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SHIMLA

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## PREFACE

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Plagiarism has done greatest harm to the image of Sikhism. Sikh theologians and historians in the past were generally brought up with a base of studies of one or the other school of thought prevalent amongst the Hindus and the Muslims. Sikhism was, therefore, naturally projected through tainted and blurred glasses. Happily the writers and scholars nowadays have begun to lift the haze and give a clear vision of Sikhism. Though some are still struggling under the old obsession and have a lurking intention to please and appease the ruling class, the renaissance that is being brought about is very heartening and necessary to show the correct image. In this book, I have attempted to describe Sikhism as I have understood it.

Sikhism is our way of life, our *dharam*. It is not based on any set of *mantras*, rules and laws, edicts or commandments as such. No importance is given in the Sikh way of life to any physical austerities, rituals, formalism, acrobatic postures, fasts or ablutions, trances or talismans, pilgrimages, signs or penances. Numbering of prayers, counting of beads, mechanical reading of scriptures, attainment of supernatural powers, show of miracles or magic, even charities and alms, celibacy or renunciation, going naked and *karam kand*, have no place in Sikhism. The Sikh way of life bypasses all such exhibitionary rituals, self-suffering, superstitions and spiritual stunts and religious hypocrisies. It steers clear of esoteric introversions and cobwebs of castes and creeds, *Varanashram*, incarnations, idolworship, and other such dogmas and hollow philosophies.

The crux of this way of life is to control and mould the human mind so that it gets into complete harmony with the Will of the Creator. This can be achieved by submerging our ego completely into the Will of the Supreme Being, both explicit (ਹੁਕਮ) and implicit (ਰਜ਼ਾ), and extinction of I-am-ness (ਹਉਮੈ). This, therefore, can very well be called Satguru's way of harmony and action.

This way of life took full two hundred years to blossom and evolve fully. Guru Nanak Dev sowed the seed towards the end of the fifteenth century. His eight successors nurtured, cultured, cultivated, and fortified it. After 200 years of meticulous planning and preparation, the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, brought it to fruition in 1699 when the Guruship was entrusted to the Khalsa under the suzerain direction of *Gurbani* enunciated in Guru Granth Sahib. The Spirit and Light are to be received from *Gurbani* and its implementation in actual life was left to the Khalsa for all time to come. The omniscience and dynamic thinking of the Guru has provided a living organism with instructions to grow and prosper perpetually. With the omnipresence of *Shabd* Guru always providing Light and Instruction, Khalsa functions as an institution in itself and is capable of propagating, adjusting, expanding and functioning without depending on or waiting for emergence of any prophet or *avtar* to show the way. The delegation of Guruship in 1699 to *Panj Pyaras*, as representatives of the Khalsa, under the supreme spiritual overlordship of *Gurbani*, laid down that there will be no personality cult amongst the Sikhs and that there will be joint leadership, joint responsibility, and joint action.

Harmony has first to be established in our individual self. Guru Nanak Dev too aimed at resurrecting, reforming and rebuilding the individual's personality and character. Harmony has to be created in our mind, soul and body. Harmony is also necessary among our functioning organs, will and intellect.

No less is harmony desirable in the family — harmony between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters and so on. Instead of competing with each other, or having reservations and individual axes to grind, a family knit together with understanding, love and harmony carries decisive weight,

commands respect, and leads to glory and success in every sphere of life. It is more necessary today than ever before.

Harmony has to be extended next to the social circle, to friends and relatives and all those with whom we come in contact and have dealings with. It has to be spread in village and town, and in the community as a whole. Harmony is essential for preservation of culture, tradition, integrity and defence of the country. The ideals of one world and brotherhood of man can only be achieved by bringing about harmony. It is only harmony which can bring about world peace.

For improvement of economic conditions of the masses and uplift of the country, it is necessary to boost production. To achieve this purpose, harmony between the employer and the employee, the brain and the instrument, the executive and the worker, the tenant and the financier/owner, is of utmost importance.

Above all, most important and essential is harmony with the Will of the Supreme Being. That is, the spiritual height where alone we can get peace of mind and stability. It is there that we get into perfect harmony and rhythm with nature where the Creator is seen in action, and which affords us joy in life and eternal bliss. The way to achieve this goal is through *simran* and *kirtan*. Hopes, when not fulfilled, and fears of happenings that we do not wish for or desire, cause frustration and distress and shake the equilibrium of our minds. *Simran* and *kirtan* lift us above hopes and fears, and our ego (ਹਉਮੈ) is vanquished through the *Shabd* :

Freeing from hope and fear burn the ego by means of the *Shabd*.

