and appointment of the Akal Takht *jathedar* must be reviewed and clearly redefined. The process of the appointment of the *jathedar* has not been codified so far. Following the demise of the Guru Gobind Singh, Mata Sundri appointed Bhai Mani Singh custodian of both Harmandir Sahib as well as Akal Takht. During the later period, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'The various Sikh *jathedars* were appointed by the five eminent Sikh personalities of the times and these appointments were ratified by the special Sikh congregations held at Amritsar or Anandpur Sahib through the process of *Sarbat Khalsa*. The *Sarbat Khalsa* was a congregation of the representative Sikhs called on special occasions to put a seal of approval on the decisions and appointments made by the *Panj Piaras*. The *Panj Piaras* were eminent Sikhs of proven track record of service and sacrifices for the Sikh Panth. The appointments of all the legendary Sikh *jathedars* like S Nawab Kapoor Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Baba Deep Singh, Akali Phoola Singh were made through this process of *Panj Piaras* and *Sarbat Khalsa* (congregation consensus). The first deviation and distortion in this tradition was made by the British after their annexation of Punjab. Aroor Singh was the first government

appointee to the post of *jathedar*, who was made to honour the main perpetrator of Jallianwale Bagh Massacre General O'Dwyer. After the British, the SGPC has been appointing the Jathedar Akal Takht. Its appointment is almost identical to the British procedure and as much suffers from all the weaknesses of government appointed judicature. This is a clear violation of the established Sikh principles and traditions, Since SGPC, in its present form, is heavily politicized and faction-ridden, its appointment of the *jathedars* and their *bukamnamas* also suffer from lack of credibility and universal acceptance. Some of these arbitrarily appointed *jathedars* have been unceremoniously dismissed and their *bukamnamas* annulled because they did not toe the official line. Some of their *bukamnamas* have been defied both by the individuals and organizations. As a result the present status of the *jathedar* has been eroded and diminished and his *bukamnamas* lack in credibility. There is an urgent need to codify the procedure or his appointment and his power and jurisdiction to issue *bukamnamas* in the light of the changed circumstances in the entire Sikh diaspora. A serious debate and discussion at the highest level is required on this issue as well as the constitution of SGPC. A piecemeal solution of any one component will not do. A judicious blend of the traditional principles and the modern needs must be effected to recast these Sikh institutions. The appointment, powers and jurisdiction of the Akal Takht *jathedar* should be somewhat on the lines of those prescribed for the Chief Justice of India so that he can become a real custodian of the Sikh principles and the values enshrined by Akal Takht. Just as Chief justice of India is the custodian and upholder of India's constitution, *jathedar* of Akal Takht must also fearlessly uphold the Sikh principles. His selection as *jathedar* of the Supreme Sikh institution (*Akal Takhti*) must be on the basis of his eminence in Sikh Scholarship, Sikh way of life and service to Sikh Society. Such a person should adorn this august office by virtue of his being the tallest Sikh of his times. The *jathedar* of the other four Sikh Takhts should also conform to these standards. These five *jathedars* of the five Sikh Takhts should constitute the *Panj Piyaras* and issue *bukamnamas* after serious deliberations and proper ratification by the apex electoral college, elected hierarchically by the various organs of the Sikh Panth. This will ensure uniformity and universal acceptance of *bukamnamas* in the entire Sikh Panth.

To sum-up, Sikh Panth must relinquish the electoral mode of their major institutions based on the election process political parties and return to Guru-ordained way of selection of its custodians to manage their religious shrines and religio-temporal institutions. Abandoning the manipulative process of factionalised vote-banks, we must return to the merit based selection of our leaders and office bearer. Only, then we can meet the modern challenges of apostasy, disintegration, personality-cult and pseudo spiritualism disguised as Saint-hood and phony *Babaism* among the Sikhs. We must review, revise, amend and restructure our major institutions if we wish to survive as a religion and maintain its distinct identity.

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## THE LEGACY OF HINDU CASTE HIERARCHY AND THE CONVERSION OF JAT PEASANTRY TO SIKHISM

M S AHLUWALIA\*

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The Jat Sikhs have contributed a lot to the members of their community in particular and humanity at large. In our own times, their hard work and patriotism has attracted the social scientists and economists to coin epithets such as “the breadbasket of India” and the “Sword Arm of India”. The official web site of the Punjab Government describes a typical Punjabi Jat as “an extrovert, a sociable fellow who likes to eat well. Even if he is in a tight spot, he would like to twirl his moustache and say ‘*Chardhi Kala*’. “Their achievements are remarkable especially in the field of agriculture. Their role in bringing about “Green Revolution”, made a leading historian to remark:

“It has always seemed to me a question worth asking – why in case of several other – similar movements, the verses of their preachers have not taken as strong roots among the peasantry as in case of Jat Sikhs of Punjab?”<sup>1</sup>

One who has studied the caste legacy of Hinduism and the developments leading to the birth of Sikhism will conveniently find an answer to the question of conversion of Jats to the new faith. The reasons for the adoption of new faith by the Jats are not too far to seek. One thing, however, is certain that the Jats were converted to Sikhism at a time when they ‘needed it most’.

### THE HINDU LEGACY: VARNA ASHRAMA DHARMA/CASTE SYSTEM

The ethics of a Hindu elite reflect the teachings of the two most renowned Hindu thinkers, Manu and Kautilya (Chanakya), who were

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the founders of the policy of “divide and rule” and were responsible for shaping the destiny of Hindu society through the ages.

Permanent human inequality by birth is the *summum bonum* of Brahminical ideology. The Brahmins proclaimed that Prajapati (God) created the caste-system and made a Sudra a slave of the higher castes. Moreover, Prajapati was the God of Aryans only, from whom the Sudras were excluded. It was also claimed that gods do not associate with every man, but only with an Arya. A Kshatriya, or a Vaisya can only make religious sacrifices to gods. Nor one should talk with everyone, as God does not talk to everybody but only to an Arya. The order and rank of castes is eternal as the course of stars and the difference between the animal species and human race. Thus the Sudra was excluded from the domain of religion and barred from any religious activity.<sup>2</sup>

This system was designed to serve the interests of a small minority of people, the Brahmins, at the expense of the vast majority belonging to other castes, the bulk of whom belonged to the Sudra caste. Lower still were the Antyaja (untouchables / outcastes), whose mere shadow could pollute the upper castes. The entire conquered / enslaved population of Adivasis (aboriginal tribes) called Dravidians was forced into Sudra and untouchable outcaste ranks. Never in the history of mankind such an “evil and cruel system” was conceived by intelligent but devious men for the exploitation of man by man. It took away the human dignity of vast majority of the Indians and subjected them to untold injustices and atrocities. The untouchables / outcastes were treated worse than animals for thousands of years. It were the Brahmins who profited most from this system and were mainly responsible for its maintenance and furtherance.<sup>3</sup> Several sacred Hindu scriptures proclaim that the caste system has a divine sanction. The Dravidians and the conquered races were equated as Shudras.

It will not be out of context here to quote the observations of Al Beruni (10<sup>th</sup> century) about the Indian caste hierarchy:

“The highest caste of Brahmins was created from the head of Brahman (God). The next caste of Kshatriya was created from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. The next two castes, Vaishya and Shudra were created from the thighs and feet of Brahman, respectively. After the Shudra follow the people called Antyaja

(untouchables), who render various kinds of services and are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only members of certain craft or profession.”<sup>4</sup> Al Beruni further observed that Hindus believe that people are unequal in every respect, whereas Muslims consider all men as equal except in piety. This great obstacle, which prevents any approach or understanding between the Hindus and Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

In the ever-changing scene of the shifting importance of deities, creeds, racial antipathies and other considerations, there was one factor, which was persistent and constant. It was the concept of Hindu Dharma. This concept was synonymous, or very closely interwoven with the social order of Brahminism – Varna Ashrama Dharma / caste system. Like the banks of a river it determined the limits within which the current of Indian social life must flow and direction in which it must move. So long as the current remained confined within the prescribed social limits, all varieties and sorts of dogmas, ideas, faiths, creeds, customs and practices were tolerated and allowed to be a part of the Hindu Dharma.

Needless to say that the caste system not only destroyed the vitality and the creativity of the people but also the glue of love and compassion for fellow human beings, which is essential for a healthy society. In due course of time the caste hierarchy India looked like a giant dead tree whose roots had been eaten by termites and was waiting to be toppled by a wind gust.

Strict observance of caste rules and regulations was made the essence of Hindu religion and transgressors were severely punished. To protect Brahmins and their defenders, the Kshatriyas, from the rage of inhumanely – treated masses, it was declared sinful to wear arms and keep arms by people other than the Kshatriyas. Even blacksmiths and carpenters, the so-called progeny of the mythical “supper engineer,” Vishava Karma, who made the weapons, were not allowed to use the weapons. They were not allowed even to fit the plowshare with an iron tip because it could injure the bullock, offspring of the holy cow.

The strict caste rules and regulations disarmed the 3/4th of the Indians and only the Kshatriyas (Rajputs and Khatris) were allowed to wear arms. This made the task of foreign invaders quite easy. It is a matter of common knowledge that right from the days of Muhammad

bin Qasim (710 AD) onwards, the invaders marched deep into the Northwest Territory without meeting much resistance. Within the next three centuries, small bands of Afghans and Turks carved out small and large principalities for themselves all over India and, by the time of Guru Nanak, the Mughals had established their own empire in India.

In our own times, it would be pertinent to recall that after 1947, a large number of Jat Sikh farmers were settled in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Their Hindu neighbors were surprised that Sikh farmers were using European style iron plows or iron-tipped plowshares. The clever Brahmin, it appears had disarmed the entire Hindu population other than the Kshatriyas. The agriculturist tribes – Jats, Gujjars, Sainis, Yadavs, Ahirs, Patels, Kunnis, Kamas, Reddys and many others were allowed to keep only wooden clubs (*luth, lathi, soti, dang*), which they used very effectively to split each other's heads, and beat their animals, wives, children and Dalits.<sup>6</sup>

#### **ROLE OF SIKH GURUS IN ERADICATING THE CASTE STIGMA**

Guru Nanak formed a community of Sikhs called the Panth. Within the Panth, caste differences were not tolerated. By denying caste differences, Sikhism opened the door of what may be called human fraternity, which will make everybody realize that humanity can not welcome any basic discrimination between man and man. Guru Nanak brought all the four castes of Hinduism under one common banner. He did not believe in the old doctrine of caste according to birth. Not only in matters of worship and devotion to God, but in every sphere of society, casteism was considered by him as an evil.

*"Noble birth and great fame  
Are as worthless as dust."*<sup>7</sup>

As to the characteristics of a true Kshatriya, Guru Nanak says:

*"A true Kshatriya, of the warrior caste,  
is one whose valour shows itself in every details of life."*<sup>8</sup>

A freelance mystic Guru Nanak was directly concerned with the problems of society. His heart bled for the lowly and downtrodden. His ideal was not only to form a community of people based on religious freedom but also to establish a socially and politically free nation. His social thought was indeed a charisma that not only inspired

the contemporary society but is capable of inspiring even to this day. It is indeed a rich legacy.

By the time of Guru Arjun Dev (1563-1606 AD) a large number of Jats had been converted to Sikhism. During his travels for about five years in Central Punjab, the Guru brought into his fold thousands of Jats, of the Majha territory who were well known as sturdiest peasants.<sup>9</sup>

Two centuries later, people who had been dehumanized by the tyranny of caste system and the oppression of Muslim rulers whose mere shadow could pollute the Brahmins, rallied under the banner of Guru Gobind Singh as a “brotherhood” of the noble Khalsa order.<sup>10</sup> They challenged the mighty Mughal Empire before whom even the Rajput warriors used to prostrate<sup>11</sup> and the Brahmins used to sing paeans “*Eeshiro va Dilshiro va*, (The emperor of Delhi is as great as God).”<sup>12</sup> The Khalsa brotherhood carried on the struggle of life and death against injustice and oppression during the entire period of the Mughal rule. The more they were persecuted and killed, the more they joined to fill the ranks of the Khalsa.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that during the eighteenth century, a new type of leadership emerged among the Sikhs community as a result of the political struggle during the Misl period when the Jats organized themselves into several Misls. This leadership was the manifestation of historical forces and political events which had virtually sent the Sikhs into jungles to escape the Mughal persecution and oppression. This new development was based on fellow feeling among the Jats to take revenge on the enemy. The various Misls slowly organized themselves into a tribal hierarchy based on peasant caste wherein the Jats became a cementing force. However, the pattern of rule by a Misl Chief, whether based on the Khalsa or Mughal tradition is not the subject of the present study.<sup>14</sup>

Since Sikhism strictly rejected the caste hierarchy, Guru Nanak and nine other Sikh Gurus successfully won the loyalty of the large sections of the Jats, a majority of whom were peasants. Now they were quite independent to carry any profession. With determination and firm faith in the “sovereignty” bestowed upon them by Guru Nanak, they succeeded in defeating the combined forces of “caste ideology” and Mughals, and establishing the Khalsa (Sikh) rule<sup>15</sup> from

Ladakh in the north to Haryana in the south and from Sivalik hills in the east to the Khyber Pass in the west. The remarkable thing is that the Khalsa forces were overwhelmingly made up of people whom the Brahminical order regarded as Sudras and untouchables. The author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* specifically mentions that a large number of Brahmins, Khattris, Vaishyas and Jats adopted the Nanak Panth. By the time of the writing of the Dabistan, the Masand system had been well established. To demonstrate that the Sikhs did not care for the distinctions of caste, the author of the Dabistan underlines that in Masand system, a Brahmin could accept a Khatri as his leader, a Khatri could accept Jat as his leader, though the latter belonged to the lowest category of the Vaishyas.

An analysis of Dabistan, would clearly demonstrate that identities based on caste were but obliterated. At the same time caste had nothing to do with access to joining the Sikh faith. According to modern researches the most important constituents of the Sikh Panth were Khattris, Jats and Tarkhans whereas a significant number of outcastes also joined the new faith at a later date.<sup>16</sup> Thus in general terms, the Sikh identity in the early phase of Sikhism was not based on caste but was defined 'by a common loyalty, by common association, and by common practice'.

