

HINDUS, MOHAMMEDANS VIS-A-VIS SIKHS

Sikhs have generally been working under the Hindu spell that they were created only to defend the Hindu Dharam and Hindu Nation. This purpose having been fulfilled, a section of the Hindus who have never tolerated the independent existence of the Sikhs, have begun to suggest that the Sikhs should better merge now into the Hindu fold. This spell had even created a common aversion amongst the Sikhs towards the Muslims as a whole. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to look into the facts and reality of their mutual relations.

Sikhism, the Satguru's way of life, was founded by Guru Nanak. We have seen that when Guru Nanak started this movement in India, the Aryan and Semitic thoughts and cultures were in conflict. Sometimes it took shape of bloody happenings and aggression and tyranny on the physically and politically weak which were the Hindu Aryans. Guru Nanak struck the middle way. It steered clear of both, though it passed through the middle. It was an independent approach. This is vividly and definitely made clear by the tenth Satguru in his significant *Swayya* that we recite every evening :

Since I have embraced Thy Feet, I have brought no one under my eye :

ਪਾਇ ਗਹੇ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਤੁਮਰੇ ਤਬ ਤੇ ਕੋਊ ਆਖ ਤਰੇ ਨਹੀ ਆਨਯੇ ।

Ram and Rahim, the *Purans* and the *Quran* express various opinions, but I believe in none of them.

ਰਾਮ ਰਹੀਮ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਅਨੇਕ ਕਹੈ ਮਤ ਏਕ ਨ ਮਾਨਯੇ ।

The *Smritis*, the *Shastras*, and the *Vedas* all expound so

many different doctrines, but I accept none of them.

ਸਿੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਸਾਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਬੇਦ ਸਭੈ ਬਹੁ ਭੇਦ ਕਰੈਂ ਹਮ ਏਕ ਨ ਜਾਨਯੋ ।

O Holy God, by Thy favour, it is not I who have been speaking, all that has been said, hath been said by Thee.

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਸਿਪਾਨ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਤੁਮਰੀ ਕਰਿ ਮੈ ਨ ਕਹਯੋ ਸਭ ਤੋਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਯੋ ।

But it was not meant to come in conflict with the already warring elements or to elbow out anyone of them. Instead the Satguru wanted to bring the two systems, at loggerheads with each other, together in amity. That is why Sikhism is also called the third way of life (ਤੀਸਰਾ ਪੰਥ) and independent way (ਨਿਰਮਲ ਪੰਥ). The Satguru has brought together both Hindu and Mohammedan men-of-God, who believed compassion to be the fountain-head of religion and spiritual purification and clean action as the ultimate aim. The presence of the *bani* in the Holy Granth of such different sages, Muslims, Vaishnavs, high castes and untouchables together, and the respectful status equal to that of the Guru thus granted to them, is the living evidence of it. When a Sikh pays his obeisance to the Holy Granth, he bows and offers his head to all of them. In Sikhism, certain philosophical interpretations are common with Hindu thought, like life after death, while such concepts as the Oneness of God and congregational worship have much in common with Islam. In some ways, it can be said that Sikhism is nearer to Islam than to Hinduism. Sikhism, in fact, is a bulwark against ritualism, formalism and hollow philosophies whether in Hinduism or in Islam. It advocates and preaches the revival of unflinching and devoted faith and confidence in the Ultimate Reality, the truth; and interpreting this faith and belief in actual life.

It is a basic principle of Sikhism not to bend before brute force, aggression, or tyranny. This has to be opposed tooth and nail even with our lives, first by non-violent and peaceful struggle and even by offering our life. This example was set by the fifth Satguru. If this did not succeed, the struggle was not to be given up in frustration or abject surrender. It becomes incumbent, then, for a Sikh to wield the sword as the sixth Satguru did. It was a mere chance that the rulers, at that time, were Mohammedans and were bigoted, tyrants and aggressors. They had, therefore, to be

opposed. While the Hindus were weak, imbecile, oppressed and unable to defend themselves. Naturally they came closer to the Sikhs who became their saviours. But it is important to keep in mind that Sikhism and Sikhs were not opposed to Islam or the Mohammedans as such. Now it will be proper to have a look at the relations between the Sikhs and either of the two.