ਆਸ ਅੰਦੇਸੇ ਤੇ ਨਿਹਕੇਵਲੁ ਹਉਮੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਜਲਾਏ ॥ (ਵਾਰ ਆਸਾ ਮ : ੧)

At this stage we realise our insignificance and helplessness as compared to the omnipotent universality of the *Akalpurkh*. The human soul is just like a drop in the ocean of the unfathomable and the incomprehensible Universal Soul. As a consequence, we arrive at a cross-roads : One leads to utter helplessness, frustration, pessimistic inaction, renunciation, fatalism, and all that sort of negative bewailing and remorse. This course has meant slavery and all the suffering that the Indian sub-continent underwent by

succumbing to this apparently easier way. The other way is that of action, service, optimism, and taking pleasure in doing good to others. Sikhism shows this latter way of positive action. We formulate our own *karmas*. That is our responsibility. *Karma* cannot be created by inaction. It results from our actions only. Action, therefore, is an essential part of life. If our actions are approved, the Master's Grace will liberate us from the labyrinth of *karma*. As long as life lasts, action must continue. There is no escape from it and there is no place for *sanyas* (renunciation) in the Sikh way of life. It is usually said that Guru Nanak was a prophet of peace. Unless properly understood, it is likely to cause confusion in the appraisal of the revolutionary evolution that the Satguru brought about. Peace of mind is spiritual harmony which is our aim. But peace in worldly life means *status quo*. *Status quo* means static subjection to whatever happens. At that time it would have meant acceptance of subjugation and conditions of serfdom. This was against the Guru's teachings and the tenets of Sikhism. Satguru has stressed upon living a life of constant struggle and continued activity for advancement and betterment. The tenth Guru has himself prayed :

When the end comes,

May I die fighting in the thick of the battle.

ਜਬ ਆਵ ਕੀ ਅਉਧ ਨਿਦਾਨ ਬਨੈ ਅਤਿ ਹੀ ਰਣ ਮੈ ਤਬ ਜੂਝ ਮਰੋਂ ।

In *Var Majh*, Guru Nanak says :

By talking and discussing, you cannot reach heaven.  
Deliverance can only be had by living an active truthful life.

ਗਲੀ ਭਿਸਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਈਐ, ਛੁਟੈ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਇ ॥

Satguru has enjoined upon us to live a life of action, and to integrate spiritual, intellectual, social, and political activity. This way, therefore, devolves on us responsibilities to be fulfilled and duties to be performed. These include both spiritual and worldly.

The first responsibility to be fulfilled is our duty, *dharm*, towards the Creator. This is done through *simran*, which means remembrance, i.e., perpetual awareness of the presence of the Omnipotent Sustainer of the Universe. This means the realisation

of the presence of the uncreated Creator in us and our existence in Him.

Our next duty is towards Satguru. The place of the Guru in Sikhism is next to God. To get enlightenment and guidance, the Guru is essential. All the gems and jewels lie inherent and hidden in us. They are only waiting for the touch of the Guru to be energised and shine (ਮਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਤਨ ਜਵਾਹਰ ਮਾਣਿਕ ਜੇ ਇਕ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣੀ ॥). We have only to take refuge under Satguru's Lotus Feet with faith and devotion. If we persist with single-mindedness, in spite of the tests the Guru puts us to, the loving Guru will embrace and come to function in us. Along with the Guru come his force, strength, and powers. But we have first to perform our duty to grasp the Guru's Feet and surrender our mind and intellect by offering our 'head' to him. Entrusting our body, mind, possessions, and everything to the Guru and abiding by His Will, we get Realisation (ਤਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਧਨੁ ਸਭੁ ਸਉਪਿ ਗੁਰ ਕਉ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਮੰਨਿਐ ਪਾਈਐ ॥).

Then we have the responsibility to fulfil towards the Sikh Community as a whole, known as the *Panth*. The Khalsa is the cream which emerges to the top after going through gruelling tests. Being entrusted with the Guruship, the Khalsa is the image of the Guru himself. To preserve its image and identity and keeping its colours high and aloft, is a Sikh's foremost and sacred duty. *Keshas* (uncut hair) are a spiritual link with the Guru. It is *keshas* that have saved the Sikhs from extinction. Otherwise, they would have been assimilated by the intolerant Hindu majority long ago. This responsibility has to be fulfilled even with our blood if need be.

No less important are the responsibilities we have to fulfil towards our hearths and homes, our families and fellow beings, and the world at large where the Creator has sent us on specific duties. To be a good 'earner' and a prolific 'learner', so that we may have plenty and surplus with us to disburse and assist the needy and the deserving, is another important duty that the Sikh way of life devolves upon us.