### **THE CASTE FACTOR AMONG THE SIKH JATS**

Although the Sikh Gurus had dismantled the age old caste system through the Order of the Khalsa, however, it has been reintroduced due to Brahminical and other external factors such as social behaviour and profession. In spite of the clear injunctions by the Sikh Gurus and Sikh social order, the caste factor has taken such deep roots that it has not been completely eliminated. In our times, there is a tendency to group the Sikhs on the basis of major castes. During a research study of the Sikh names the present writer found that the Sikhs as a whole have been grouped into several categories like Jats, Aroras, Khattris, Ramgarhias, Majhabis, Rajputs and Namdharis.<sup>17</sup>

The Jat Sikhs are historically landowners, farmers and warriors. These are divided into numerous clans like Aulak, Bains, Bajwa, Bal, Bath, Bhullar, Chahal, Dhaliwal, Dhillon, Dosanjh, Gill, Grewal, Hundal, Kang, Randhawa, Sahota, Sidhu and Virk. The Rajput Sikhs

are closely connected with Jat Sikhs and have several principal divisions, such as Bhatti, Chauhan, Khokar and Rathore. The Khatri Arora Sikhs are mostly merchants, businessmen, traders or, less commonly, warriors and professionals and have generally been described as the ruling class.<sup>18</sup>

### **JATS AS PREACHERS**

It will be quite interesting to note that some of the Jats even adopted the role of preachers. The earliest recorded evidence is that of Dhanna Jat (1415 ?), whose verses are included in the Holy Book of the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib. It will not be out of place here to mention the social revolution which was brought about by the Sikh Gurus as in case of Dhanna Jat who declares in one of his verses:

*“Having heard all this, I, a Jat, applied myself to devotion;  
I have met the Lord in person;  
Such is the great fortune of Dhanna.”*<sup>19</sup>

Dhanna earned fame as one of the medieval Jat turned saints whose *bani* (verses) has been included in the Guru Granth Sahib. In one of the hymns, in *Rag Asa* he describes himself as an ‘ignorant Jat’ and explains how he was attracted to the worship of God by the examples of other low-caste Saints like Namdev (a calico-printer), Kabir (a weaver), Ravidas (a cobbler) and Sain (a barber).

Dhanna Jat’s name is included in the Bhakatmala, as one of the twelve disciples of Ramananda (1293-1410). His date has been tentatively fixed as 1415. The earliest mention of his name is found in the songs of Mira Bai (1498-1546), who in one of her Bhakti songs proclaims how Dhanna grew corn without sowing seed. During his childhood Dhanna Jat, under the influence of Brahmin neighbour, worshipped the thakurs (idols) but later on converted to *nirguna bhakti*, i.e., the Worship of Formless One. This is evident from his hymns included in the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>20</sup>

Be that as it may, a new life style guided by the principle of equality attracted one and all in Punjab and elsewhere. It is rightly believed that Jat espousal of Sikhism was something more than a mere alternative to ‘Sanskritization.’<sup>21</sup> Another reason of the Jat conversion to Sikhism may be due to socio-economic factors. The Jats of Punjab were predominantly peasants and the most outstanding problem of the peasants in seventeenth century, when the Sikh faith had taken its

firm roots in the Punjab, was that there was a very heavy burden of land-revenue coupled with the oppression of the Mughal ruling classes. This naturally provoked peasant revolts. Thus the economic pressure may have forced the Jat peasantry of Punjab, as elsewhere, to resort to armed violence.

It has been forcefully argued by the social scientists<sup>22</sup> that it was not religious but the economic factor which forced the Jat peasantry of Punjab to resort to arms. However, in so far as the major factor leading to the Jat revolts in Punjab during the period under review is concerned, the issue is inconclusive and debatable. Again to what extent their sacrifice, sincerity, hard work and patriotism has been rewarded, is yet to be properly assessed.

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FOOT NOTES AND REFERENCES

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4. Qeyamuddin Ahmad (ed.), *India by Al-Biruni*, 3rd reprint (New Delhi, 1995), p 45
5. Ibid
6. Baldev Singh, op. cit., p. 6.
7. *Sri Rag Ki Var*, tr. Trilochan Singh and others, Sacred Writings of the Sikhs, p 75
8. Ibid, p 118
9. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* (Delhi, 1977), Vol. I, p 57. The bulk of the new converts to Sikhism were Jat peasants of the central districts of the Punjab, who were technically low in caste hierarchy, took over leadership from the Khatri. Ibid, p. 89
10. During the period of the tenth Guru, during his stay in Malwa territory, hundreds of thousands joined the Khalsa fraternity. Some

of them were the ancestors of the erstwhile ruling houses of Patiala, Nabha and Jind. Ibid., p 93

11. Jagjit Singh, op. cit., pp 213-18
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20. Harbans Singh (ed), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Punjabi University, Patiala, Vol 1, (Patiala., 1995), p 567.
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22. For details of peasants revolts during the Mughal period see Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, Bombay, 1963, pp 318-351. Irfan Habib argues that the ‘economic pressure’ was basically responsible for cementing the historical association between the Jat peasantry and Sikhism. Irfan Habib, ‘*The Sikh Review*’, op. cit., p.40.

THE TURBAN AND THE SIKH SCRIPTURES

M S RAHI*

In the world scenario, the turban had become a recognized symbol of honour, respect, status and dignity much before Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, appeared on the worldly scene in the 15th century. The political and social situation in India was chaotic. Afghan invaders had made the life of the natives of Hindustan miserable. No honour was left for them as they were prohibited from riding horses and wearing turbans on their heads. The purpose was to humiliate and insult them in their daily life. All this pained Guru Nanak and he was unable to adjust to the life all around, as he was a born rebel against religious bigotry, unjustified indignity to the people and unwarranted violations of basic human rights. He did not hesitate to lodge a protest

– *Eti mar pai kurlane, tei ki dard na aya*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 360

(Humanity was crudely thrashed, didn't You feel any remorse?)

Was God against the inhumanity of Mughal invader, Babar? It was an outright insult and cruelty to the creation of God. Guru Nanak found it hard to reconcile with such a treatment of human beings against the norms of civilization. He had some other vision of life. It is, perhaps, honorable and respectful living, on which Guru Nanak laid the foundation of his new creed, i.e., Sikhism. He exhorted the enslaved and spineless people in the following words :

Jay jivian pat lathi jaye sab haram jeta kuchh khave

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 142

(To live without self respect is to eat in shame).

He invited those people, who had the guts and courage to face all the odds of life, even death for the sake of honorable living to join

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him, in his new creed. Shameless people without human dignity had no place in his company.

Je tau prem kbelan ka chao, sir dhar tali gali mori aao

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1042

“If you want to play the game of love, come with readiness to sacrifice your life,” were the words of his open invitation to join the glorious adventure of life. Donning the turban, and a musical instrument -*Rabab* -in the hands of his Muslim companion, he set out to sing His message in the four corners of the world. The dignity in all spheres of life – dress, language and conduct – was the cornerstone of his teachings. There is sufficient evidence in his hymns included in Guru Granth Sahib to prove that Guru Nanak never lived without turban – the symbol of divine dignity.

Bhagat Namdev (1270 -1318 AD) had envisioned God with a turban on his head. His *shabd* as recorded in Guru Granth Sahib reveals this fact:

Khoob teri pagri, meethe tere bol, Dwarka nagri kabe ke Mangol, Name Ke swami meer mukand

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 727

(Handsome is Thy turban. How can there be a Mughal in the city of Dwarka. Thou art the lord of Namdev, the sovereign of all and the giver of salvation).

Guru Nanak, the world teacher, was in the image of God, whose praises he sang throughout his life. It is not possible to imagine Guru Nanak without the turban. Guru Nanak perfectly understood the psychology of slave people and condemned those people who, in order to please foreign rulers, abandon their language, dress and heritage; there cannot be any greater ingratitude than to forget one’s heritage. Guru Nanak’s *Bani* depicts the plight of such people :

Aad purkh ko alahu kahiye shekha aai bari.

Dewal devtian kar laga aisi kirat chali.

Kuja bang nivaj musla nir roop banwari.

Ghar ghar miya sabhna jiyen boli avar tumhari.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1191

[The Primal Lord is called Allah. The turn of the Muslim divines has come. Tax is levied on the temples of gods. Such a practice has come into vogue. The ablution pots, calls to prayers and prayer-carpets

are seen everywhere and the Lord appears in blue form. In every house all the persons call Mian, your language O'men has become different].

The turban is the most important piece of the Sikh's heritage. Another reference in Sri Guru Granth Sahib testifies this fact:

*Kaia Kirdar Aurat Jakina.
Rang Tamashe Maan Hakina.
Napak Pak Kar hadoor hadisha.
Sabat surat Dastar Sira.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1084

[Make good deeds thy body and faith thy bride. Revel thou in the true Lords' love and entertainment. Make pure that is impure. Deem thou in the True Lords' presence, thy counsel. Let the body be complete with the turban on thy head].

That is why all the Sikh Gurus donned the turban in the most majestic manner. Looking at the turban of Guru Hargobind his Dhadi poets Nathmal and Abdula, sang,

*Do talvaran badian ik meeri di.
Ik peeri di, ik rakhi kare wajiri di pag teri, ki jahangir di.*

Similarly, references are found to the turban in the hymn of Baba Farid Shiekh (1173-1265 A.D.) :

*Farida main bholawa pag da mat meli ho jay,
Gable rooh na jani sirr vi mitti kbaye.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1379

[Farid, I am worried about my turban lest it should be soiled, however my thoughtless soul is unaware that dust will eat my head too]

Bhagat Kabir (1440 – 1518) also refers to the turban:

Je sirr rach rach bandat paag,

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1376

Showing the importance of the turban, Bhagat Ravi Das brings about the importance of the turban from another angle :

Banke bal paag sirr tere –

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 659

The turban is the gift of Guru and also identity of the Sikhs. Bhai Gurdas whose writings are said to be the key to the *Bani* contained in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, refers to what kind of tragic situation can

be created by innocuous removal of turban. He writes:

*Thande kboo nayke pag bisar aya sirr nange,
Ghar wich ranna kamlian thosi liti dekh kbuthange.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 32:19

[A man after taking bath on a well came bareheaded to the house without turban, when ladies of the house saw him in that condition, they started weeping as some relative has died].

No doubt, all the Sikh Gurus donned the turban but Sri Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, made it an inseparable part of the Sikhs' personality in 1699 AD at the time of creation of the Khalsa and ordained that the Sikhs should make their turban beautiful (*Dastar Sajoni*). After bestowing *amirt* on the *Panj Piare* and partaking *amrit* from them, the final seal and stamp was put on the personality of the Khalsa, when Guru Gobind Singh said :

*Khalsa mero roop hai khaas, Khalse meh hou karon niwas....
Khalsa mero Satgur pura, Khalsa mero sajan sura.....
Khalsa Akal Purakh ki fauj, Pragteo Khalsa Parmatm ki manj.
Jab lag Khalsa rahe niara, Tab lag tej dion main saara.
Jab eh gabe bipran ki reet, Main na karon en ki parteet..*

(*Sarb Loh*)

(Khalsa is my real personification. I live in the Khalsa. Khalsa is my true Satguru. Khalsa is my brave friend..... Khalsa is the army of the Almighty. Khalsa took birth as per the wishes of the Almighty. As long as Khalsa would remain distinctive (*niara*), till then, I shall give him all the support. When the Khalsa would disown its principles, then I shall not bother about them).

Therefore, after such an assertion of Guru regarding the looks of the Khalsa (the Sikhs): Can it be said that the turban is not an essential and inseparable part of a Sikh's personality, only because it is not one of the five (K's) *Kakars*? Such an argument would obviously be illogical if not absurd, in the face of the fact that Guru wanted the Sikhs to be *Nirala* (distinctive) through their looks and conduct. The turban was one of the modes thought about by the Guru. The turban, therefore, remains one of the most distinctive and all encompassing articles of Sikh faith. Perhaps, no person on earth can imagine Guru Gobind Singh without a turban and so his true Sikh, as Guru had given a new concept of merger of Guru with his *chela* (beloved

follower), and it was rightly said :

Wah wah Gobind Singh aape Gur chela.

[Guru is a great of the great as he himself is a guru and himself a *chela* (follower)].

The Guru gave this new concept for the advancement of human race by creating a casteless society of equals, where turban was a symbol of honour, equality, fraternity, dignity and freedom. Nothing like that had earlier happened anywhere in the world and unique history was created; which though is yet to become the basis of worldwide multicultural civilization, surpassing language and cultural limitations and recognizing all humanity as one:

Manas ki jaat sabhai ekay pehchanbo :

[Recognize all humanity as one as Guru Gobind Singh had proclaimed.]

– Sarb Lob

When the other people simply used to tie the turban, the Sikhs were supposed to make it beautifully. It was laid down in the Code of Conduct (*Rehatnama*) as mentioned by the Bhai Nand Lal, a distinguished poet of Guru Gobind Singh that –

Kangha dono waqt kar; pag chun kar bandhi and

Nagan hoye bahar phire; nagan sis jo kabaye

Nagan parshad jo batri; tankhabiya baddo kabaye.

– Bhai Nand Lal

[A Sikh should comb his hair twice in a day and should make his turban carefully. A Sikh who roams bareheaded and eats bareheaded, he deserves to be punished and declared a *Tankhabiya*].

Similarly, there are the injunctions in the *Rehatnamas* of Bhai Desa Singh, Bhai Chopra Singh, Bhai Daya Singh and *Rehatnama* published by the S.G.P.C. on the basis of those Codes of Conduct (*Rehatnamas*). The Sikhs have been ordained not to remove their turban when going out of their house. The religious literature of the Sikhs is full of references to the turban, its importance for them and what use they should make of it in various situations of life. Such was the importance given to the turban by Sri Guru Gobind Singh that he used to hold competitions of tying a beautiful and majestic turban at Paonta Sahib. Now a Gurdwara *Dastar Asthan* stands at that place.