Hindus being the victims of the Mohammedan rulers' bigoted fanaticism and tyranny, came closer to the Sikhs to seek protection. Naturally, therefore, most of the conversions to Sikhism happened to be from amongst the Hindus. But conversions from Mohammedans also continued. There is no denying the fact that Guru Nanak Dev and his three successors came from Hindu stock. But after the fourth Satguru, the Guruship remained confined to the Sikhs (ਘਰ ਦੀ ਘਰ ਵਿਚ ਰਹੀ).

History tells us that the first who discerned the Divine Light in Guru Nanak was the Mohammedan Chief, Rai Bular, of Talwandi Rai Bhoi Ki, and Satguru's first disciple and companion was Bhai Mardana, a minstrel, who played on the *rabab* and remained in Satguru's attendance till his end. His last rites were performed by the Satguru himself. Bhai Mardana and his successors, Satta and Balwand, had the honour of getting their compositions, included in the Holy Granth. Then we find the third Guru establishing twenty-two *Manjis*, that is centres of Sikh Mission. One well-known centre was under a Mohammedan called Allahyaar in the area now called Kapurthala.

Emperor Akbar got so enamoured of the efforts and policy of the Guru Darbar in bringing about unity and integration among the different communities at loggerheads with each other, that he came all the way to Goindwal to have an audience with the third Nanak and study the Sikh way, which he later adopted at the Imperial Court.

The present site of Amritsar was obtained from Emperor Akbar in 1577 by the fourth Guru by paying 700 Akbari rupees to the residents of Tung who were the owners of the land.

By the time of the fifth Guru, Mohammedans, especially Sufis, came very close to the Sikhs. So much so, when the

foundation stone of the Golden Temple at Amritsar was to be laid, the fifth Guru called Hazrat Mian Mir from Lahore to do it.

The sixth Nanak, Guru Hargobind, began to collect volunteers for his forces to protect and safeguard their worldly and religious interests. In these volunteers, there were several Mohammedans too. It will be worth noting that while building the town of Kiratpur in the hilly Sutlej Valley, the Satguru erected, besides gurdwaras, temples as well as mosques, at his own expense. At Sri Hargobindpur also he built a mosque at his own expense for the use of his Mohammedan troops.

Prince Dara Shikoh, like many other Sufis, was an admirer of the Satguru and close to the Sikhs. When pursued by the army of Aurangzeb, Prince Dara Shikoh asked for the Guru's help which was extended by Guru Har Rai by sending out his force to guard the passage of the Beas till the Prince was able to cross and escape.

When the birth of Guru Gobind Singh took place at Patna, Bhikhan Shah, a Mohammedan Pir, sitting at Ghuram in the district of Karnal, now in district Patiala, bowed to the East, when he read his *Namaz of Thayjud*. His followers were surprised and asked the reason for it, because Muslims bow towards Mecca in the West. Bhikhan Shah replied that the Divine Light had flashed in that direction, and he marched off to Patna to see the Guru. In the battle of Bhangani near Paonta, Syed Budhu Shah along with his four sons and 700 disciples joined the forces of the Guru against the Hill Rajas who were defeated and routed at the end of February, 1686. Budhu Shah lost his four sons and several of his followers in the battle. We all know of Ghani Khan and Nabhi Khan, the two Pathan brothers of Machhiwara who risked their own lives, staked everything, and took the Guru on a palanquin on their shoulders and with timely assistance of Qazi Pir Mohammed got the Satguru through the enemy lines to safety after the escape from Chamkaur, while the Hindu and Mughal Imperial Forces were in hot pursuit. It was the Muslim Nawab of Malerkotla, who had the courage and daring to protest when the two younger sons of the tenth Guru, innocent children of seven and nine years, were cruelly tortured and put to death by Wazir Khan at Sirhind. We find that this

devotion and love of the house of Malerkotla towards the Guru and the Sikhs continues to this day. On the ninth of March, 1969, the Nawab got an *Akhand Path* of Guru Granth Sahib performed in his Darbar Hall at Malerkotla. At the place of the throne of the Nawab Ruler, the Holy Granth was opened. Personally, orthodox Muslims themselves, His Highness the Nawab and the Begam Sahiba stood in attendance with *chauwar* in their hands. I had the pleasure and privilege to be personally present at the occasion. Recently, the Nawab was returned to the Punjab Legislative Assembly on an Akali Ticket. His close relative leading a *jatha* on September 15, 1971, comprising of Sikhs as well as Mohammedans to Delhi for liberation of the gurdwaras in the capital, surpasses everything.

