

# THE SIKHS TODAY

KHUSHWANT SINGH



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ORIENT LONGMANS

# THE SIKHS TODAY

*By the same Author*

THE SIKHS

THE MARK OF VISHNU

*(Reprinted as THE VOICE OF GOD & OTHER STORIES)*

MANO-MAJRA *(Reprinted as TRAIN TO PAKISTAN)*

I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE

UMRAO JAN ADA—COURTESAN OF LUCKNOW

*(Translation of novel by RUSWA)*

THE SKELETON

*(Translation of novel by AMRITA PRITAM)*

RANJIT SINGH—MAHARAJAH OF THE PUNJAB

FALL OF THE KINGDOM OF THE PUNJAB

THE SIKHS. Vol. I. (1469—1839)



# THE SIKHS TODAY

*THEIR RELIGION, HISTORY, CULTURE,  
CUSTOMS AND WAY OF LIFE*

KHUSHWANT SINGH



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*To*  
*SHAKUNTALA*  
*and*  
*GOPAL DAS KHOSLA*

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## WHO ARE THE SIKHS?

**T**HE word 'Sikh' is derived from the Sanskrit 'Shishya' which means 'disciple'. Sikhs are the disciples or followers of Guru Nanak. There are about five million Sikhs, most of whom live in the part of the Punjab which is in India. Before the partition of the province in 1947, half of them lived in that portion which is now in Pakistan. Although the Sikhs form less than 2% of the population of India, for many reasons they appear to be more numerous. As a people they are bigger built than almost any other group of Indians. Their distinctive appearance—they invariably wear beards and turbans— attracts attention. They are virile, aggressive and assertive. There are many things which make them so.

*The Sikhs are India's best farmers.* In their home State of the Punjab they make an acre yield four to five times more than an acre yields elsewhere. Lands in other parts of India which had been abandoned as barren, weed-infested, swampy or malarial, have been reclaimed by Sikh refugees ousted from Pakistan and turned into the most productive in the country. By contrast, the lands which they had tilled in what is now Pakistan, and which were considered the very best in India have lost much of their productivity through water-logging and neglect. It is commonly said that if all the farmers of India were as good as the Sikhs, India would have no food problem at all. The Sikh farmer works harder and is more enterprising. He is more willing to adopt modern methods of agriculture than any of the other Indian farmers.

*The Sikhs are India's best soldiers.* For the last 100 years

they have formed a substantial part of the army of the country and have shared the awards for gallantry on the battle-fields of the world evenly with the equally sturdy Gurkhas. The brunt of the invasion of Indian territory in Kashmir by Pathan tribesmen and Pakistani irregulars in October 1947 was borne by Sikh regiments. But for their dogged determination in the face of fierce onslaughts, the story of Kashmir would have been quite different.

*The Sikhs are India's best sportsmen.* More than half of the country's records in field and track events are held by Sikhs. All the five gold medals won by India at the Asian Games were won by members of this community. Sikhs dominate the Indian world of sport right from rustic wrestling and field hockey (in which India still holds the World Championship) to the most sophisticated like golf and polo.

*The Sikhs have shown more enterprise in venturing abroad* than any of their compatriots. Sikh taxi drivers, policemen and petty traders can be found in most countries of Asia and Africa. There are small but thriving colonies of Sikh settlers in Canada, the United States and Great Britain. In a country like India where beggary is rampant, it is rare to see a Sikh stretch out his hand to ask for alms, or to come across a Sikh woman who has taken to the streets. This is remarkable since, due to the partition of the Punjab in 1947, half of them were deprived of practically everything they owned and had to start life all over again.

There are many other fields of activity in which the Sikhs are ahead of other communities. They are good technicians, mechanics, carpenters, artisans and engineers.

They control the transport systems of many of the bigger cities of India. To foreigners, the Sikh taxi driver is the symbol of the race. The percentage of literacy amongst them (particularly amongst the women) is higher than amongst either the Hindus or Muslims. This has produced a large number of writers, artists, scholars, scientists and men who have attained eminence in the professions of law and medicine. We shall endeavour to introduce some of these men and women to the readers through the pages of this book.

There are some distinctive features of the religion of the Sikhs which make its study worthwhile. *Sikhism is the only major religion of India which is purely Indian.* Hinduism came with the Aryans from Central Asia, Islam from Arabia, Christianity from the Middle East and Zoroastrianism from Persia. Buddhism which was born in India has hardly any following in the country of its origin. And the Jains have so merged themselves in the Hindu fold as to become indistinguishable.

*Sikh religion represents Hinduism and Islam in their maturity.* It is a synthesis of these two faiths as they developed in India.

*Sikhism is perhaps the only non-denominational faith in the world.* The Sikh scripture, the Granth Sahib, consists of the writings of not only the Sikh Gurus, but also of Hindu and Muslim saints of all castes and creeds.

All these facts make the study of Sikhs and their religion important.

PART I

*HISTORY AND RELIGION*



## CHAPTER ONE

### BIRTH OF SIKHISM

#### NANAK AND HIS NINE SUCCESSORS

**I**N THE spring of A.D. 1469, the wife of a petty official living in a village in the district of Sheikhpura (now in West Pakistan) gave birth to a son. Since the boy was born in the mother's parents' home (Nanakey) he was named Nanak Chand.