Such is the important place of turban in Sikhism that it cannot be termed as only a cultural symbol of the Sikhs. The *Gurbani* makes it clear when Guru Arjun Dev says that his double turban is a sign of victory.

*Hau gosain da pehalwanra, main gur mil uch dumalda.
Sab hoi singh ikathian, duyai betha vekhe aap jiyo.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p74

[I am the pretty wrestler of the Lord. Having met the Guru, I have put on a tall plumed turban. All the assemblage to witness wrestling is gathered and the merciful Master Himself is seated to behold it].

Without any doubt, the turban of the Sikhs is rooted in Guru Granth Sahib and its teachings. The Sikh against his will should not be separated from the turban in his life as that would be his spiritual death. Any force or law to do the same would be against the law of life and nature. And it would not be permissible at the present stage of civilization. The principle of freedom of conscience, which is protected in the Constitutions of all the Nations, would be violated. Perhaps, that is why the most precious thing considered in life is Freedom, and not the Riches. So is the turban to the Sikhs — the symbol of honour and dignity — the lasting distinctive affiliation with their Guru; where the personality of a Sikh is judged from his *Gufar*, *Raftar*, *te Dastar*, i.e., from his language, gait and turban. That is why the Guru at many places in *Gurbani* has indicated that *Akal Purakh* (Almighty) accepts His *bhagats* by bestowing honour of *Saropa* (short turban) upon them :

Pebar sirrpao sewak jan mele, Nanak pargat pahare.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 631

[The Lord dressed me with the robe of honour, blended me his attending slave, with himself and Nanak became renowned in the world].

Therefore, such intimate is the relationship of Guru, the Sikh and the Turban. Hence, a Sikh is supposed to live and die with his turban. In their wisdom, the worldly powers should never think of disturbing that relationship.

The recent ban on wearing of turban by Sikhs in France by the French Govt is a direct infringement and violation of the Fundamental Right of the Sikhs. The Sikhs must launch a concerted movement to

make the French authorities to lift the ban on wearing of turbans by pleading their case before the various international fora. It is heartening to note that law court in Germany has recently restored the Sikhs' right to affix their photographs on their passport with a turban on their heads. This precedent of Germany restoring the Sikhs' right to have turbaned photographs should be used by the Sikhs to argue their case for a similar facility in France. Still another tragic incident of shearing a Sikh boy's hair by some hooligans in Rajasthan should make us aware about the dangers to Sikh identity. The way the whole Sikh community protested against this act of sacrilege, which led to the arrest of the culprits, speaks volumes of the Sikhs' concern about Sikh identity. However, what is happening to the Sikh identity in the home state of Punjab in the form of Sikh youths discarding Sikh symbols of hair and turban is extremely shocking. We must take steps to check this evil of apostasy.

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WANTED A STATESMAN, A LAWYER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

RAM SEWAK SINGH*

United Nations recently celebrated the Silver Jubilee of the approval of their Charter of Human Rights. A socio-political wing of the Brahmins, R.S.S (an organisation like that of a paramilitary force), at the same time declared a war on the human rights¹ of the non-Hindu Indians. Even though they fully know it that India, a member of the U.N.O., is a signatory to this Charter and their actions are against the Charter.

The Indian government ordered that non-Hindus must study Sanskrit and submit themselves to the Hindu *Vedas* and their culture. Under the cloak of Indianisation of the culture and language, they have started Hinduising the non-Hindus. Protests against that were natural.

A group of expert lawyers is urgently needed to plead the case of the Muslims, Christians and Sikhs with the U.N.O. and other world organisations. The following will brief them about the history of the Brahminical activities in India.

BRAHMINISM DENIES EQUALITY OF HUMANITY²

Its creation mythology states that Brahma produced Brahmins, the holy people, from his head. Kshatriyas, the fighters, to protect the Brahmins, were born from his arms whereas the Vaish, the traders, came out from his stomach. To serve the above three upper castes, Brahma created a low caste from his feet. Land tillers, smiths, shoemakers and other workers were put in this group. To ensure their poverty and block their social independence from the high castes, they were not permitted education, entry into Hindu temples or worship of God.

* United Kingdom

CHALLENGES TO BRAHMANISM

1. EARLY LOCAL REVOLTS.

Buddhism and Jainism challenged this self-claimed holiness of the Brahmins. They preached against this injustice being done to humanity. Buddhism ruled India peacefully for many centuries during the early Common Era (Early A.D. period).

The cunning and crafty Brahmins led by Shankracharya, however, adopted dubious methods to get Buddhism uprooted from India. They accepted Buddha as one of their gods and distorted their religious literature. Later, they tricked the rulers to permit the conversion of the Buddhists by force back into Hindu fold or to kill them. Not even a single Buddhist was left alive in the land of their birth and their religious places were converted into Hindu temples. The committed Buddhists, who fled the country, played a great role in making Buddhism a world religion.

2. INFLUENCE OF THE WESTERN FAITHS.

Christianity and Islam do not permit dividing people into high and low castes. Muslims reached India about 1,000 years ago. Later, they even conquered Delhi and ruled a major part of India for centuries. Brahmins applied their old trick to the invaders. Akbar married Hindu women and inducted Brahmins into his cabinet. They influenced Akbar to worship sun and practise Hindu rituals against the principles of Islam. Muslims believe that it was the beginning of the downfall of their powerful empire.

3. BHAGTI MOVEMENT.

About five centuries ago, *Bhagats*, devotees of God, questioned the superiority of the Brahmins and their sole rights on spirituality. They were born in different regions of India and most of them were low caste. They exposed Brahmins in simple but very strong words. "If the Brahmins are super people, why are they born, like we people, from the womb of a woman? Yes, we are low-caste and have red blood in our veins but do the Brahmins have white milk flowing in their veins to claim their superiority over us?"

4. SCRIPTURAL CHALLENGE TO BRAHMINICAL MYTHOLOGY.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, gave a big blow to Brahmanism when he preached that, "Muslims and Hindus, low-caste

and high-caste, rich and poor, men and women are equal, all being children of the common Father, God. No one is high or low. Anyone who loves God can realise Him.” His fifth successor in 1606 compiled a common scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, which contained spiritual hymns revealed to Hindu, Muslim and low-caste devotees of the *Bhagti* Movement.

THE SIKH RAJ AND THE BRAHMINS.

The Sikhs, by their love for all people without discrimination, won the hearts of the masses in the north-west of India. They became the rulers of Punjab under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799.

Brahmins, through his Hindu Prime minister, practised the same old game. They mis-guided the Maharaja to practise many Brahminical rituals prohibited by the Sikh faith. Four queens and five female attendants became *sati* at the funeral pyre of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This inhuman Brahminical act of *sati* took place in 1839; it was observed and recorded by the British.

THE BRITISH RAJ, THE SIKHS AND THE BRAHMINS

The British, the East India Company, first placed their foot at the Calcutta seaport and soon took over the rule of Delhi from the weakened Moghul kings. In 1849, helped by the traitor Hindu prime minister, the British took over the Sikh Raj and thus whole of the Indian subcontinent became a British colony.

During the British rule, the Brahmins who were 2% of the Indian population were given posts limited to their proportional share. However, they still played a very clever role in misguiding the Sikhs and distorting their faith with the purpose of bringing them back into the Hindu fold. Mr Macauliffe, a British judge, wrote in 1899 in the introduction to his book, *The Sikh Religion*, “A movement to declare the Sikhs as Hindus in direct opposition to the teachings of the Gurus is widespread and of long duration.”

The Punjab Intelligence reported to the British government in 1911, “Hinduism has always been hostile to Sikhism whose Gurus powerfully and successfully attacked the principle of caste which is the foundation on which the whole fabric of Brahmanism has been reared. The activities of Hindus have, therefore, been constantly directed to the undermining of Sikhism both by preventing the children

of Sikh fathers from taking *Pahul* and by reducing allegiance of the Sikhs from their faith. Hinduism has strangled Buddhism, once a formidable rival to it, and it has already made serious inroads into the domain of Sikhism.”

When the British annexed Punjab, they also took over the control of the gurdwaras and began converting Sikhs to Christianity. This forced the Sikhs to start *satyagrah* (peaceful struggle for justice) to get back the control of their gurdwaras from the British. Sikhs made unparalleled sacrifices in blood, suffering and money, making the then most powerful government in the world to yield and pass Gurdwara Act in 1925. Mahatma Gandhi congratulated the Sikhs for their historical success.

Brahmins under the garb of All India Congress, the only political party of India, in 1929, formally requested the Sikhs for their support to oust the British from India. They promised freedom, equality and human rights to the Sikhs after the British transferred the control of the Indian Government to the Congress.

The Sikhs, 2% of the population, made more than 90% contributions for the freedom of India when counted on the basis of the Indians killed, deported and put in jails for life.

THE BRAHMINS IN FREE INDIA

The Brahmins cunningly utilised the popularity of Mahatma Gandhi and the Sikh sacrifices to obtain freedom from the British, otherwise they had no ideological link with any of them. After the British left India in 1947, they rejected both Mr Gandhi and the Sikh nation.

When the Sikhs reminded the Congress of their promises made to them during the freedom struggle, The Prime Minister, Mr Nehru, a Brahmin replied, “Now the times have changed.” It meant that those promises were fake. They were made only to fool the Sikhs and motivate them to make sacrifices for the freedom of the Hindu country. Sikhs had thus become slaves of the Brahmins, the worst masters, after their country obtained freedom from the British mainly with their (Sikhs’) support.

The Brahmins hated Mr Gandhi’s policy of reconciliation. Therefore, the R.S.S men murdered him in 1949. The R.S.S. had planned to kill three birds with one stone – to murder Mr Gandhi, blame the

Muslim community for his gruesome death and in revenge murder thousands of innocent Muslims. They failed because the killer was caught at the spot and identified.

Even during 1984, during the genocide of Sikhs immediately after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, they remained passive spectators to the slaughter of Sikhs.

After the R.S.S. got full control of the Indian government, they also rejected the philosophy of peace preached by Mahatma Gandhi. To justify their new policy of violence, they pointed out to the multiple arms held in the hands of their god Shiva and goddess Durga, and encouraged the Hindus carry Trishuls in imitation of the sacred kirpan carried by the initiated Sikhs.

PRESENT CRUSADE OF THE BRAHMINS AGAINST NON-HINDUS

Hindus bear a strong grudge against “foreign” faiths. When Muslims ruled India, they tortured, killed and converted Hindus to their faith. Christians are also blamed that they bribed poor Hindus to make them Christians.

None of these allegations can be applied to the Sikhs to blame them. Their faith was founded in India and they served people better than any other community. However, the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, records very strong words against Brahmanism and rejects grading people into caste groups.

The Brahmins have, therefore, distorted the history of the Sikhs and introduced Hindu rituals in the Sikh religious places. They continue to do it even today and the Sikhs feel very much hurt to point it out to them. Brahmins have the media at their back and it is impossible for the Sikhs to make protests to their everyday illegal and shameless activities. Now with the government in their hands, they want to force this idea down the throat of the Sikhs, however illogical and illegal it may be.

After the Hindus won freedom from the British with the help of the Sikhs, major attack has been made ironically on the Sikhs themselves. Maybe because they cannot have support from any foreign government to plead their case. Brahmins have not only planted their own stooges to manage the Sikh religious institutions but also their agents in the Political Wing of the Sikhs. They do not conceal their agenda to convert the Sikhs and make them slaves of the Brahmins.

The Sikh leadership, blinded by the offer of chairs, is doing nothing; rather it is acting as an agency of the R.S.S. and thus fooling the whole Sikh nation. The Sikhs in India and abroad, who understand this, should enlist the support of other tortured people, Dalits, tribal communities, Christians and Muslims. They all should unite and make a move before it is too late to protect the religious freedom and human rights of the people in India.

Sikhs, remember! This is the mission of your faith. You should be proud to believe in it and struggle to achieve this mission. You did it earlier, why not now?

SIKH GENOCIDE BEFORE THE WORLD COURT

World at large has not yet developed the degree of sophistication to cut through the fog of misinformation or the conscientiousness that would express an outrage at the world level for persecution of minorities especially in a country that has very cleverly, for over half a century, created a facade of being world's largest democracy.

There are other minorities in the country with whom we have community of interest. All these groups should establish *Jatbebandi* (liaison) and bring the criminal and genocidal activities of the Central Govt. of India and its majority community to the attention of The World Court in The Hague, perhaps starting with the well documented 1984 genocide of the Sikhs at the behest of, first Indira Gandhi and later her son Rajiv Gandhi. Fact that they are both deceased, having died the same violent death that they wrought upon innocent victims, should not spare them the retribution of the world opinion. They must be made to pay, even posthumously, for the crimes against humanity in the human courts.

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### NOTES

1. There are many complaints registered against India by the wing of the International Commission for Human Rights
2. It is no reflection on any individual or community called Brahmins. Here it refers to the philosophical approach of the faith of dividing people into castes.

## FALL

JASBIR SINGH\*

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Fall in America is a beautiful season. Neither it is hot nor cold. Mind starts to calm down from the hectic activity-filled summer. Summer is always full of mind boggling superfluous but pleasant events and activities. There is a great rush of *raagis* and *pracharakas* from India. The seasonal birds who want to make the most of sunshine, “Make hay while the sun shines.” Not only that there are so many cultural stars, musicians, actors and actresses with their hoopla. Besides you have your own lists too, visiting some National Park, State Park, Picnics, going to beaches, amusement parks, visiting long lost friends and relatives. So the plate is full.

Fall is soothing and is a kind of homecoming, from outward flow of energy to calming down and starting introspection. Most of us are feeling sorry that summer is over so soon. But some of us, a distinct minority starts thinking seriously to make commitments to achieve significant goals while withdrawing from frivolous, wasteful but pleasure giving pursuits. Take the case of citadels of learning, schools, colleges and universities – all these are getting ready to start a new session, “fall”.