The Sikh conception of God resembles more the monotheistic God of the Muslims than any of the gods connected with the polytheistic view of the Hindus. In other ways too like castelessness, congregational worship, community dining, joint action, and positive activities in living, the Satguru's way of life is nearer to Islam than to individualistic, introvert, self-centred Hinduism.

This nearness is confirmed in the words of the tenth Master in *Zafarnama* when he wrote to Aurangzeb that he had to battle the mischievous hill people as they were idol-worshippers and he was an idol-breaker.

It is not correct to say that the Sikh conflict was with the Muslims as a whole at any time. If it were so, Muslims of note like Syed Budhu Shah, Syed Begh, and Maimu Khan would not have fought on the side of the Sikhs against the Mughal Forces. They did so because they appreciated the rightful stand of the Satguru and the cause his Sikhs were fighting for. If it were so, Mata Sundri would not have established her residence at Delhi itself after the evacuation of Anandpur and the barbarous treatment meted out to her family and innocent children, and she could not have issued her writs to the *Panth* from under the nose of the Emperor after Guru Gobind Singh's death. Two orchards and a village presented to the child Gobind Rai by Nawabs Rahim Bakhsh and Karim Bakhsh are to this day with the Patna Sahib Takht. 5,000 acres of

land belonging to the Nanak Matta Gurdwara in U.P. was an offering from a Muslim Begum. Sometimes I begin to feel, when studying without prejudice, the *Zafarnama*, the letter of victory written by the tenth Guru to Emperor Aurangzeb, that there was no bitterness at all or any enmity between them. The way the Satguru puts up his case, reprimands the Emperor for having lost his sense of duty and his failure to administer justice evenly to people who were put under his charge by the Almighty God and reminds him of the day of reckoning, and describes to him the atrocities and tyrannies that his men perpetrated on innocent citizens of the land, all these are certainly not the normal way to address an enemy. This letter was written after the escape from Chamkaur and the deaths of the Satguru's four sons and mother. As a result of this epistle, a meeting between the Emperor and the Satguru was being negotiated when the Emperor expired. After the death of Aurangzeb, we find Guru Gobind Singh taking part in the war of succession and helping win the throne for the right claimant, Bahadur Shah. No enemy would do that.

Similarly, the Sikhs have had very close connections and relations with the Hindus. The first four Gurus having come from Hindu families. The circle of relatives, friends and associates, naturally expanded more with them than with Muslims. Most of the ceremonies and rites performed by the Sikhs are very near to those of the Hindus. Our habits, customs and most of the ways of living are similar to that of the Hindus, though some of our important principles, tenets, and outlook are nearer to Muslims than to Hindus. If the Sikhs came into conflict with the Mughal rulers, it was for the sake of and to protect the Hindus. In fact, the Sikhs have fought the battles of the Hindus. Naturally, therefore, the enrolment of volunteers and conversions to Sikhism came mostly from the Hindu fold. When the Sikhs were fighting, their battles against tyranny, as a natural consequence, the Hindus looked after the Sikh families in the villages. It may be mentioned that it was under these circumstances, when the Sikh womenfolk and youngsters came under the Hindu influence that Sikhism began to be corrupted by Hindu ideas. The martyrdom of the ninth Guru, as we have seen,

was due to the word he had given to the Brahmins from Kashmir that their *Dharam* would be protected and the Mughal tyranny extirpated. In reality it was a sacrifice for freedom of everybody's faith.

It is surprising to see that in spite of all this suffering, sacrifices, martyrdoms offered by innumerable Sikhs for them, there has always been an important section among the Hindus that has invariably opposed the interests and the very existence of the Sikhs. They call us as one of them, but in doing so in reality they mean the denial of any separate Sikh identity. At one time, it was Chandu who became instrumental in torturing the fifth Guru to death, at another it was Sucha Nand, who prompted Wazir Khan to execute the young innocent sons of Guru Gobind Singh at Sirhind. When the son and successor of Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh, was preparing to preserve the link and fulfil the promise that his father had given to the distressed and helpless Hindus, it were the Hindu Hill Rajas who began to harass and attack him. The first battle, therefore, the Guru had to fight at Bhangani, was forced upon him by these Hindu Chieftains. When convincingly routed, these Hindu Rajas approached the Mughal Emperor at Delhi and brought the Imperial Forces to help them against the Guru. Then we have the ignominious Lakhpat Rai who personally commanded the Lahore Forces during the first holocaust at Kahnawan. It was he who got a general proclamation issued for the extirpation of Sikhs and began to implement it from 10th March, 1746.