To perform our duties and to fulfil our responsibilities we must have requisite capabilities and capacity. For this purpose, besides will and understanding, ways and means, intellect and

knowledge, physical fitness is of utmost necessity. It is only in a sound body that a sound mind can properly function and harmoniously exist.

Satguru's mission, and so the ideal of a Sikh, is to uphold and advance righteousness, to emancipate the good, 'the saint in us' (ਧਰਮ ਚਲਾਵਨ ਸੰਤ ਉਬਾਰਨ ।) and to extirpate evil and evil-doers root and branch (ਦੁਸਟ ਸਭਨ ਕੇ ਮੂਲ ਉਪਾਰਨ ।). To fulfil this mission, for self-preservation, and preservation of our way of life, our *dharam* and traditions, for self-defence and protection of our institutions, traditions, and freedom, organisation and discipline are most essential. These essentials were incorporated in this way of life from the very beginning. Sikhism broke with ascetic traditions at the very start. Guru Nanak Dev had himself established missionary centres even in far flung places like Ceylon, Central India, Assam, Multan and Baghdad. His selection of a successor was also a significant step in this direction. This established a precedent which continued till the ascendance of the Eternal Guru, Granth Sahib. Our way of life is not individualistic with interest hovering around our person only. This individualism had been a bane of Indian civilisation. Our aims, therefore, are to be achieved in *sangat* and not by any way of renunciation. This is why *sangat* (community gatherings) and *pangat* (community dining) are two main pillars on which the edifice of our way stands with perfect harmony all round.

Everything which is perceptible is the manifestation of the Supreme Master. He can be perceived in His myriad and uncountable forms, while He is still beyond and One. It is in His manifest nature that His Will (*Hukm* and *Raza*) can be observed in action.

In *Asa-di-Var* the Satguru says :

It is Your Will functioning in Nature, by which we see and hear and are conscious of fear and comfort.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਦਿਸੈ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਭਉ ਸੁਖ ਸਾਰੁ ॥

The nether regions, the heavens, and all the forms in creation come under the course of Thy Nature.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਪਾਤਾਲੀ ਆਕਾਸੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਆਕਾਰੁ ॥

So do the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the Semitic scriptures and all the schools of thought.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਕਤੇਬਾ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

Under Your Will come the ways of eating, drinking, dressing and all the ways of love and affection.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਖਾਣਾ ਪੀਣਾ ਪੈਨਣੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਰਬ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥

Thy Nature prevails in all the species, genera, the animal kingdom and colours.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜਾਤੀ ਜਿਨਸੀ ਰੰਗੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਜੀਅ ਜਹਾਨੁ ॥

Thy Nature works in the virtues and evils of men and in their feelings of honour and dishonour.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਨੇਕੀਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਬਦੀਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਮਾਨੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥

It is Your Nature which works in the wind, water, and fire, as well as the particles of the earth.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਪਉਣੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਬੈਸੰਤਰੁ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਖਾਕੁ ॥

It is all Your Will and Nature that work everywhere. You are the Creator and Master of Nature. Your Name is the holiest of the holy.

ਸਭ ਤੇਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਤੂੰ ਕਾਦਿਰੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪਾਕੀ ਨਾਈ ਪਾਕੁ ॥

Says Nanak, Thou beholdest and pervadest all things under Thy Command and workest most intelligently.

ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਵਰਤੈ ਤਾਕੇ ਤਾਕੁ ॥੨॥

Our actions, movements, aspirations, ceremonies and *maryada* have to be in complete harmony and rhythm with the workings of Nature. Anything opposed to it will not be advisable in our way of life. It will strike a discordant, incoherent, and jarring note, which must be stopped. Under the influence of other ways of life, especially the Hindu way, our *maryada* and most of our connected actions have become corrupt and jarring, and are screaming in disharmony which call for being corrected and brought in tune and harmony with nature. For instance, the whole nature, the stars, the earth, and ancient instruments and machines like the Persian wheels, the manual wheat-grinders, oil-mills, ploughing, and every other thing goes round in anti-clockwise direction, by going towards the right. The Olympic tracks even nowadays go in the right, anti-clockwise, direction. In science the right is the