What is nature’s role in fall? The “leaves” are the crowning beauty of a tree. The roots stay in the darkness of underground and delicately keep plowing underneath to collect and supply the nutrition to trunk, stem and eventually to leaves. The trunk provides the strength and confidence to stems and leaves. Leaves bask happily in the sun, all their nutritional needs taken care of by roots, trunk, branches and stems. Enjoying the open air and sunshine, the leaves enter into a dance that leads to an orgy. In this state of frenzy, completely oblivious

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of the outcome, they start changing colors, red, yellow, orange, and purple. Suddenly the serenity and stateliness of the tree as a whole is transformed into a complete chaos. The splashes of color are thrilling like watching a Bhangra Dance, but you know the show is coming to an end. When the beating of the drum stops, the dancers disappear one by one. THE LEAVES FALL. The crowning glory is transformed in a moment into the most humbling oblivion. Interestingly, those fallen leaves that stay at the root do become manure and again become part of the tree. But those that let themselves be blown by the wayward wind, God knows in what gutter they fall.

## **PART II**

I was reminded of Prof Mohan Singh Ji's classic poem, "*Sikhi Da Boota*." He asks which is that tree that can grow in every climate and every where and anywhere? He further asks which is that tree that more we prune it, the healthier and larger it grows. That is the tree of "Sikhi."

A tree has to go through many "fall" seasons and many winters and many Springs. When I look at Sikhi in general allover the world, and particularly in USA, I can compare it to the traditional fall. There are numerous colors and shades of Sikhi. Every Sikh proclaims to be the best interpreter of Gurbani. His version is not only the best but the only one. There are 'Khalsa' proclaiming Sikhs, who in fact should be ashamed of them, if they look themselves in the mirror. Guru Ji is to be reflected from there. And there are those who can look into the mirror all right, but may not be able to look into their hearts, where Guru ji is to reside. At the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, we learn that there were 22 proclaiming to be the Gurus, now you cannot count the number. Then there are Sarabhlohi, Akhand Kirtanis, Harian Welan Wale, Nanaksarea, Rameasea, Ramgrahae, Beas Wale, Sindhi – Bhai Chela Ram De, Sikilgar, Jat Sikhs, Majhaels, Doabeas, Malwaes, on and on. See the different colors of these leaves, which have forgotten the roots and the trunk?

The next obvious and "natural" stage is of oblivion. The handwriting on the wall is there. In India, Sikhism has been given the "fatal" injection. It is a matter of a couple of decades. Already the Sikh leadership, political, religious, even intellectuals are in shambles.

They have completely lost their bearings. They have no idea of the “Individuality” of Sikhism. Go to Mandir, put on *tilak teekas* and have no relation with Guru Granth Sahib, is the norm.

In USA and Canada, all these symptoms are in full bloom plus a big wave of “Intermarriages.”

The next stage of oblivion is not far away. May be just a few decades away. All these leaves will fall from the tree of *Sikhi*. But those that still stay within the roots, should consider, “*Jo Sharan Aae tis Kanth Lae,*” but those who let themselves be blown by wayward winds, will find some gutter.

Parallel scene is, that distinct minority, that thinks seriously and makes commitment to achieve the marvelous goals promised by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, they are getting ready to join the “Fall” semester.

After “fall”, there is bleak “winter”, when you cannot visualize the pristine beauty of the tree. It just stands desolate devoid of all its beauty, the leaves. But, “When winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

Lo and behold the spring has come! The tree magically erupts in full bloom and God’s mystery is revealed. The Khalsa now goes to East from the West. “*Khalsa Pargateo Parmatam Ki Mauj.*”

## INTERFAITH RELATION, *PREM KI JIT*

KAMALLA ROSE KAUR

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As far as I can see, Sikhism is the only major religion in this world that is universalist, non-sexist, not-racist, anti-caste and anti-class. It was set up by Nanak, to be non-authoritarian, meaning it is an anti-cult movement as well. Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh fought against baboon troop social dynamics (authoritarian hierarchies), way back in a time and place where this was still hopeless.

Yet, because of them, women do not sit in the back of *Sikhi*.

Meanwhile, I was raised in a Protestant Christian culture where the basic dogma is highly sexist, exclusive, non-universalist, etc. Yet, Protestant Christians are far ahead of every other religion on earth in empowering women into equal authority with their men. Thus, even though at the level of core belief, women in the West are constantly fighting Eve's battle, Christianity is the best choice for women in a practical sense. We can speak from the pulpit within Christianity.

Of course, throughout the world, women are more religious than men are. Women pray and meditate more, attend temples and churches more, do more *seva*, and they keep the charities going. Women are less likely to misuse power when they attain it. Far less likely to sell their souls for sex, stuff and/or power. We have worldwide better statistics when it comes to resisting the urge to murder and rape, and every other criminal activity. Women start fewer wars.

This is not to say that women are better than men in all areas, but in the area of ethics, the data is clear and profound. And the reasons for this has to do with baboon troop mentality as much as anything else. Men, to be good men, need to give up the urge to be Alpha Male, King of the Castle, Guru and CEO.

Women, in order to help men, to help our planet, to help *Sikhi*,

help ourselves and our children, need to give up the idea that we need men and that we are in competition with other women for men's attention.

This is distinct from whether women want men – the majority of us do – or rather we want our one man. But we want men, fathers, brothers, husbands, uncles, nephews, and sons who are “good guys”, men who can quickly and easily disband the baboon troop, authoritarian hierarchies, for the sake of *Sikhi* and the planet.

*Sikhi* is on a world stage now and it is embarrassing to say that *Sikhi* is a universalist, non-sexist, non-racist, anti-cult, anti-caste and anti-class movement when the truth is that *Sikhi* looks like a regional, traditional sect from the Punjab, India – prone to cults, sexist, and with a tendency to sound mighty racist quite a lot of the time too!

*Sikhi* needs a unifying, pro-active cause, something we can all get behind and work together on. We need something to show the world (that has forgotten our incredible history and ignores our present persecution) how amazing Sikhs are!

And what better cause than *Sikhi* itself? What better way to share our tradition and our strength and our huge capacity to fight for the right, than to declare that *Sikhi* is a universalist, non-sexist, not-racist, anti-cult, anti-caste and anti-class religion, and then prove it?

The world doesn't believe anything like this is possible, of course. To go quickly from a traditional male dominated, superstitious, authoritarian baboon troop society, to being the truly human culture Guru Nanak was dreaming of? To transform into being the kind of religion that women the world over could feel excited, supported, empowered and happy to join? To be the kind of movement that teaches that change and transformation are possible on this earth? To have *Sikhi* suddenly show it's stuff and take it's place as a major world religion and force? This is the urgent need of the times.

My Western friends think I am totally crazy and most of the Sikh men I deal with have a “there there child” tone in their responses to me as well. But to quote a very famous and beloved Western visionary “You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.”

*Sikhi* has a tradition of doing amazing acts of righteousness. Only *Sikhi* has the Sikh tradition. Who else but Sikhs can teach the lesson that only *Sikhi* teaches? Mind you, I am not interested in converting

the world to *Sikhi*. That is not what is important at all. Yet, this planet desperately needs *Sikhi*. This planet needs Sikhs to do what Sikhs do best – for the glory of universalism and the love of the human potential, more than for the Glory of *Sikhi*.

Only Sikhs have ever run into battle screaming “PREM KI JIT!” (Love Be Thy Victory)! Before materialism and baboon bosses succeed in conquering *Sikhi* and the planet, and destroying good simply for their own ego-gratification, why not fight?

*Prem Ki Jit !*

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## WORLD'S RELIGION AND PEACE

JARNAIL SINGH\*

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There is so much affliction, suffering, tension and conflict in the world. Obviously, this situation is not going to change overnight to make the world a paradise. The question to be answered is: Can the religious communities make contributions to achieve peace or reduce the suffering? I would like to explore the possibilities and the hurdles to achieve this objective.

### WHAT IS PEACE?

Normally, we mean peace as freedom from or absence of war or civil strife. The war is generally understood as conflict between states or nations. This is really at gross macro level. Let us suppose, some day there is no conflict, war between nation states. Even in that eventuality the human beings will not be totally free of civil strife and conflict.

As we all know, even when a state is not in conflict with another state, its citizens could be subjected to various conflicts, oppressions and injustices. Tell those people that the given state is at peace. The response can be well imagined. So peace has to more than absence of war between nation states.

### RELIGION/ RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Religion as understood: belief in a divine or super human power/powers to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator(s) and ruler(s) of the world, universe. These powers are said to be revealed and approached through a Prophet, *Messiah*, Guru or *Avatar*. As a consequence invariably the Supreme divine power, whatever it is, is left in the background and the Prophet/*Messiah* becomes the object

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of veneration, directly or indirectly.

People subscribing to a particular view of the Ultimate reality – God, *Wahguru*, *Allah*, may be called a religious community. Belief in one God or in His *Messiah*/Prophet does not necessarily result in uniformity. Believers in one prophet are further subdivided into various groups and subgroups. There are so many bases for the division, e.g., devotion to particular individual in the development of the particular religion, race, language, customs, and so on. For lack of a better term, we may call such groups as ethnic groups, though in general terms they may have the same religion.

Now let us observe the ground realities. There is so much affliction, suffering, tension and conflict in the world. Conflict exists between countries, states, religions and sub-religions, ethnic groups. Examples can be given about every type of conflict.

This is an interfaith assembly, i.e., individuals from all the major religions are here. Can these individuals and those whom these individuals represent, directly or indirectly, work for peace? In other words, will they try to reduce the conflict? Total elimination of conflict is simply impossible, at least in the foreseeable future.

What are the root causes of conflict, disturbance of peace? There are essentially two causes, sources of conflict:

One is individual;

The other is ideological.

In practice, sometimes it becomes difficult to distinguish the two. For some unknown reason, some individuals start believing that they have the right to exploit, disturb others and even to rule over others. As long as these individuals are restricted to individuals or a small group, we generally call them criminals or gang lords. Occasionally, such people gather enormous powers, even control of state apparatus. They will use every means, fair or foul, to achieve unlimited power and misuse it for their personal glorification and masochistic purposes. Such people generally try to envelope themselves in religious and pseudo social garbs.

People of this type are not amenable to any reason. Ultimately, it is up to the society, international community how best to control such individuals. Hitler, Idi Amin and Mugabi are some of the examples of this behavior.

Then there is the ideological source of conflict. Ideology could be social, economic and even religious. Throughout the history, there have been individuals, groups, large groups, imperial states, and still exist in varying degrees, who believe that their perspective on life and modes of production should prevail in the whole world. Naturally, other groups, national or ethnic do not play dead. That leads to open conflict and large scale of wars as well.

Let us come to the religious ideology/ideologies. At this stage of the development of the humanity, there are at least half a dozen major religions. Over the years, wars, inquisitions, genocide or near genocide have happened in the name of religion. Another name for the same is – bring civilization to the savages or save the souls.

More recently, there is the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue, multi-faith society, and so on. I have also attended a few. In general there are two conferences at the same time. One open, the other hidden behind scenes. In the open sessions, representatives of various religions try to put their best face of tolerance, goodwill towards humanity, and so on. For that they will quote selectively from their respective scriptures. In this respect it will be worth quoting – I believe it was a Bishop of Toronto:

“The Bible and Shakespeare can be interpreted in more than one way.”

The idea presented is: There is one ultimate reality, God – whatever other name you want to give to it, him or her. And various religions are only different means to approach that reality. People are exhorted to bring out the spirituality in their respective religions to bring peace on this earth. I can quote Guru Amar Das, Third Guru in this respect:

O Lord, the world is in flames. Save it, in Thy mercy, through what ever door-means, you may.

Invariably there is the other aspect as well, some times open, more often behind scenes. That is to show the superiority of their respective religions. At times it ends up as denigration of a particular religion or even denying its existence. Methods vary from crude to subtle.

We come back to the question posed in the beginning. Can the spiritual/ religious people bring harmony and peace, reduce conflict? The answer appears – May be.

We have to face ground realities. Wishful thinking will not help. We have to get over the idea – that all religions are same – different pathways to the same reality – God. All religions are not the same. Each religion has its own philosophy, rituals and dogmas, Prophets and Gurus. Properly analyzed, even the end objective is not the same for all religions – you may not agree with me on this. Will the leaders of various religions, sects ever give up their different dogmas? That day is really far off, if it ever comes true.

Secondly, let us stop arguing which religion is better. Guru Nanak gave answer to that about 500 years ago. As the story goes: Guru Nanak went to Mecca. There he was asked, who is better, Hindu or Musalman? Guru's answer was brief and to the point. "Without good acts both are equally damned." Today we may say, with out good acts every one is damned. It is not the label that one carries that matters; it is the actions that bear fruit.

That is the crux. Mere talk will not carry very far. Then there are acts on individual level and acts at corporate or collective level. There are individuals, perhaps a majority, who proclaim to be religious and pious. At the same time they say, "We do not want to get involved in the 'dirty' politics. We will act in the name of Christ, or according to the will of the Guru, and so on."

I would put them in the category of Rishi Mode. A Rishi, divine sits in a jungle, under a Banyan tree. Modern version of a Banyan tree is the air conditioned room. There the Rishi pronounces on the virtue and sin, laws of *Karma*, greatness of God/*Allah*, and so on. Answer to this sort of attitude was again given by Guru Nanak about 500 years ago. It is valid today as well. Guru Nanak went to meet Yogis, hermits living far away from populated areas, in the snowy Himalayas. They asked Guru, "How is the mother country"? Here again Guru tells these people, "What the heck you are doing here? Why you have abandoned your responsibilities?"

Logical consequence of Guru's answer to the Yogis is: The religious people have to rise above the individualistic ego and work together, irrespective of their nominal/ worldly religion. To that end, the religious people have to stand up against oppression and cruelty, where ever it is happening. It could be within one's own religious group, between religious or ethnic groups, or between states. The religious

assemblies/conferences have to go beyond mere statements. Structures need to be built whereby these principles can be given practical shape. In other words, oppressors have to be confronted.