This mentality of some of the Hindus has persisted even into our own times. It should suffice to cite just one instance here about it, and that too of no smaller person than Mr Gandhi himself.

In the mid-thirties of this century, alarmed by the spate of conversions of the untouchables to Islam and Christianity, the great Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Dr Ambedkar realised that the salvation of the depressed scheduled castes from the unjust oppression and cruel tyranny at the hands of the so-called higher castes since times immemorial could only be in their wholesale conversion to Sikhism. In their wisdom and farsight, they drew up a scheme and agreed to a pact and started to implement it. Dr

Ambedkar paid visits to Amritsar and left some of his fellow workers there to study and understand Sikhism and its institutions. The Khalsa College at Bombay is one of the outcomes of this. But to the misfortune of all concerned, this scheme was confided to Mahatma Gandhi on a strict and definite understanding not to let it out till the proper time. But unless the Mahatma was swept by rank communalism and prejudice against the Sikhs, why should he have thrown the confidence reposed in him to the winds and without any qualms of conscience committed a breach of faith by a premature condemnation of the scheme, saying "It would be far better that the crores of untouchables of India got converted to Islam than they become Sikhs." Eventually, at his threat to fast unto death the whole effort flopped. Friends who negotiated with Dr Ambedkar and once met him even at Janjira — a small island near Bombay in May, 1937, will bear me out. They included Sardar Narain Singh, then Manager of Nanakana Sahib, Principal Kashmira Singh, Master Sujjan Singh, Bawa Harkishan Singh Principal, Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail, Sardar Teja Singh Akarpuri and Sardar Gurdit Singh Sethi, then President Singh Sabha, Bombay, who are still present in this world.

There is another more recent instance also, which I presume most of us clearly remember. In 1929, Sikhs were given a solemn assurance by Hindu Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Moti Lal Nehru and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, and also assured by a formal resolution of the All India National Congress at Lahore, that no Constitution of free India shall be framed by the majority community unless it was acceptable to the Sikhs. Until August, 1947, this was repeatedly re-iterated. But when later on after independence, Jawahar Lal Nehru was reminded of it, he blandly told the Sikhs that circumstances had now changed, as if pledges are given to be eaten away when convenient. Not only that, we all know that a circular was issued in the Punjab soon after the partition of the country that an eye be kept on the Sikhs. They have since been practically looked upon as if they were aliens.

The same mentality worked when the present Punjab state was presented to us — a torso of a state (*Suba*) without head,

arms, or legs.

There are friends and foes among both Hindus and Muslims but sometimes only one side of the picture is projected and that too after having been partially drawn and prejudicially coloured. These facts, some pleasant and some may be unpleasant, are mentioned only to show in what awkward and difficult situations the Satguru's mission is taken forward. Where there is frontal confrontation, as was the case during the conflict with the Mughal Forces and the Pathan and Durrani invaders, the matter is straight and simple. The steel clanked and blood flowed.

Strong sinews and tough muscles with a courageous heart, perserverance and faith, along with fighting tact and will to sacrifice, ultimately count. But when the attack is cloaked, surreptitious, camouflaged, and from within, a stab in the back, a hit below the belt, sugar-coated poison administered within our hearths and homes, the matter becomes serious and dangerous, and conflict complicated and difficult. You have to guard and protect every nook and cranny. This is what the Sikhs have to face today when the country has attained independence.

Unfortunately, Sikh history has not been written without an ulterior and alien edge on it. Some attempts of late have been made by some men of letters to probe and dig deep into facts and to narrate the happenings without any bias and project a true and factual picture. But writing or rewriting history is a colossal job. It should be tackled effectively on a collective level only rather than individually. It will be an important achievement when this task is fulfilled, because the teachings of the Satguru can best be understood from the anecdotes of history wherein those teachings stand implemented and explained in actual life.