positive, active side, while left is negative. Sikhism is based on principles of positive action and mental and physical strengths. By going in the right direction we pay respect to the sacred steel hanging on the left also. But some of us, under Brahminical influence, while going round (*parikrama*) in sacrifice to the *Ishat Gurudev*, do so in clockwise direction. This is blatantly in disharmony and discord with nature. To give another instance, generally we find that the Sikhs pay their obeisance to Guru Granth Sahib, but treat it like Hindu idols. They love Punjabi, but care very little to read and know what is contained in the Holy Granth, and still less to follow the guidance and instruction the *Shabd Guru* imparts. Sometimes they act in insolent defiance of the very instructions they recite or sing in the *Shabd*, as is observed when some mimics of Hindu rituals offer *Arti* with burning candles and throwing flower petals on Guru Granth, in the Hindu way of worshipping the idol or honouring an individual. The *bani* they recite when doing so unequivocally and frankly forbids such actions. It describes the whole nature as offering *Arti* to its Supreme Master and instructs us to get into complete harmony with it. Sikhism is based on the conception of the Formless and Timeless Supreme Being. The Satguru being now the Guru *Shabd*, is also formless and timeless (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ — *Nirankar*) and so is the way of worship which is solely and only the singing of the praises of the *Nirankar*. Thus, all the misconceptions about Sikhism are due to looking at the Satguru's way of life through tinted and borrowed glasses.

The mess we have made and our failure in the field of politics is also obviously due to our being confused about this way of life of ours. It is correct to say that in the Sikh way of life *dharam* and politics cannot be separated. But unless politics are kept subservient to *dharam*, we cannot justify our stand, and as long as we are not clear and definite about the image and shape of our way of life, our *dharam*, we will not be able to cope with modern politics which are getting more sophisticated and intricate every moment. We must first be clear and convinced in our mind, that the Sikh way of life, has an independent image and identity. We must wriggle free of the Hindu spell under which Sikhs have so far been working;

the idea, that the Sikhs were created for the protection of the Hindus or only to bring about reforms amongst the Hindus, which purpose has now been fulfilled and Sikhs should better merge back in the Hindu morass; the spell which created hatred in the Sikh mind for Muslims and Islam as a whole, although Sikhism is closer to Islam than to Hinduism as the Satguru's conception of God resembles more the monotheistic God of the Semitic religions than any of the gods connected with the polytheistic Hindu view, besides the community worship and other factors like castes and *Varanashram*. This nearness to Islam is reflected even in the Satguru's own words in *Zafarnama*, when he wrote to Emperor Aurangzeb that he had to thrash the turbulent hill people as they were idol-worshippers while he was an idol-breaker. It is only those who have never tolerated the existence of the Sikhs and Sikhism, who try to create the impression that Sikhism is only a satellite of Hinduism. Acceptance of such a deadly injunction can only mean slavery and serfdom for us or total extinction. There can be no hope of success in politics as long as we are not clear and convinced of our '*Panth*' being '*nirala*,' distinct and independent.

The truth revealed by the Satguru is eternal and so are the human values propagated by him. This spirit and guidance is conserved in the Guru *Shabd* enunciated in the Guru Granth Sahib for all time to come. Under its sovereignty, the Guruship was entrusted to the Khalsa. This was because the *maryada*, the dealings, the behaviour, the policy, and living, has always been changing and will continue to change from time to time. This has to be coped with at all times whenever needed. The way of living which is static, unaccommodating, and unreasonably dogmatic and rigid, cannot last long. It gets extinguished by its own outdated stagnation. The Guru in the Khalsa is always alert and functioning. It is dynamic, always adjusting, and self-growing. It is fully capable of facing and getting over any eventuality at any time. Occasions for adjustment have always arisen and will always arise. The Sikh way of life itself has taken about two hundred years, the 16th and the 17th centuries, to evolve and take a final shape. Along with it, *maryada*, has also been changing and evolving. I can very well

visualize, for example, the Sikh congregations in cold, well-to-do Western countries assembling on chairs, keeping their feet warm, while Guru Granth Sahib is placed respectfully on a high pedestal with observation of full honours. It is cheapest to squat on the ground. In a poor country like India which cannot afford the luxury of having even a full covering over the floor everywhere, let alone chairs and other elaborate furniture, this may look odd and sound radical, but an eventuality like that cannot be ruled out. There will certainly be no harm or sacrilege in it. Generally people are conservative, and do not accept a change very readily. Above all we have the overriding presidency of the Guru *Shabd*. These are good enough insurances against frivolity, infidelity, frailty, opportunism, slavish submission, flattery, and other irreligious lapses. The Satguru did not found this way of life for only the Punjab or India or the Eastern Hemisphere. Being meant for the whole Universe, it must serve and be adaptable to all places, climes, and people.

