

INTRODUCTION

The following chapters on various aspects of Sikhism come from a realised soul, whom we can aptly term as a true Gursikh, who lived and practised the Sikh way of life as envisaged by the Sikh Gurus. It is the essence of a lifetime as experienced by him.

Although written a quarter of a century back, yet the book could not be presented earlier to the *Panth* to which it rightly belongs. May be it was ordained to become a homage to the Great Master, the purveyor of *Amrit*, ਬਾਦਸ਼ਾਹ ਦਰਵੇਸ਼, ਬੁਤ ਸ਼ਿਕਨ, Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, on the 300th anniversary of the birth of his beloved Khalsa.

To understand Sikhism in its original precept it is essential, nay imperative, to understand the difference between this new religious thought and the ones existing at the time when Guru Nanak undertook his mission. His very first words, ਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ, are indicative of the fact that whatever he was to preach was independent and separate from the prevalent doctrines. Later in *Gurbani* it was made clear in unambiguous terms :

ਹਮਰਾ ਬਰਾਬਰਾ ਰਹਾ ਨਾ ਕੋਊ ॥
ਪੰਡਿਤ ਮੁਲਾਂ ਛਾਡੇ ਦੇਊ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ...
ਪੰਡਿਤ ਮੁਲਾਂ ਜੋ ਲਿਖਿ ਦੀਆ ॥
ਛਾਡਿ ਚਲੇ ਹਮ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਲੀਆ ॥੩॥

He (Nanak) meant thereby that all human beings are brothers and sisters, being the scions of one Almighty God. It was wrong to segregate them into different groups and sects whose followers keep on quarrelling with one another. The Guru said :

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ ॥
ਤਿਸ ਦੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਇ ॥

and :

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ॥

Very few thinkers and writers come out of the Hindu idiom of thinking, thereby, negating the very efforts and the mission of the ten Masters. No doubt Sikhism originated from a depressed and repressed Hindu society, but it is not Hinduism, nor a sect thereof. Christianity and Islam sprang from Jewish stock, but we cannot call a Christian or a Muslim a Jew. Just as Lord Christ was born a Jew, so was Guru Nanak born a Hindu. But he broke the shackles of Hinduism in a single stroke when he refused to wear the sacred thread (ਜੰਜੂ).

Major points of Sikhism, like unicity of God, brotherhood of man, negation of incarnation (ਅਵਤਾਰਵਾਦ), rejection of idol worship, etc., take Sikhism away from the Hindu thought. Here I can venture to say that these basic principles take Sikhism closer to Islam. Gurus were messengers and not God-incarnate, as they themselves said :
ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥

and :

ਕਹਿਯੋ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਸੁ ਭਾਖਿ ਹੋ । ਕਿਸੁ ਨ ਕਾਨ ਰਾਖਿ ਹੋ ।

Even in the way of life which the Gurus have laid down for a Sikh, we find that concepts of congregational prayer, casteless, classless society, are alien to Hindu thought. These again take us closer to Islamic society. In writer's words, 'Sikhism is antithesis of Brahminism.' Sikhism is a social religion based on ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ and ਜਹਾ ਜਹਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਹਾ ਤਹਾ ਰਛਿਆ ਰਿਆਇਤ ।

Another important point to be kept in mind while reading *Gurbani* and understanding Sikhism is the one spirit in ten forms (ਜੋਤਿ ਓਹਾ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਸਾਇ).

Vested interests today are trying to divide the *panth* into Sikhs of such and such Guru. Only a few would say they have taken *Khande da Pahul*. It is today from such and such *sant*, *sadh* or *dehra*, who in turn preach their own *maryada* which further divides the Sikhs. The authority of Akal Takht as centre of Sikhism is dissipating. There are Singhs who though overtly *Amritdhari*, do