There is another task before the religious people. It is relatively easy to see the visible oppression. But there is another type as well. It could be termed the invisible oppression. It exists but it is invisible to the vast majority of people. Because the oppressed individual or group is so weak that they do not even speak out. Some times under indoctrination they have accepted their fate. It is the duty of the religious pious people to seek out and bring to the surface such hidden oppressions. Without light such darkness will not go away.

One more parable will not be out of place:

After the World War II a pious person went to God. He asked God, "Hey Almighty, where were you when all these horrendous events were happening?" God sat back, had a smile and said, "Brother I know where I was, tell me where were you?"

## GURU'S CONCERN IS YOU, ME & ALL\*

BIRENDRA KAUR\*\*

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Much has been said about the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, and more will be heard during the course of this Seminar. The point that I wish to highlight to this august audience is that the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib are not for Sikhs alone. These are meant equally, if not more, for people from all the other faiths as well.

Down the centuries, probably out of fear of loss of credit for originality of its teachings or merger of Sikh identity into majority, these have been overly protected, and projected as teachings of a separate religion for another people. This has made people from other faiths feel alienated from *Gurmat*.

But the fact is that when Guru Nanak, the fountainhead of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, revealed his message, there was not a single Sikh. He addressed humanity as a whole, all his life. He noticed that people's spiritual growth had stagnated. They confused religiosity with ritualism, courtesy *brahmin-ism* and *qazi-ism*. He felt the need to change the very outlook of the people, as that would lead to a change in their behaviour. His observation that people of different religions believed that their Gods were different from each other's, led him to define God as *Ik Onkar* (the Sole Supreme Being), *Satnam* (of Eternal Manifestation), *Karta Purakh* (the Creator, Immanent Reality), *Nirbhau* (Without Fear), *Nirvair* (Without Rancour), *Akal Murat* (Timeless Form), *Ajuni* (Unincarnated), *Swaibhang* (Self-existent), *Gur Parsad* (realised by Grace of the holy Preceptor).

His aim, thus, was crystal clear. It was bringing the warring people

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\* Written for the Seminar at Pune University on the Theme *Teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, with focus on Bhagat Namdev* held from 7th to 9th July, 2005

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on a common platform, so that they shall hate none and fear none. Through his concept that God is *Ajuni*, he placed the *avataars*/prophets/saviours, including himself, as all belonging to the One and the same Lord. He thus brought home the fact that Almighty is the mightiest of all, and the Creator of all, in order to eliminate any differences/enmity/hatred amongst followers of different faiths/sects. Once all are assured of equal love of One and the Only Father, siblings have no reason to quarrel. Harmony prevails.

He belonged to a family, Hindu by religion, and his closest, lifelong companion, Mardana, was a Muslim. He did not marry into a Sikh family, and his sons were not Sikhs. The *sadbhus* he fed with the Rs 20/- that his father gave him for business purpose, were not Sikhs. The people whom he liberally distributed grains from the royal godowns, were not Sikhs. The *thug* that he transformed into a *sajjan*, was not a Sikh. Bhai Lalo, with whom he preferred to dine over the affluent Malik Bhago, was not a Sikh. He did not take the *Udasis* (the long travels) for Sikhs. He loved South Indians as much as he loved North Indians. He loved the Punjabis as much as he loved the Maharashtrians (the historical gurdwaras, like at Bidar, are a testimony to the fact). He left his home and hearth, not for Sikhs, but for people in all directions – Sri Lanka in the South, Tibet in the North, Mecca and Baghdad in the West, and Assam in the East. The Naths, the Yogis and the Siddhas he approached, were not Sikhs. He condemned Babar for his atrocities, not on Sikhs. He went to jail, not for Sikhs. The *bhagats* whose works he collected (3 out of the 15 were from Maharashtra – Bhagats Namdev, Trilochan and Parmanand) were not Sikhs. Bhai Lehna, whom he selected, even in preference to his sons, to carry on his mission of Universalism, was not from a Sikh family. He did not say, “*Na koi Hindu, na koi Mussalman*” to Sikhs. Were he to appear today, he would probably say, “*Na koi Hindu, na koi Mussalman, na koi Sikh.*” His concern was the entire mankind, and not any particular kind of man.

He noticed that people were fear-struck, courtesy superstitions generated by the so-called mediators between God and man. When he tried to stimulate the logic of people by throwing water towards his fields, hundreds of miles away, in a direction opposite to that of the sun, as was the sacred practice, the people were not Sikhs. Similarly,

at Kurukshetra, it was not Sikhs whom he proved that nothing untoward happens if one lights fire and cooks on the day of an eclipse. Neither at Mecca, did he prove to a Sikh that *Allah* pervades everywhere. He aspired to transform one and all into confident, loving, bold, Almighty-like individuals.

His dialogue with the Naths, the Yogis, the Siddhas shows that he was open to views of others. The fact that he collected the works of other *bhagats*, shows that he acknowledged the presence of other godly men everywhere, and in all ages. It should not be difficult for us to see that by the collection of such works by him (and safe handing over of these to his successor, later to be compiled in Guru Granth Sahib) is an indication of his far sight, which encompasses not only his contemporaries, but also us, five centuries down. Not only that, this medium that he chose for transmitting his teachings is going to cater to the needs of mankind till eternity. Such was his vision infinite, and such his concern eternal !

He was not out to convert, but to liberate people from the clutches of priestly class, and elevate them, and thus offer them an ecstatic view of the world. What is one's view in a crowd? Simply put, he guided people to view the world and the cultures therein as flowers, each emitting a different fragrance and adding to beauty of the garden in its own way, and nurtured by the same Gardener. Only such a one is a Sikh, be he a Hindu/Muslim/ Christian/Jew or so on by birth. Mere birth into a Sikh family, makes not one a Sikh.

Guru Nanak addressed the very root causes of the problems facing the society. Saviours of the modern world are suppressing the so-called terrorism from atop, *sans* success. As a result, rather, its roots are spreading deeper and wider, and hatred and tension are mounting by the day. We are being fed that the world is a safer place today, even as holocausts, genocides, massacres, and the like are of frequent occurrence. Cash is being spent by the Millions on security and defense of nations and leaders. Yet, 'the kingdom of God' appears not in sight.

Knowledge is advancing in the fields of Science and Technology, to the relief of physical and mental needs. But no heed is being paid to spiritual needs, so essential for sanity in these tension-torn times. As parents, we assist, encourage, induce the child to grow physically,

mentally, and when an adult, give him the freedom to choose his career and life-partner. At 18, he is given a say in shaping the future of the nation. But when it comes to religion, freedom is a big NO, and he has no say, whatsoever, in the matter. His religion has already been decided even before his birth. He is not allowed, leave alone encouraged, to reason. We place the lid of blind faith on his spiritual queries. It can only be understood in terms of one's extreme dedication to one's religion in which one is born, and, therefore, the lid, and that too ensured in place, by promoting superstitions, instilling fears, promising benefits in the yonder worlds, and so on. So, only the rare dare to lift the lid and to search for the Truth.

Personally, I am too one of those who are in love with the religion into which they are born. But, as per the instructions of the Guru to contemplate before believing, I have dared to venture out, only to discover that nothing short of the Guru's system could fulfill my spiritual aspirations. The Guru's instructions are for you, me and all.

Responsibility demands that people of the land of the Guru adopt and convey the Guru's message to fellow beings from other lands of the planet, for the salvation of mankind, by filling each heart with love for all. Each one of us can do that, each in one's own unique way, no matter the situation one is in. The ocean comprises of drops, each of which is important, no matter how small.

May Almighty bless you, me and all.

## SWAMI AGNIVESH CONTROVERSY

GURDEV SINGH\*

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In their meeting of July 7, 2006, the Institute of Sikh Studies commended the appropriate and timely rejoinder of Dr Kharak Singh (published in the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* of July-September, 2006) to the utterances of Swami Agnivesh, President, World Council of Arya Samaj.

The Institute wrote a letter (reproduced below) on July 10, 2006 to Swami Agnivesh.

Swami Agnivesh Ji  
President  
World Council of Arya Samaj

Dear Swami Agnivesh Ji,

Apropos your keynote address at the International Seminar organised at Amritsar on June 10, 2006 and subsequent reports of June 11, 2006 and June 16, 2006 in the Daily Tribune.

We were appreciative of your observations made at Amritsar on June 10, 2006 and on knowing the contents and tone of your remarks from those who were present in your audience at Amritsar felt encouraged and happy that a personage of your stature has ventured to carry out reforms and improvements in the existing level of harmony among Hindus and Sikhs, two sister communities so intimately bonded together, but your letter published in *The Tribune* of June 2006 dampened our enthusiasm toward your meaningful endeavours spelt out at Amritsar on June 10. Without discussing the matter in detail, I, on behalf of the Institute of Sikh Studies, assure you that we shall be willing to contribute earnestly toward your meaningful efforts seeking

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\* President, Institute of Sikh Studies, # 128, Sector 35-A, Chandigarh

further improvement in the nature of relationship between Hindus and Sikhs, and we should not hesitate to take up steps which are destined to bring about greater harmony among different segments of our populace, especially the closely interrelated Hindus and Sikhs. I may pertinently state that the IOSS is an apolitical organisation comprising of some globally known individuals.

With kindest regards,  
Yours Sincerely,

(Gurdev Singh)  
President, IOSS

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The President subsequently wrote a letter on July 22, 2006 to The Editor, *The Daily Tribune*, Chandigarh with copy to SGPC/Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and others.(reproduced below)

To
The Editor,
Daily Tribune,
Chandigarh.

Dear Sir,

Kindly publish the following letter in your esteemed paper.

Apropos Swami Agnivesh's letter published in the *Daily Tribune* of June 16, 2006.

Swami Agnivesh in his keynote address delivered at the International Seminar organised in Amritsar on June 10, 2006 declared that objectionable remarks in the *Satyartha Prakash* which offended the Sikh sensibilities would be removed. His statement published in the *Daily Tribune* of June 11, 2006 was as under:

“The World Council of Arya Samaj (WCAS) will remove objectionable words, if any, from the 150-year-old book “*Satyarth Prakash*” authored by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in its endeavour to end mistrust between Sikhs and Hindus. He said the WCAS held Guru

Nanak and Sikhism in high esteem.

Swami Agnivesh, President of the WCAS, stated this while talking to *The Tribune* after addressing an International Seminar organised by the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC to mark the 400th martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev here today.

He said he would soon hold a meeting with Sikh scholars and eminent leaders and try to remove objectionable material from the book and try to resolve the issue amicably. He said it would further help in uniting Arya Samajis and Sikhs."

We were appreciative of his observations made at Amritsar on June 10, 2006 and on knowing the contents and tone of his remarks from those who were present in his audience at Amritsar felt encouraged and happy that a personage of his stature has ventured to carry out reforms and improvements in the existing level of harmony among Hindus and Sikhs, two sister communities so intimately bonded together, but his letter published in *The Tribune* of June 16, 2006 dampened our enthusiasm toward his meaningful endeavours spelt out at Amritsar on June 10.

In his letter published in the *Daily Tribune* of June 16, 2006, Swami Agnivesh stated as under:

"Apropos the news-item, "Arya Samaj to remove offensive words from book" (June 11), I, as President of the World Council of Arya Samaj, propose to initiate a series of dialogue between scholars from both sides to transcend differences and heal hurt feelings, if any. It is not my intention to rewrite or alter the original text of Maharishi Dayanand.

There is, however, a real need to offer appropriate footnotes on texts that are likely, if misunderstood, to disrupt the harmony of religions. This would help, additionally, to explore and honour the spirit of Satyarth Parkash and promote spiritual solidarity for social transformation.

What is envisaged is not changing and chopping off the text of Satyarth Parkash but the incorporation of explanatory footnotes so as to avert misinterpretation and to make true meaning of this great and demanding text clearer to contemporary readers."

What necessitated Swami Agnivesh Ji to change his approach and issue the aforesaid letter is best known to him. Without discussing the matter in detail, I, on behalf of the Institute of Sikh Studies, assure him that we shall be willing to contribute earnestly toward his

meaningful efforts seeking further improvement in the nature of relationship between Hindus and Sikhs and we should not hesitate to take up steps which are destined to bring about greater harmony among different segments of our populace, especially the closely inter-related Hindus and Sikhs. I may pertinently state that the IOSS is an apolitical organisation comprising of some globally known individuals.

Yours Truly,
(Gurdev Singh)

President, Institute of Sikh Studies

~ ~ ~

Vide his letter of August 01, 2006, Sardar Harvinder Singh Sarna, President, Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee responded as under :

'I appreciate your views expressed in the letter and endorse the same. Keeping in view past attitude of the Arya Samaj, I don't think that the WCAS would remove or amend the objectionable words in the "Satyarth Parkash". If the Institute of Sikh Studies succeeds in doing so, it will be your great service to the Sikh Panth. The DSGMC will stand by you in the endeavour to remove objectionable remarks in the Satyarth Parkash.'

~ ~ ~

Sardar Avtar Singh, President, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Sri Amritsar, vide his letter of August 10, 2006 responded:

'Thanks for your letter of 22 July, 2006 addressed to the The Editor, The Tribune regarding the dragging of feet by Swami Agnivesh on his solemn assurance to have the offensive text removed from 'Satyarth Parkash' written by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. The matter is being taken note of.'

The IOSS in their meeting of August 07, 2006 appreciated that we have taken adequate steps and now it was up to Shri Agnivesh to take necessary action.

There has been no response from Swami Agnivesh. It appears that his statements made in June, 2006 at Amritsar were only for public consumption. It is evident that he has been unable to come forward with a tangible suggestion to improve upon the close relationship bonding the Hindus and Sikhs. How we wish he ventures out to accomplish a praiseworthy act !