To properly understand the Satguru's Sikh way of life, also called Sikhism, how it evolved during the 16th and 17th centuries and took its final form, it is necessary to keep in mind the continuity of the Guru in ten human forms and its dynamic existence and functioning in the Khalsa afterwards. Without doing so, some intelligent people, even Rabindra Nath Tagore, have drawn unintelligent conclusions and misled some clever thinkers like M.K. Gandhi, who taking the clue from Tagore, had the audacity to call Guru Gobind Singh a "misguided patriot" and after the partition of the country, uncovering his communalism, started denouncing the Sikhs in his daily propaganda prayer meetings. Not that he did not know the unequalled services of the Sikhs to humanity, but he could not conceal his intolerant, communal, and anti-Sikh feelings. Measuring with his own yardstick and equating the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, with Shivaji Marhatta, Tagore pronounced that Guru Gobind Singh fell from the high spiritual ideals of Guru Nanak and that Sikh society decayed because it took to the profession of arms. He particularly lamented that Sikhs did not conform to his notions of high ideals and did not produce any

painters, or dancers, or even poets, not knowing that all the Sikh scriptures and religious books and even some of the historical works are all written in poetry and set to music and rhythm the like of which has not been written so far. Sir Gokal Chand Narang, an ardent Arya Samajist, in his, *Transformation of Sikhism*, writes about Guru Gobind Singh that “Hereditary as the gift of poetry had been in his family, he developed a style of Hindi poetry which has remained unsurpassed since his times.” Again he says, “He developed a class of warlike poetry, unknown in the Punjab before, which he turned to such a great account in rousing the dormant energies of the people.” And he says further, “Verses of Gobind Singh forming an invocation to the Sword are among the finest of their kind to be met within any literature of the world.” Any one who has a little sense to see things impartially, would straightaway note that the first brick of the Khalsa edifice which Guru Nanak laid with his teachings and dissemination of knowledge (*gian*) was in poetry and music. Both of these fine arts reached a stage of perfection during the time of his nine successors, untouched, unequalled and unparalleled so far. Music (*kirtan*) is the sole form of worship in Sikhism. No wonder it did not meet the expectations of Tagore and the like, as there is no place for femininity or feminine acts and guiles among the Sikhs.

Sir Gokal Chand Narang had rightly said in his *Transformation of Sikhism*, “Gobind himself, in fact, as well as his work, was the natural product of the process of evolution that had been going on ever since the foundation of Sikhism. The harvest which ripened in the time of Gobind Singh had been sown by Nanak and watered by his successors. The sword which carved the Khalsa’s way to glory was, undoubtedly, forged by Gobind, but the steel had been provided by Nanak.”

The essence of the Sikh way of life is to be an ascetic within (ਬਾਤਨ ਫਕੀਰੀ) and a prince without (ਬਾਹਰ ਅਮੀਰੀ). Arms mean protection to the weak and the poor, and destruction to the tyrant. We have to transcend our little egos and appearances, but not to renounce the world. This was the teaching the sixth Satguru imparted to Ram Das Samrath, the Maratha, in 1634. This Ram Das later on became

the spiritual guide of Shivaji Marhatta.

In this small book, salient features, essential factors, and important aspects are separately discussed. I have tried to be as brief as I could. But still some repetition of ideas and points could not be avoided as most of these notes were written on different occasions, at different times, and even for different purposes. In this respect I wish, therefore, to seek the reader's indulgence. I have also tried to quote lines from *Gurbani*, which are commonly known and used. This is an attempt to put my humble contribution also in lifting the haze and helping to present the Sikh way of life in its own independent lustre and unsullied crystal clear image. If I have been able to do a little bit, I should be grateful to my Gurudev for His Grace and Mercy.

Our connections with Sikhism and the *Panth* date back to the time of the sixth Nanak, Guru Hargobind Sahib, when my ancestor Bhai Roop Chand grasped the Satguru's Lotus Feet and received unlimited blessings and boundless bounties. Ever since then it has been our proud privilege and honour to be at service of the Guru Panth to the best of our capacity and ability granted by the Satguru. My impressions of Sikhism, therefore, grew and developed in this background and atmosphere, family traditions and hereditary customs and living. Not that I feel I have said anything new; every guidance and instruction can be had from *Gurbani* on every aspect of life and from the history of two hundred years of the Guru period when the Satguru's ideas and teachings were implemented in actual life. But whatever I have said are the impressions that I have gathered. I have taken care to keep independent of any other school of thought. Still I do not claim to be perfect and incorrigible. If any learned friend makes any corrections, I will be deeply thankful for the loving interest taken to further improve my efforts.

Bhai Ardaman Singh