not even accept *karah parsad* prepared by another sect, though *Amritdharis*. It can be said with certainty that the subsequent nine Gurus have said or done nothing that does not emanate from Guru Nanak. There is difference between Nanak and Guru Nanak. Nanak is the spirit (ਜੋਤ) that pervaded the ten forms and now is with us in the form of Guru Granth Sahib (ਗੁਰਗ੍ਰੰਥਸਾਹਿਬ). Guru Nanak Dev was the first Guru, the founder of Sikhism. Various historical facts would support the fact, the thought, that Sikhism has evolved in 200 years under guidance of one spirit in ten forms. A seed sown by Nanak bore fruit and the crop harvested on Vaisakhi 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Nanak, with a sword, steel of which was provided by Guru Nanak Dev. Remember the *Panj Piaré* came from places which were never visited by Guru Gobind Rai. The seed of Sikhism there was sown by Guru Nanak. *Panj Piaré* were the fruit. Similarly, the oft quoted line about Guru Gobind Singh, ਆਪੇ ਗੁਰ ਚੇ ਲਾ, needs deeper understanding. Guru Nanak bowed before his successor Bhai Lehna, while passing on Guruship. Continuing the tradition set by Guru Nanak and followed by his successor Gurus, Guru Gobind Rai bowed before *Panj Piaré* and sought *Amrit* to become (Guru) Gobind Singh. He in turn completed the transfer of Guruship to the Khalsa under the aegis of Guru Granth Sahib at Nanded, thereby giving the concept of *Granth-Panth*. Writer terms it as 'one Guru one movement'. It should suffice to make an understanding mind realise the continuity of the mission of the ten Gurus. Guru Nanak says :

ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥ ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥

Guru Gobind Singh repeats the same as :

ਤਬ ਥਾ ਅਬ ਹੈ ਆਗੈ ਹਵੈ ਹੈ ।

On Vaisakhi, the Tenth Nanak seeks head on palm with a drawn sword. Culmination of Nanak's mission can be seen in the paintings which show the *Panj Piaré* with their heads on their hands, offering these to Guru Gobind Singh who holds a drawn sword, with the caption :

ਜਉ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥

ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਜਾਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥

It is commonly said and believed that Guru Gobind Singh

turned the Sikhs into militants. Thus, today many pseudo-Sikhs like to be called Sikhs of only nine Gurus and get a shiver up their spine (if they have any) at the very mention of Guru Gobind Singh's name. But, in fact, the turning point was the sixth Guru taking up arms. Initiation by *Amrit* on Vaisakhi 1699 was not a turning point, because most of the battles like ਭੰਗਾਣੀ, ਨਦੌਣ, were fought much before that.

Bhai Ardaman Singh did not subscribe to this thinking in terms of 'militant and non-militant' Sikhs. He was of the view that it was a movement initiated by Guru Nanak with a clear objective to create a man, a nation, which should take up arms to defend itself, its society, its religion, from the soulless multitudes of his time. It was essential to first preach and make man understand and realise, just like striking the fine edge of a wedge to split a boulder. You do not provide weapons to a recruit on day one. It is done only after he goes through a rigorous training and when found fit to handle the same with skill and discretion. Sword is the same in Guru Gobind Singh and Aurangzeb's hands, but we know the difference as to how these were wielded. Battles fought before Vaisakhi 1699 were the tests.

It was in 326 B.C. that Alexander the Great invaded what we now call India and ever since it has been a one way traffic of invasions on India. Ironically the mountains over which the invaders came, came to be known as *Hindukush*.

With physical slavery of the masses came the worst thing that can happen to a man : mental slavery. No body had the moral courage and guts to speak against oppression.

ਅੰਧੀ ਰਯਤਿ ਗਿਆਨ ਵਿਹੁਣੀ ਭਾਹਿ ਭਰੇ ਮੁਰਦਾਰੁ ॥

and :

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ ॥ ਜਾਇ ਜਗਾਇਨਿ ਬੈਠੇ ਸੁਤੇ ॥

From that hopeless, helpless mass of people, Guru Nanak's mission was to create, develop and evolve the He-man, ਮਰਦ ਅਗਮੜਾ.