REVIEWS

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SIKHI

A REVIEW BY LAURIE BOLGER*

Author : I. J. Singh

Publisher : The Centennial Foundation, Ontario, Canada, 2006

ISBN 1-894232-11-9

Pages xvi + 170; Price \$15.95

The World According to Sikhi, a collection of twenty-five essays, marks the latest milestone on the journey I.J. Singh began in his immensely popular three earlier works.

Like its three predecessors, *The World According to Sikhi* is not a catechism about who Sikhs are, and what they believe in or practice. Instead, *Sikhi* is revealed as a vibrant path of multifaceted meaning and universal, timeless relevance. This book covers the gamut of Sikh experience — from our identity in the diaspora and how the foundations of the faith continue to influence its followers today, to the ethical framework *Sikhi* provides for a useful, productive life.

Throughout the book runs the thread common to the personal journey of every serious spiritual seeker. The word “Sikh” implies being a continual student, and the essays mark the signposts along the way. It is a seemingly inverse path, progressing from being a Sikh simply by accident of birth, to becoming a Sikh. A committed practitioner of *Sikhi* strives to penetrate the meanings of the eternal teachings of the faith and formulate a personal response that incorporates them into all aspects of everyday life. These essays are a cogent roadmap of the process whereby the journey becomes the destination, that is, as in all spiritual quests, uniquely one’s own.

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The World According to Sikhi invites the reader to share in the joyous celebration of the inner life of the mind. The first essay, “Guru Granth: Major Currents in the Sikh Scripture,” explores the heightened concept of the “Word.” Guru Granth, the eternal, living Guru of the Sikhs, speaks not only of the written or spoken Word, but also of the unspoken word, *anhad*, to which “the inner self vibrates and resonates such that the mind becomes part of divine connectivity.” The Word becomes God only when a Sikh reads it and adopts it, such that the universal and timeless values of Guru Granth provide an ethical compass for an examined life, one of introspection and self-awareness.

Because Guru Granth must be discussed and debated to remain vibrant and alive, Sikhs need to cultivate the habit of *vicchar*, or critical thinking and thoughtful analysis. Several of what are, in my admittedly-biased opinion as a librarian, Dr Singh’s most satisfying essays, such as “The Shelf Life of a Book” and “Get Me Out of the Well,” bemoan the lack of meaningful books in Sikh homes and gurdwaras. He chides Sikhs for being resistant to “books that are the repository of the Gurus’ ideas and teachings” and for not developing a love of reading that would allow them to fully discover the Guru in the Word, or *Shabd*, of Guru Granth.

A Sikh’s life, however, is certainly not only of solitary introspection. *Sikhi* clearly recognizes the need for a community, or *sangat*, of stimulating minds on the spiritual journey of self-exploration. As I.J. Singh reminds us in “The Company to Keep,” *sangat* can become the beginning of both “a personal transformation and a communal conversation.” In a *sangat* united in common purpose and prayer, a Sikh may truly commune with the Divine. It took over two hundred years for this concept of a spiritually awakened, egalitarian community to fully evolve. In “The Nature of Dialogue,” I.J. Singh discusses how the progressive teaching style of Guru Nanak — dialogue, discussion and debate — led to the development of *sangat*, which matured into the concept of self-governance when Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa in 1699. After initiating his first five followers, and himself accepting initiation from their hands, there was “no distinction left between the Master and the Sikh.”

But while embracing the egalitarian message of *Sikhi*, Sikhs also “kept close to their hearts their timeless feudal roots.” How does the

music of the universal message that is *Sikhi* play in the multi-cultural setting of the diaspora? What should Sikhs, who live far from their traditional homeland, make of their Punjab-based institutions? I.J. Singh explores the changing nature of these institutions, points a finger directly at the “feudal Indian society where authority flows from the top down,” along with “unfiltered transfer” of its values to the Sikh diaspora, and exposes the “virtual state of internal dissension and civil war” that exists in most gurdwaras.

However, he optimistically dissuades us from the belief that *Sikhi* is becoming hopelessly mired in stagnation and decay. As he explains in “The Journey and the Destination,” *Sikhi* can remain vibrant and relevant if its traditions and teachings continue to provide “a framework of ethics through which we can measure and negotiate our way through life.” We need to reinterpret our faith “in the language and the context of the times in which we live,” he argues, such that the legacy of the Gurus remains eternal and timeless.

The application of eternal Sikh values to some of today’s dilemmas are highlighted in a series of timely essays towards the end of this book. “The Many Ways of Mating” and “Same-Sex Unions” discuss how traditional Indian society comes to grips with modern love, both heterosexual and homosexual, and how Sikh humanitarian perspective can be a useful tool for exploring the controversial issue of gay and lesbian marriages.

“Tracking Evolution and Intelligent Design,” acknowledges how *vicchar*, an integral component of being a Sikh, can illuminate this complex matter in the light of Sikh teachings. Guru Nanak’s views of the creation of the universe are shown to be amazingly modern and totally in consonance with present-day scientific theories.

In “Some Wars are Just,” I.J. Singh starts with the ideas of Thomas Aquinas that have shaped western thinking on what constitutes just war, and explores the Sikh perspective on how to distinguish revenge from justice, while tampering an uncompromising sense of justice with mercy. Sikhs must remain armed, or *shastardhari*, intellectually, morally, and spiritually, as well as physically, if they are to fight not only when war is inevitable, but every day on “the battlefield of the mind.”

I.J. Singh returns to this inner world in his last essay, “Festina Lente,” which discusses the idea of *sehaj*, a centered mind that is so

fundamental to Sikh thinking. “Hasten Slowly,” the title of this essay counsels us. Approaching life with equipoise and a sense of humility elevates our productivity, replacing our obsessive concerns with an awareness of the Infinite within us. This lesson is the last, but certainly not the least, of the timeless concepts of the Sikh Path that *The World According to Sikhi* illuminates for the spiritual seeker who journeys through its pages.

There are, admittedly, a few bumps along the journey that prevent it from being one of unmitigated bliss. While this book is of undeniable interest and appeal to a wide audience of all religious persuasions, some topics may require more explanation for a non-Sikh.

An innovative feature of all the essays in this book is that each ends with a powerfully impressive last sentence or two. These phrases reminded me of the *rabao* line that focuses on the main idea of a *shabd*. They might have been even more effective had each been connected to a central citation of Gurbani tied to the theme of the essay.

Several essays refer to the growing presence of non-Punjabi Sikhs; unfortunately, these mentions are far too few and scattered, and need to be pulled together in a cohesive way. I would urge I.J. Singh, who speaks so cogently about Sikh life in the diaspora throughout the book, to produce some essays spotlighting these “forgotten” Sikhs.

Topics such as sexism and casteism that, contrary to the teachings of the Gurus, continue to infest Sikh cultural practices, deserve more in-depth coverage. I would like to see I.J. Singh focus on these significant realities of Sikh life in essays that might spur readers to much-needed remedial action.

These caveats aside, this book is an extraordinary collection of writings. In his *Preface*, I.J. Singh tells us, “Essentially, we experience the world outside in terms of the universe within ourselves ... To see and nurture this connection between the universe within and the world outside remains to me the key to understanding *Sikhi*. How to explore it, how best to describe the process is the very ambitious goal of these essays.” In my opinion, Dr. Singh has admirably achieved his objective.

As in his three previous works, which have all enjoyed enormous, well-deserved success, all the essays that form this latest book are immensely insightful and engaging, done in an articulate and accessible

style that is full of trenchant commentary and a genuinely delightful brand of dry, subtle wit.

His writings strike the perfect balance between presenting material that anyone, regardless of background, can readily identify with, and making one's mind stretch effortlessly, to accommodate new ideas and ways of thinking.

One gentle word of warning is in order, however. These essays are easy to read, and often quite amusing. Yet they are anything but superficial, and taking them lightly will only shortchange the reader. Their multiple layers of meaning are like a *Matryoshka*, the Russian wooden doll with numerous nested components hidden within it.

I.J. Singh's latest book warmly welcomes you like a treasured friend, and also extends to you an irresistible invitation to return again and again. Indeed, *The World According to Sikhi* deserves prolonged and repeated reflection, real *vicchar*. But isn't that exactly what *Sikhi* is truly all about!

□

GEOMETRY-WISE

Prove : *Sikhs are not Hindus*

Brahmins are Hindus – (i) [Given]

Shudras are Hindus – (ii) [Given]

From (i) and (ii),

Brahmins are Shudras – (iii)

Shudras are Brahmins – (iv)

(iii) and (iv) are inconceivable by Hindus – (v) [Given]

Sikhs conceive mankind equal (including Brahmins & Shudras) – (vi) [Given]

From (v) and (vi),

Sikhs cannot be Hindus

Hence, Sikhs are not Hindus

– Birendra Kaur

THE ENQUIRING GURU
– QUESTIONS BY THE SIKH GURUS AND THEIR ANSWERS –

A REVIEW BY LAURIE BOLGER*

Author : Gurbal Singh Bhuller

Publisher : The Information Institute, Washington, DC, 2006

ISBN 0-9772107-1-5

Pages xxi + 164

The Enquiring Guru is a thoughtful and incisive compendium of 130 questions and answers about life and its meaning, painstakingly parsed out of the Sikh sacred scriptures, Guru Granth. While the living, eternal Guru of the Sikhs certainly could never be pared down to a mere 130 questions and answers, this short but pithy book is a most useful catechism of the Sikh faith, as well as a springboard for delving into the treasure-chest of Guru Granth. It serves up quite a mouthwatering taste of the richness that is *Gurbani*, making many of its basic, recurring key words and concepts more understandable and accessible.

An articulate, thought-provoking Foreword by I.J. Singh firmly situates this work within the perspective of Sikh tradition. It highlights the amazingly modern method of “horizontal dialogue” used by Guru Nanak and his successors, “where not only is there information transfer, but the teacher-pupil interaction serves to generate ideas and wisdom.” The preeminent role given by the Gurus to dialogue, discussion and debate is indeed “absolutely mind-blowing,” when one considers the predilection for “vertical dialogue” that was and remains a major feature of Indian society.

Unlike some other works which seek to clarify the teachings of

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Guru Granth, this book is non-intimidating, user-friendly, and highly browsable. At least one answer is provided for each of the 130 questions. The original text is given in Gurmukhi script, accompanied by a smooth and readable English translation. Notations on authorship and the exact location of the citation in Guru Granth place the quote in context, and motivate the reader to further exploration.

This book is enriched by over 100 footnotes. They serve to not only explain the quotes, but provide insights into the depth of meaning of a particular word or phrase, as well as fascinating glimpses into Indian culture during the time of the Gurus. For example, the footnote to the phrase translated as “The *Shabad* is the Guru,” gives a reference to the key concepts of God as reflected in the *Mool Mantra*, along with the idea that God can be experienced through the “Word.” Another note, referring to the “soul-bride” who is still in the world of her father’s home (i.e., a person still attached to material attraction), enlightens the reader about age-old marriage customs.

The types of questions and answers that form this book give one an eyeful of the sublime facets of Guru Granth. Some of them appear deceptively simple and mundane, flashing only the merest hint of the layers of complex thought that shimmer invitingly beneath the surface. An example of this is a famous quote by Bhagat Ravidas, a low-caste cobbler, used along with an excellent footnote, where he brings out “the difference between me and You”: “You are me and I am You — what is the difference between us? We are like gold and the golden bracelet, or like water and the waves.” Other citations tantalize readers with the stunning poetic imagery that permeates the sacred text. For instance, in thinking about how to stay in control, Guru Nanak asks: “How can one live in the palace, the home of snow, wearing robes of fire?”

All the quotes, questions and accompanying notes propel the reader along the lifelong path of exploration of the infinitely rich Sikh tradition. As I.J. Singh acknowledges in his Foreword, “Sikhism asks every Sikh to delve personally into its magic and mystery.” This prolonged and repeated reflection, *vicchar*, is what *Sikhi*, which has been called “a religion of laypeople,” is truly all about. Indeed, the author of this compilation, Gurpal Singh Bhuller, is not a formally-trained Sikh scholar or theologian, but rather a dedicated lay follower

of the faith. He succeeds in inspiring the reader to join him on the quest all sincere spiritual seekers must make, the one of introspection that leads to self-awareness and a truly examined life.

I wish Bhuller had added more discursive commentary throughout this book. However, its concise Q&A format necessarily precludes such elaboration. The footnotes, as mentioned above, do go a very long way to enlighten the reader and serve as a stimulus to further thought and discussion.

A somewhat more pressing need in this work is the one for better proofreading and editing. There are some glitches, such as missing footnote numbers in the text, as well as typographical errors. Furthermore, while the List of Headings at the beginning of the book appears in both English and Punjabi versions, the Index of Questions at the back is not translated into English, which would have been a very helpful addition for many readers.

However, these caveats do not detract from what is a short, but most useful, guide to the ethical framework for a productive daily living given to us by Guru Granth. Gurpal Singh Bhuller's work is indeed a most inspiring effort, at once satisfying and appetizing, which definitely deserves a place on the bookshelves of those looking for a valuable compass to help plot their own unique roadmap to an inner journey of exploration and discovery.

A GOD MADE TO ORDER

A REVIEW BY HARDEV SINGH*

Author : Gajinder Singh

Publisher : Ms Manbir G Singh, #2983, Sector 61, Mohali 160 062 (India)

Pages : 185; Price : \$18

A God Made To Order is the fourth book in a series started by the eminent Sikh writer Gajinder Singh. I had the privilege to review his books for *The Sikh Review*. The author is well versed in comparative religion and it is amply reflected in all the thirteen essays of this book. The author has brought out the essential features of Sikh religion and its unique contribution to world civilization vis-a-vis other religions of the East and the West. The author deplores the attitude of Sikh and non-Sikh scholars to mis-interpret the message of Sikh Gurus. I congratulate the author in choosing some unique themes which are relevant to the modern crisis of conscience being experienced by the present generation in general, and the Sikh youth, in particular.

'In Search of God' is the opening essay of the book under review. The author evaluates the belief systems of the ancient religions and compares these with the revolutionary and practical philosophy of the Sikh Gurus. On page 13, the author projects the Sikh viewpoint: "The Sikh Gurus wanted man to resist exploitation and any compromise with adversities, for which individual's character had to be remoulded. The first step in this transformation of character was to learn to be humble with purity of love. Guru Nanak emphasized that a person who did not adopt the Truth zealously in practice, could not be a serious devotee". In comparison to Sikh ideals, the author refers to the Hindu way of life (p 17): "In the Hindu scheme of matters, there is *praischet* (penitence) and *opai* (remedy) for all irregularities

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committed; there is washing away of sins at holy pilgrimage centres; there are special *yagya havans* to placate Gods, so that a person sits comfortably, having done his duty by his religion through financial means, what he was incapable of doing morally.”

The author is critical of the approach adopted by the scholars of Sikhism in either interpreting *Gurbani* in relation to Vedic discipline, or presenting it as the synthesis of Hinduism and Islam in his essay ‘Of Love and Fear’: “The game of love was the primary concern of the Sikh Gurus who kindled the light of human affection in the hearts of ordinary people and turned them into *devas*.” There is a wonderful essay “The Mind”, in which the author adopts a psycho-analytical approach to blind faith: “Blind faith is the order of the present times as consumerism has induced all to seek quick solutions and returns. The common man has no time and patience to contemplate inwards and analyse matters.” The author asserts that blind faith has no place in Sikh religion and priestly class is discarded. Sikh Gurus have bequeathed to us the voice of *Gurbani* as a guide post.

“Sabd-The Word Divine”, is an essay in which the author classifies *sabad* into two distinct varieties; reflective and revelatory. According to the author, the reflective *sabads* are related to some particular and specific event and situation and have a lesser spiritual value. He classifies *Zafarnama*, *Babar vani*, *Bhatt vani* and some other *sabads* of Guru Granth Sahib in this category. It is regretted that the author fails to fathom the transcendental realms of *sabad* and floats on the surface only in this essay. I fear majority of Sikhs will not accept the author’s division of *Gurbani* into two streams of thought; the mundane and spiritual. On page 52, the author presents his thesis about this division in specific terms: “The odes and eulogies of the *Bhatt vani* were also for a specific time and purpose, and their import is different from the motivating *bani* composed by the Gurus.”

The author defines faith and blind faith in the essay, ‘A Matter of Faith’. According to him: “Sikhism, as a religion, denounces blind faith. Sikhism is a religion of Grace. The principle of Grace is a different matter and all the rituals and rites have no place, be it an *Akband Path* or *Sampat Path* or periodic visits to a gurdwara under vows. There is no merit in such magical formulae. No religion before Guru Nanak insisted on moral values as the foremost and preset condition to expect Grace. “The celestial song of Guru Nanak was to arouse the masses from their slumber of ignorance and blind beliefs.”

Á God Made To Order is the title essay of this book. In auhor's view, the God is created by man, the sculptor, by chiseling the rock face. Then the author compares the concept of God in different traditions. The author ponders over the sorry state of affairs in the Sikh religion and gives suggestions to utilize the gurdwara premises to promote various social and cultural activities among the Sikhs instead of mere booking of *Akband Paths*, which encourage only *karam kand* rituals, strongly condemned by the Gurus.

The author emphasizes the unique contribution of Sikh Gurus in his essay, 'Facts of the Matter' in the following words: "Guru Nanak brought about a revolutionary change in people's understanding and viewpoint of piety and religious purity far ahead of the set customs and traditions prevailing in Hindu and Muslim society. The Sikh Gurus firmly appreciated the freedom of faith and respect of each one's point of view. They allowed liberty of faith."

Despite author's bold and calculated move to establish the Sikh tradition as the most revolutionary and scientific in the world, I find some minor flaws in his presentation. There is lot of repetition in some of the essays regarding the rejection of rituals by Sikh Gurus. The author also takes liberty to translate *Gurbani* in his own style, for example, on page 79, he translates *sakta* as 'the materialist' and *makhatu* as 'the unfit person' (p.159). There are more appropriate terms in Sikh literature for these words. Typographical errors are rare in this book, the author used 'tooted' in place of 'touted' at page 46. We should expect more contributions from Gajinder Singh in coming years.

□

ERROR REGRETTED

In the Book Review Section of the July-September 2006 issue an error on page 119 in the opening sentence has been inadvertently made. The sentence should read as follows :

"A lot of literature has been produced on the theme of the five symbols of the Khalsa bestowed by the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh to the Sikhs on the Baisakhi of 1699 which consolidated the Sikhs against the fissiparous tendencies and divisions by caste, region and customs."

SRI GURU NANAK PARKASH ITIHASIK PERPEKH

A REVIEW BY GURDEV SINGH*

Author : Dr Kirpal Singh
Publisher : Singh Brothers, Amritsar
Pages : 125; Price : Rs 80/-

Sri Guru Nanak Parkash is the greatest epic ever written in commendation of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. It is a voluminous work divided into three parts, viz., Porbarad I and II and Utarad – 130 chapters. Every chapter contains on average 50 stanzas totaling about 7000 couplets.

In old times, poets used to write Shah Namahas in honour of kings just as Firdausi wrote to get reward of one Ashrafi for one couplet. Bhai Santokh Singh could also write eulogizing his contemporary Sikh chiefs or Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is greatness of Bhai Santokh Singh that he chose the founder of Sikhism as the hero of his epic.

History has not done justice to *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash*. It is in Brij Bhasha which is difficult for the Punjabi-knowing people to understand. The Hindi-knowing elite are not inclined to accept *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash* as a work of Hindi literature because it is couched in Gurmukhi script. Consequently, the excellence of this work has not been properly appreciated.

Sri Guru Nanak Parkash commands great respect among the Sikhs. Its recitation and explanation are done in every gurdwara in the evening. In it life of Guru Nanak has been dealt with in four phases – early life, life at Sultanpur, Travels and life at Kartarpur.

Sri Guru Nanak Parkash is not only a great epic from literary point of view, it is historically significant also. To a superficial observer it

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appears to be a collection of accounts of Hindu mythology as incidents of Guru Nanak's life have been narrated with Puranic similes and metaphors. But its close study will reveal that it contains the traditions of Guru Nanak. It was an uphill task to sift historical data from such a sophisticated work. Dr Kirpal Singh has accomplished this task admirably and has projected it on historiographic pedestal.

This book depicts gist of *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash*. Important events relating to Shri Guru Nanak Dev have been discussed. The episodes of Guru Nanak's life have been critically studied and the myth that *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash* is based on the flight of imagination has been discarded. For instance, Bhai Santokh Singh has shown Guru Nanak as toddler in a chapter "Bal Lila". Here historical imagination, which works within the limits of source material, has been used to make the young Nanak move above. It is in order from history point of view.

Bhai Santokh Singh is an eloquent master of dialogues and while scripting dialogue he has shown great skill and awareness of social environment and woman psychology. These traits are evident in the dialogue of Chando Rani, mother-in-law of Guru Nanak, and Bibi Nanaki, Guru Nanak's sister.

Dr Kirpal Singh has done in-depth study of episodes of Guru Nanak and has come to the conclusion that these had historical basis. At places, he has literally followed *Varan Bhai Gurdas* and *Sikhan di Bhagatmala*, the works which are considered authentic in Sikh history, For instance, see accounts of Mula Kirh, Pritha, Kheda, Prithi Mal, Didi, etc, etc.

The book *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash Itibasik Perpekb* is small in size, but it gives a lot of information. Puranic nine *Khands* have been described in the modern terminology with geographical names, biographical notes of all Muslim saints mentioned therein like Bahaudin Zakaria, Shaikh Farid, etc., have been given, historical evolution of Sidh, Nath, Yogis, has been traced and brief biographical description has been added like that of Gopichand, Bharthari, etc, etc.

Dr Kirpal Singh is an internationally recognized historiographer. For the last sixty years, he has diligently devoted himself to the study of history, Sikh culture and Punjabi folk-lore. In the pursuit of his

passion for research, he has studiously interacted with scholars and common people at home and abroad. He has written voluminously and prolifically. Age is no impediment to his erudition and commitment. He applies himself earnestly and enthusiastically to give his best to his readers. Resultantly, his write-ups are always of sterling quality. This small treatise *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash – Itihatik Perpek* is just a sample of Dr Kirpal Singh's exceptionally high historiographic and literary caliber.

The author deserves congratulations on this commendable work.

NEWS & VIEWS

SEMINAR ON SCHOOL EDUCATION

Unsatisfactory state of affairs in the field of education has been agitating the minds of the members of the Institute. Time and again members felt that some measures should be evolved which may improve educational facilities to the people. Consequently, the IOSS about four months back resolved to hold a seminar on 'Education' which might throw up workable suggestions to obtain better educational facilities to the people. This seminar on 'Education' is being organized at Chandigarh on October 1-2, 2006 by the IOSS in collaboration with the International Sikh Confederation. To ensure meaningful outcome at the October seminar, IOSS and ISC had been holding group discussions in which eminent scholars, teachers, administrators, social and religious leaders participated. The subject was deliberated upon by the IOSS and ISC in their own meetings also. Prominent leaders in their respective fields relating to education are expected to participate in the seminar on October 1-2, 2006. It is hoped that the deliberations at this seminar will throw up a workable blue-print for improving the state of education obtainable at present, specially to school students. It is intended that the deliberations of this seminar should be focused on the school education in rural areas and particularly in the schools run by Sikh organizations.

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GOVERNMENT CONCERNED OVER ILLEGAL PUBLICATION OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Chandigarh, July 23. Keeping in mind the sentiments of the Sikh community, the Punjab Government has decided that it will ask the Central Government to provide for a law to take action against a person who tries to publish the holy Guru Granth Sahib on his own accord or

tries to conduct the “*Parkash*” of the Guru Granth Sahib at an unauthorised place.

Sources in the Punjab Government said the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee had requested for legal sanction to curb any unauthorised publication of the Guru Granth Sahib and its “*Parkash*” at places that are not approved by the Sikh clergy. The Punjab Government is seeking imprisonment of six months and a fine of Rs 10,000 for any person who violates these two aspects.

It may be mentioned that the Jathedar of Akal Takht in an edict had banned the private publication of the Guru Granth Sahib by anybody and empowered only the SGPC to carry out the task. Similarly, the Akal Takht had also banned the conduct of “*Parkash*” of the Guru Granth Sahib at places like marriage palaces.

The opinion of the government is that such stray reports were still coming in about violations of the edicts of the Takht. (*Courtesy : The Tribune, July 24, 2006*)

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AKAL TAKHT INVITES EXCOMMUNICATED SIKHS TO REJOIN SIKH FOLD

Amritsar, July 21. In an unprecedented ‘*Gurmatta*’ (literally, Guru’s intention), passed unanimously in presence of Guru Granth Sahib, today gave choice to all excommunicated persons to rejoin the Sikh fold by January 13, 2007 without undergoing any ‘*Tankhah*’ (punishment) on the pre-condition that they accept the authority of Akal Takht, ‘*Granth and Panth*’.

Jathedar Akal Takht, Joginder Singh Vedanti, who read the ‘*Gurmatta*’ from the rostrum of the Takht here, said that those who had gone astray ‘intentionally or un-intentionally’ from the Sikh fold could themselves avail the special exemption given to them to mark quadricentennial century of ‘*Miri Piri*’ (foundation of Akal Takht).

Later talking to *The Tribune*, Jathedar Vedanti said that the ‘*Gurmatta*’ was meant for all including Nirankaris, who were excommunicated after the Sikh-Nirankari clash on April 13, 1978. The *Gurmatta* was pronounced to mark the ‘*Miri-Piri Divas*’, which was postponed for today after clash on July 2.

The Sikh scholars feel that this was for the first time in the 400 years of the foundation of Akal Takht that any excommunicated Sikh was given an opportunity to re-join the Sikh fold without undergoing any atonement. ‘*Ramraias, Minas, Dheermalias, etc.*, had been

excommunicated from the Sikh Panth since the Guru's period. (*Courtesy: The Tribune, July 22, 2006*)

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## ***Letters to Editor***

### **INTERNATIONAL SIKH CONFEDERATION ROLE APPLAUDED**

The efforts of the ISC to deal with the various challenges being faced by the Sikhs highlighted through the July-September 2006 issue of *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* based on the seminar held on the April 8-9, 2006 has received a lot of appreciation and support from our readers. Some of the responses and suggestions are reproduced below.

Dear Editor,

The papers read at the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) conference held in April 2006 in Chandigarh and published in the *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, July-September 2006 (Vol, VIII, Issue 3) were very interesting and contain a good deal of information and suggestions which I found myself nodding in agreement with all the way through. The Institute of Sikh Studies is to be congratulated for organising this conference so successfully.

The papers dealing with education were most lucid and helpful. S S Johl's paper on the Socio-Economic Status of Sikhs has given a clear penetrating analysis of school education in Punjab and misuse of alcohol and drugs amongst Sikh youths.

S S Johl states that "the disturbing aspect that needs serious consideration is the menace of drug addiction and alcoholism that is eating into the very vitals of the community, especially in the rural areas".

What we see and read in the media is that the consumption of alcohol and other drugs is becoming a serious problem in Punjab. There is hardly any social function in Punjab where alcohol is not served. The per capita alcohol consumption in Punjab is considered one of the highest in the world and every indicator of alcohol-related harm has shown a substantial increase. Use of illegal drugs is also increasing among teenagers and the use of 'smack' and alcohol in high schools is increasing at an alarming rate. Even Punjab teenagers are seen

celebrating various occasions with beer and champagne (*The Tribune*, December 12, 2005). The survey conducted by the Institute for Development and Communications based in Chandigarh in 2003 found that every third male and every 10<sup>th</sup> female student in the state has had drugs on some pretext or on one occasion or the other.

Young people are also regarded as vulnerable by the print media in Punjab. Their alcohol and drug misuse has become the focus of public concern. It is not a small minority of young people who are involved, but a fairly large proportion. This certainly needs to be taken seriously by our Sikh community leaders. But how can we minimise or eliminate the problem of alcohol and drug misuse?