This slavery of a thousand years could not be unshackled overnight by mere preaching. All the Gurus lived the way of life which they preached as any other man. They suffered with their followers, and showed the way of living an honourable life and

also laying down their life for a principle, honour and dignity :

ਜੇ ਜੀਵੈ ਪਤਿ ਲਥੀ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਸਭੁ ਹਰਾਮੁ ਜੇਤਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਖਾਇ ॥

and :

ਜਬ ਆਵ ਕੀ ਅਉਧ ਨਿਦਾਨ ਬਨੈ ਅਤਿ ਹੀ ਰਣ ਮੈਂ ਤਬ ਝੁਝ ਮਰੋਂ ।

The first word of protest against the oppressive ruler came from Guru Nanak :

ਏਤੀ ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਕਰਲਾਣੇ ਤੈਂ ਕੀ ਦਰਦੁ ਨ ਆਇਆ ॥ ੧ ॥

ਕਰਤਾ ਤੂੰ ਸਭਨਾ ਕਾ ਸੋਈ ॥ ਜੇ ਸਕਤਾ ਸਕਤੇ ਕਉ ਮਾਰੇ ਤਾ ਮਨਿ

ਰੇਸੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥ ੧ ॥

He was the first human rightist and had the guts to call Babar a *jaaber*. He courted arrest with the rest as one of them. Guru Hargobind Sahib did not come out of jail leaving his fellow prisoners to languish. This earned him the honorific of ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋਡ.

Bhai Sahib used to say, as he believed, that when the fifth Guru, realised that his *sangat* was ready morally to face the unjust, oppressive rule, he decided to make his son, *Bal* Hargobind, don arms. According to my father, ਹੁਣ ਹੋਆ ਹੁਕਮ ਮਿਹਰਵਾਨ ਦਾ, was the milestone and turning point in the history of evolution of Sikhism. It was indicative of the readiness. Guru Arjun Dev himself defied the Mughal ruler by giving protection to Khusro and providing him passage through his territory. It was an act of courage and defiance of authority unthinkable at that time.

He reiterated the concept of *Takht* which had already been given by his predecessor Gurus :

ਤਖਤਿ ਬਹੈ ਤਖਤੈ ਕੀ ਲਾਇਕ ॥ ... ਤਖਤਿ ਸਲਾਮੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ॥

and :

ਤਖਤਿ ਰਾਜਾ ਸੇ ਬਹੈ ਜਿ ਤਖਤੈ ਲਾਇਕ ਹੋਈ ॥

The message, the last message to his son *Bal* Hargobind, that he sent before going to Ravi makes matters amply clear. He said :

ਵੈਰਾਗ ਨਹੀ ਕਰਨਾ ।

ਸਸਤ੍ਰਧਾਰੀ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਤਖਤ ਤੇ ਬੈਠਣਾ ।

ਯਥਾ ਸਕਤੀ ਫੌਜ ਰਖਣੀ ।

Reading history deeply with a discerning mind one would realise that when *Bal* Hargobind ascended the *gaddi* he was offered a sword not ਸੇਹਲੀ, and when he demanded another, a similar one was produced. One thing is clear, there were two similar swords

made for the particular occasion. Second and even more important is that Guru Hargobind was given a military training and made fit to wear and wield two swords weighing 22 ਸੇਰ each. It leaves no scope for doubt that Guru Arjun Dev himself prepared and got him trained in the martial arts. And it was done under the able guidance of Baba Budha ji.

If any one Guru is to be mentioned, it was Guru Arjun, the apostle of peace, ਸ਼ਾਂਤੀ ਦੇ ਪੁੰਜ, who turned Sikh movement towards a militant one, capable of armed struggle against oppression of both ruler and the priest.

The concept of ਸੰਤ-ਸਿਪਾਹੀ, Saint-Soldier, is also indicative in Guru Nanak's compositions (ode, ਵਾਰ, which came to India with Alexander, till Guru Nanak's time was used to inspire valour, narrating the valorous deeds of different warriors, Guru Nanak used this martial mode of music for worship).

The *Khanda* — double-edged sword — united one edge of *miri* with the other of *piri*. The two swords that were prepared by Guru Arjun Dev for his successor to proclaim ਮੀਰੀ-ਪੀਰੀ were blended into one *Khanda* that was used to prepare *Amrit*. This was the evolution of Khalsa, completed on Vaisakhi 1699.

To grasp the gist of this book, one should know that Bhai Sahib was a fundamentalist, with a modern outlook. This was fortified by his close association with people like Principle Teja Singh ji, who used to spend his summer with us at Shimla. After Partition, great Sikh historian, Baba Prem Singh ji Hotimardan, stayed with us for quite some time. Before going to college and after returning home I used to attend their conversations and discussions. One small incident would be quite in place here. One morning at one such sitting Principal Sahib said, “ਬੱਚਿਓ! ਅੱਜ ਸਿਨੇਮਾ ਹੀ ਵਿਖਾ ਦਿਓ।” The movie he wanted to see was *Quo Vadis* - based on Lord Christ's life. Referring to his professor (Bhai Jodh Singh ji), he said that latter once said that he had never seen a movie to which Principal Teja Singh had replied, “ਤਾਂ ਕੇਹੜੀ ਮਲੂ ਮਾਰ ਲਈ, ਇਹ ਭੀ ਤਾਂ ਅਕਾਲਪੁਰਖ ਨੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਹੀ ਬਣਾਈਆਂ ਹਨ।”

This was living the *Gurbani* concept of ਹਸੰਦਿਆ ਖੇਲੰਦਿਆ ਪੈਨੰਦਿਆ ਖਾਵੰਦਿਆ ਵਿਚੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ। He was so engrossed in the plot of the picture

that he cried throughout seeing the tortuous plight of Christians. These two were not always as serious as the subjects of the discussions were. Once Principal Sahib in a lighter vein but making a point said : ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਬੜੀ ਅੱਛੀ ਤੇ ਉੱਚੀ ਚੀਜ਼ ਪਰ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਵਸ ਪੈ ਗਈ ਹੈ ।

I think this holds true more so today than at that time. But it seems that he was not happy even in those days about how Sikhs lived and projected Sikhism. He writes, "Sikhism is anti-thesis of Brahminism." Bhai Sahib was firmly of the view that Sikhism is a separate independent religion. He used to say Sikhism is closer to Islam in principles, while Sikhs have become closer to Hindus. Bhai Sahib's last public appearance in the service of the *Panth* was on 23rd December, 1976. I would like to mention what happened with the university high-ups here. Department of Guru Nanak Sikh Studies had invited Bhai Sahib to read a paper on the theme of *Guru Nanak's Solution of National Unity and Integration*. This was submitted to the university as customary. He was asked to delete the line "into the main all-assimilating saline ocean of Hinduism" from the following paragraph :

"When the Aryans, Dasyus, Pishachas, Hunas, Yueh Chis, Sakas, etc, came to India, they settled in the country with an idea to remain here and become one of the people who were already here. In due course, they lost all sense and features of alienism and became Indians. Along with their language and cultures, which mainly centred upon the modes of dining and wiving, these little streams merged, lock, stock and barrel, *into the main all-assimilating saline ocean of Hinduism ...*"

This deletion he declined to do and asked for the return of the manuscript. Deadlock carried on till the change of guards. Under the new Vice-Chancellor, Mr R C Paul, the paper was approved and then read as it was. It was so much appreciated that the then Chief Minister, who was presiding over the function asked the University to have it translated into other languages. But the working of the University is well-known to the Sikh-watchers. Those who have known Bhai Sahib know him as a man of mellow temper and sweet words and his thoughts were to be treated

like this.

He, like his father, was strongly against pictures (ਮੂਰਤਿ) of Gurus. He said it tantamounts to idol worship. In 1975 when the Punjab government was celebrating Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom and wanted to have a painting done for the occasion, he threatened to walk out of the meeting saying, 'How can one aspire to draw a picture of one he has not seen or met'.