Having taught health and safety education and promotion to undergraduate and post-graduate student teachers in the University of Reading for a number of years and seen health education being taught as part of personal, social and health education in British schools, as well as being involved in the evaluation of school health education programmes, I am of the opinion that this problem of alcohol and other drugs misuse needs to be solved through education in schools and at home and mass media communications. We have to find out what drives the youths in Punjab to take up such substances.

Education is the most powerful instrument to meet the challenge of alcohol and drug misuse. Education is not only concerned with equipping students with knowledge and skills they need to earn a living. It must also help our young people to: have respect for other people, other cultures and other beliefs; become good citizens; use leisure time creatively; think things out for themselves; pursue a healthy and safer life-style; and, not least, value themselves and their achievements. It should develop an appreciation of the richness of our cultural heritage, and of the spiritual and moral dimensions of life.

For education to be effective, it is necessary to have some understanding why young people drink and why they take psychoactive substances and in what way. This will be a useful first step in forming policy, development and practice aimed at reversing the worsening trends highlighted in the media. A credible starting point is to explore the motivations, values and meaning that young people ascribe to such drinking and drug taking behaviour. Our Sikh youths need guidance and we need to involve them in finding ways to minimise the harm from this risky lifestyle of drinking and drug use, and to develop

teaching and learning materials for use in schools.

If young people are to be able to make informed decisions about alcohol- and drug-related issues, they will need information on all aspects of their misuse. There is thus an urgent need that young people are given information about the harmful effects of over-indulgence in drug and alcohol upon themselves, parents and community. The SGPC has a very important role to play to keep our youngsters away from alcohol abuse.

“Upon the education of the people of this country, the future of this country depends.”

Benjamin Disraeli, the prime minister of Britain spoke these words in 1874 when Britain was at height of its economic power. These words can equally be applied to the people of Punjab. It is even more so today for the state of Punjab. In a highly competitive world there is nowhere to hide.

In conclusion, I endorse whole heartedly S S Johl’s statement that “education and health are the two basic determinants of economic well-being of an individual”, and the Sikh community leaders in India and abroad should take this acute problem seriously.

Amarjit Singh, PhD

<amarjit101@ntlworld.com>

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Dear Editor,

First of all, the undersigned congratulates you all, for the initiative taken in setting up the International Sikh Confederation (ISC) and prays to *Akalpurakh* for its success. With His blessings, the undersigned remained a humble *sewadar* of Nishkam, for more than twenty years and is now trying to do *sewa* with Kalgidhar Trust & Society, education being their focus, which is the focus of ISC also.

Hon’ble S. Sardara Singh *ji* Johl, Deputy Chairman, Punjab State Planning Board, Chandigarh in his six page article “Improving the Socio-Economic Status of Sikhs” in the latest issue of *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* (July-September, 2006) has very effectively summarised the problems of the state of Punjab, especially of the rural population (majority of them being Sikhs) and his recommendations for empowering the rural youth of Punjab are as under: -

The funding to children, as suggested by S Sardara Singh Johl, will be helpful only if they get any gainful education from the rural

schools. The children are virtually getting nothing, as you would kindly observe from the two research studies carried out when, while working with Nishkam, we were trying to improve the situation in Patiala Education III block through the Punjab Elementary Education Project (PEEP), taken up in the Khalsa Sajna Year of 1999.

S. Kulwant Singh ji, based on his practical experience, in his very informative and analytical article "A Blueprint for Educational Resurgence in Modern-Day Punjab" has recommended a dual approach of agitating with the Govt. and creation of "Sikh Educational Fund".

The undersigned from his small experience of working with Nishkam, in the PEEP, feels that the suggestions of S. Kulwant Singh ji are more practical. Here, the undersigned will like to add that after interacting with two Sikh organisations, PEEP was finally taken up by Nishkam, in Patiala Education III Block, with the help of Dr. T.R. Sharma, (an eminent educationist and dedicated social activist) who is a resident of Patiala.

Further, S. Kulwant Singh ji have suggested a detailed survey of Punjab villages. Perhaps, he is suggesting an educational survey only. This the undersigned feels is a must because that only will indicate the latest ground conditions and will enable ISC to not only effectively agitate with the Government, based on factual data, but will enable ISC to decide future course of action.

To make the project a success the undersigned is of the opinion that ISC will have to create a movement and broad base its reach, as limited measures may not be of any consequence, since over a period of time the problem has aggravated to unthinkable levels, resulting in Punjab falling, in the education field, from 7th position, among Indian states, in 1985-86 to 23rd position in 2003. Virtually, ISC will have to fight a war, for revamping the educational system. Therefore, ISC will require a well disciplined and trained army, to take the project further. Perhaps, involvement of all Missionary Colleges, Sikh Schools & Colleges and other Sewa Missions/Societies would be utmost necessary, for achieving any success and keeping the costs low, since the financial resources of IOSS or ISC may be presently limited. Involvement of Panchayats is a must for long term success and sustainability of the project. Therefore, for undertaking educational survey of Punjab villages, support of all Sikh organisations may be solicited. This will also enable ISC to know their commitment, to the cause of education in Punjab.

S Kulwant Singh ji while concluding his article has expressed that the dream of the visionaries in ISC can be fulfilled only by working selflessly day and night by sacrificing personal comforts of leisure and family obligations. This is very true. He has further added that the very fact that this dream has been conceived is an indication that Waheguru Akal Purakh's Will is working behind this noble and lofty dream. According to him: -

(i) the organisers need to cast themselves in the mould of divine instruments of this Guru's design and respond to this great challenge and (ii) the immediate challenge and task is not as radical as to build a new pyramid overnight in place of an existing crumbling pyramid as to prick the conscience of those who are consciously and deliberately demolishing the once pre-1980 considerably sound educational pyramid through a reprimand, a censure and a gentle rap on the knuckles from those who decidedly possess a higher moral stature.

The undersigned, however, feels that to make the project a success, not only the organisers of ISC but each and every educated Sikh will have to come forward to give his/her *daswandh* of time and money (perhaps, more than *daswandh*) and the undersigned will have no hesitation in doing that. Perhaps, ISC will have to adopt modern methods and technology to approach/reach each and every Sikh to solicit his/her support.

Your kind attention is invited to Sardar Sadhu Singh's article "School Education in Punjab", wherein he states:-

"There is a need for change and adaptation to the challenging socio-political situation of a rapidly modernising society. Education should have its aim at both the development of society and the realisation of man's potentialities. So, the future of the Sikh community depends, to a great extent, upon the levels of education of the Sikh children. Men of vision and imagination realised this fact at the time of Vishav Sikh Sammelan in 1995. It was resolved that Quality Education should be imparted in all Sikh institutions."

This clearly brings out that though men of vision realised in 1995 that the future of the Sikh community was dependent on the levels of education but the vision was eaten away by the politicians and we lost more than 10 years period in the process. But what to say of 10 years, the community have already lost 100 years because the greatest visionary of modern times, Sant Attar Singh ji of Mastuana in 1906

had not only given a vision of real education but had started the process also. He declared that the true way was:

“To Establish Permanent Peace in the world was by creating good human material through value based scientific education and spiritual Upliftment”.

One hundred years back his focus and priority was education to females because had set up a school for girls in 1906, followed by a boy's school and later the Akal Degree College at Mastana in Punjab. Had we listened to him and taken adequate steps, we would have been saved of the ills of female infanticide and drug addiction not to say others.

When Sikhs talk about education they generally give example of the Jews, who while passing through adverse times had not only decided to give the best education and culture to their children but had implemented it faithfully and in a dedicated manner. And the result is for all to see that the Jews are at the top, in all the fields and even control the US economy, to a large extent. In the present illustrious issue of AOSS dedicated to ISC also, a no. of authors have suggested creation of “Sikh Education Fund” on the lines of “Jewish Education Fund”.

The Sikhs, however, tend to forget that education has never been their focus because had it been so they would have listened to Sant Attar Singh ji, who had given a call for real education, much before the Jews had thought about it. So, the whole issue boils down to implementing the decisions taken. You, in the agenda of ISC, have stated as under: -

“Quality Education: The state of education in rural areas of the Punjab is highly deplorable. A concerted effort is required to provide quality education in villages by strengthening the existing schools with better infrastructure, better teaching staff and modern teaching techniques. Similarly, at the higher education level, financial assistance to deserving students needs to be assured. The ISC is expected to come out with a comprehensive education plan.”

Kulvinder Singh
<k.ssambhney@nic.in>

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Dear Editor,

Dr Birendra Kaur in her paper *But Not the Least*, presented during ISC seminar held on April 8, 2006 has touched very important issues the Panth is facing.

*Panth be able to Set Priorities*

Creation of dedicated funds for specific projects is a healthy suggestion but the most important thing is the devoted manpower for the utilization of such funds.

*Khalsa Educates*

Two papers presented in the seminar (i) School Education in Punjab and (ii) Rural Education..., indicate that an appreciable beginning has been made in this direction. The results are encouraging and the need is not only to strengthen the existing Akal Academy system but to further expand the same with dedication and devotion.

Yours sincerely  
Er Harjot Shah Singh  
#1589, Phase 3-B-2  
Mohali

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TRANSLATION OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB IN ENGLISH

Dear Editor

In his article, AOSS Vol. VIII-3, p 81 Professor Sarjit Singh has raised many important points for the attention of the Sikh scholars. A panel needs to be appointed to obtain all the views, discuss them, and decide the guidelines/take decisions on such points. This panel may be nominated by the ISC in consultation with the SGPC Amritsar and DSGPC Delhi, the two constituent bodies, so that the decisions are approved by them and preached among the Sikh community.

Some of the points, however, raised by him are based on his misplaced enthusiasm, for example changing the non-controversial pronunciation of < to *Ikob*. He ignores that there are some basics of word formation and pronunciation in every language. They have to be taught and learnt by the students.

First, in English: Look to the pronunciation of 'boot' and 'book', and the spellings of the words 'know' and 'no', same vowels different pronunciation in the first case, same pronunciation and different spellings in the second case. It has to be learnt accordingly and not changed to suit a learner.

Now, in Gurmukhi : < - ੴ pronounced as *ik*
ਮਹਿਲਾ ੴ - ੴ pronounced as *Pabla*

Two pronunciations for the same digit (letter) are correct and not

wrong. Further, the letters ਤ and ਨ, according to his thesis (as the child would read) should be pronounced as ਤੱਤਾ and ਨੱਨਾ but professor Sahib does not read them like that; he reads them as they are supposed to be read. Similarly 'ਯ:' is not to be pronounced as written, that is ਯਾ ਦੋ ਬਿੰਦੀਆਂ ॥

There is lot in every language that one has to learn from an expert teacher and not from a child, who himself is a learner. Particularly in case of *Gurbani* (not to be written as Gurbaani) one needs to learn it from an expert teacher. Even a Punjabi scholar will need guidance to read and understand it correctly. *Gurbani* has its own special grammar, not used in Punjabi.

Some words coming from two different languages have to be pronounced accordingly. ਜਨ Punjabi word, pronounced as ਜਨ, almost all through in *Gurbani* means a person, a disciple, etc., However the same word ਜਨ in Persian is pronounced as ਜਨ as in ਜਨ ਪਿਸਰ ਪਦਰ ਬਰਾਦਰਾਂ (Guru Granth Sahib, p 721). It means 'wife'. Correct pronunciation is needed for conveying the meaning of *Gurbani*.

The pronunciation of <, the symbolic representation of *Ikoan(g)kar* (pronounced with personal variations) is OK. It should not be, because of the ignorance of the learner, tampered with to change it to *Ikob* or any other one.

I may further explain it; "\$ is not read as "S slashed" but is read as 'dollar' even by a school student. In a book of the maths an elementary student will read the symbol 'x' as 'multiplied by' and not as 'cross'.

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TERRORISM BEGINS AT FOETAL LEVEL FOR FEMALES

Dear Editor,

Terrorism directed at the females at the foetal level, like any other terrorism, cannot be eliminated, without understanding what caused it to raise its ugly head in the first place.

Female Foeticide is a reflection of our sick society. Female Foeticide is unheard of in the Western cultures, where dowry and bride burning are unheard of.

How come we never took as much notice of the menace of Dowry System and the Bride Burning episodes as we do today of Female

Foeticide? Today, every person, be one a male or a female, is prattling “Stop Female Foeticide”, thereby addressing only the parents of girl child, making them feel guilty and holding them alone responsible for the reprehensible act. The sermon should instead be directed towards the in-laws that they allow her to exist! Lets acknowledge that we are all responsible for her plight that begins even before her birth. Our slogan should be:

“Female Foeticide: a *kalank* on our Culture”

It might prick the masses a wee bit.

If the treatment of women by society remains unchanged, parents will continue to kill their daughters, and rightly so, before birth, rather than nurture her, educate her, wed her along with dowry, only to be abused / burnt / killed by in-laws after marriage. As, no one can doubt the love of parents for their child.

Unless we ensure security for her after marriage, it is indeed a good idea for parents to kill her before birth. But, neither Law alone nor Custom alone can bring about any worthwhile change in the mindset (or rather ‘set mind’) of the people. Legally, let the Dowry (among other securities from his side) be in a form that it should be available to her alone or be ever invested in her name, and, socially, the boy and his family should welcome her, and remain ever thankful / indebted to her and her family, if the Indian family system is to be saved / preserved.

Birendra Kaur

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GREATLY BENEFICIAL

Dear Editor,

I am becoming a Sikh and am most eager to learn and progress along the Sikh Path as much as I can. Dr I J Singh is a trusted guide and invaluable catalyst in this regard. He has lent me back issues of *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* and I have derived great benefit from discussing the articles with him. Being a voracious reader as well as a librarian, I encounter numerous sources of writings on *Sikhi*, and have found *Abstracts of Sikh Studies* to be highly informative and extremely well-written.

Warm regards

Laurie Bolger

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