He was of the firm view that *kirtan* was the only way of worship in Sikhism. He often said that otherwise the entire Gurbani would not have been composed in *ragas*. Some of the *ragas* in Guru Granth Sahib are new to Indian music (ਸ਼ਾਸਤਰੀਆ ਸੰਗੀਤ) such as *Asa-Tilang*.

He himself became a student of Mahant Gajja Singh of *Gurusar Sudhar*, a noted musician of his time. Mahant Ji often came to Bagrian for the purpose. (It won't be out of place to mention that, according to Giani Gurdit Singh, other prominent students of Mahant ji were Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha and Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala). Bhai Ghasita (ਭਾਈ ਘਸੀਟਾ), a known *ragi* of his time, was enrolled with my grandfather.

Yet another *ragi* of fame of the time who added to father's knowledge of *kirtan* was Bhai Jawala Singh of *Thathe Tibey* (ਠੱਟੇ ਟਿਥੇ).

He was not of the habit of keeping knowledge to oneself. He wanted it to be institutionalised to be preserved and spread. When Punjab government instituted Bhai Mardana Award, Bhai Sahib was asked to select *ragis* for the award. A number of sittings were held where *ragis* of the time presented their talent.

A solid contribution that he made in the field of *kirtan* was that he persuaded Punjabi University, Patiala, to record *kirtan* of all known *ragis* of the time.

At his request and suggestion the University commissioned Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh (sons of Bhai Jawala Singh, mentioned earlier) to record and annotate old traditional compositions (ਰੀਤ) of *shabads*. This book ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਸੰਗੀਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਚੀਨ ਰੀਤ ਰਤਨਾਵਲੀ which has 492 compositions annotated, was released after Bhai Sahib's death, in 1980.

Due to Bhai Sahib's position as a non-political personality, twice politicians had requested him to convey some ideas to the Akali leadership.

During the *Punjabi Suba* agitation, Late Sardar Partap Singh Kairon requested Bhai Sahib to advise the Akali leadership that areas like Faridabad and Sonapat which were revenue earning towns, would be excluded, that whatever was to be left, warranted revenue remission every alternate year, and that the remaining truncated Punjab would not be financially viable and would leave no scope for further expansion.

On the day Akalis launched *morcha* at Amritsar against the emergency in July, 1975, Bhai Sahib was requested to talk to Akali leadership and convey to them that emergency was clamped on entire India and not Sikhs alone. Further that it was a critical time when Sikh / Akali demands could be favourably considered and settlement acceptable to Sikhs could be reached. The proposal was duly conveyed to the Akali leaders whose response was not encouraging.

The partners in *morcha* deserted them and Akalis were left alone to face the music. Consequences which followed, every one knows.

Had any such settlement been reached the situation today would have been a lot different. But it now remains as one of the Ifs of history. Bhai Sahib's services to the *Panth* were recognised and honoured posthumously by SGPC at the *Vishav Sikh Sammelan* and by the Chief Khalsa Diwan at Amritsar.

Bhai Sahib Ardaman Singh was a true Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, with the twin characters of *Sant-Sipahi* and the third dimension of scholarship infused by the tenth Master. Bhai Sahib fought against the overt and covert attacks, inroads of Brahminism to his last breath in order to maintain the independent identity of Sikh *Dharam*. He lived up to the commitment ਜਬ ਆਵ ਕੀ ਅਉਧ ਨਿਦਾਨ ਬਨੈ ਅਤਿ ਹੀ ਰਣ ਮੈਂ ਤਬ ਝੁਝ ਮਰੋਂ ।

For him life was a battlefield against Brahminism.

Finally, I will like to thank Dr Kharak Singh without whose encouragement and help, this book may not have seen the light of

the day. Not he alone but his entire family was there to cooperate and help with a smile.

The person who kept me on the right track, advising me to stick to and carry on the legacy of my ancestors' service to the *Panth*, keeping away from the quagmire of politics is Sardar Inderjit Singh Jaijee.

I am humbly proud to be a member of the Institute of Sikh Studies where I learn so much from the galaxy of prominent Sikh scholars. To them all I owe my thanks.

August 18, 1999

Bhai Ashok Singh
Bagrian