Nanak grew up to be a precocious child. He was indifferent to his studies and instead of reading his school books, he took to studying the Hindu and Muslim religions and having long discourses with holy men. He was the despair of his parents as he would not attend to the family business and squandered whatever money his father give him in feeding the poor and the hungry. When he grew to be a young man a marriage was

arranged for him and for a time he devoted himself to his wife and the two sons she bore him. Then the search for the truth became too overpowering and he abandoned his home to become a wanderer. He fasted, prayed and meditated. He thought of the misery that the centuries of wars between the Muslims and Hindus had brought on the people of the Punjab. His study of the two religions also showed him that there was much in common between Islam and Hinduism. He had heard and read of Muslim divines like Farid and Kabir and Hindu Saints like Ramanand, Tukaram and Namdev who had emphasised the essential unity of the two religious systems. He was convinced that what the country needed was somebody who could bring the two faiths and the two peoples together. He also came to the conclusion that this could not be done by a hermit who cut himself off from the world but one who lived amongst people and sought to change them by precept and example. He started his mission with a simple statement: 'There is no Hindu, there is no Mussulman.' He took as his companions an aged Muslim musician called Mardana and a Hindu peasant called Bala and the three went preaching from one village to another. Nanak composed his sermons in verse which his Muslim colleague set to music, and the two sang them to the accompaniment of the lute. Nanak's teaching fired the imagination of the peasantry of the Punjab and large numbers of followers gathered round him. Within a few years these disciples (Shishyas) became a homogeneous group whose faith was exclusively the teachings of Nanak. The Shishya became the Sikh (Punjabi form of the Sanskrit word). Nanak travelled all over India. He went as far east as



Assam and as far south as Ceylon. Then he went westwards beyond the borders of India to Mecca and Medina in Arabia. Wherever he went, he sang his hymns which told the people that if they wanted to love God they should learn first to love each other. Nanak never made any claims to kinship with God nor did he invest his hymns with the garb of sanctity. He was content to be a teacher. His crusade was against the fanaticism and intolerance, which had become the practices of the Muslims, and against meaningless ritual, discriminations of caste and sex which had become an integral part of Hindu life. It was a crusade without any anger, violence or recrimination. He was a man of gentle ways, possessed of a kindly sense of humour. Two incidents in his life illustrate his method of approach. Once, on the banks of the Ganges he saw Hindus throwing water to the rising sun as an offering to their dead ancestors. Nanak faced the other way and began to throw water in the opposite direction. When questioned, he answered simply: 'I am watering my fields. If you can send water to the dead in heaven, surely I can send it to my village in the Punjab!' On another occasion, he happened to fall asleep with his feet towards Mecca. An outraged priest woke him up rudely and drew his attention to the fact. 'Brother,' replied Nanak calmly, 'if you think I show disrespect by having my feet towards the house of God, then turn them in some other direction where God does not dwell.'

Nanak spent the last years of his life with his family in the village of Kartarpur. Here people flocked to him and heard him sing his hymns and preach of the unity of Islam and Hinduism. When he died, his body became

a subject of dispute. The Muslims wanted to bury him, the Hindus to cremate him. Even today Nanak is regarded as the symbol of harmony between the two major communities. A popular couplet describes him as:

Guru Nanak Shah Fakeer

Hindu Ka Guru, Mussulman Ka Peer

When Nanak died in A.D. 1539, he had a following of people dissenting both from Hinduism and Islam. It was left to his nine successors to mould that following into a distinct community with its own language and literature, its own religious beliefs and institutions, and its own traditions and conventions.

Although Nanak had two sons, he chose a faithful disciple named by him as Angad to succeed him. Angad (1504-52) adapted the script used by moneylenders of Northern India to compile the writings of his master and gave it the name Gurmukhi—the language of the Guru. He also set up centres from where the teachings of the founder could be propagated and organised the Sikhs into a close-knit community. On his death, Angad again chose one of his disciples, the aged Amar Das (1479-1574) to be the 3rd Guru. Amar Das appointed his son-in-law, Ram Das, to be the 4th Guru. Ram Das (1534-1581) laid the foundations of the temple at Amritsar and his son Arjun, the 5th Guru, invested it with the special sanctity it has for the Sikhs today. Arjun (1563-1606) took many steps to make the Sikhs a community distinct from the Hindus and the Muslims. He compiled the Granth Sahib by collecting the writings of the preceding Gurus and those of Hindu and Muslim saints, adding to them his own. The Granth Sahib

became the sacred scripture of the Sikhs in preference to the holy books of the Hindus or the Muslims. In addition to the temple at Amritsar, Arjun built other big ones at Taran Taran and Kartarpur. Guru Arjun's greatest contribution to the Sikh faith was to give his life for it. Emperor Jehangir was perturbed by the Guru's growing influence amongst the people. Under royal instruction the Governor of Lahore had him arrested on a frivolous charge and subjected to severe torture which resulted in the Guru's death. Arjun became the first of a long line of Sikh martyrs.

One of Arjun's compositions shows how within a hundred years of the death of Nanak, the Sikhs had freed themselves from their connections with the two parent communities.

I do not keep the Hindu fast, nor the Muslim Ramadan.

I serve Him alone who is my refuge.

I serve the one Master, who is also Allah.

I have broken with the Hindu and the Muslim,

I will not worship with the Hindu, nor like the Muslim go to Mecca.

I shall serve Him and no other.

I will not pray to idols nor say the Muslim prayer.

I shall put my heart at the feet of the one Supreme Being,

For we are neither Hindus nor Mussulmans.

After the execution of Arjun the Sikhs began to change from a pacifist to a militant people. Arjun's son, Hargobind, who succeeded him as the 6th Guru, organised his following into an army. The final transformation of the Sikhs into a fighting sect came with the last of the ten Gurus, Gobind Singh. In 1675 young Gobind's father, the 9th Guru Tegh Bahadur, was summoned by

the Mughal Emperor to Delhi and ordered to accept conversion to Islam. The legend goes that he offered to show the Emperor a miracle whereby no sword would be able to sever his neck. He wrote some words on a slip of paper and tied it around his neck with a piece of string. When the executioner cut off his head, the message on the paper was read: 'Sis diya pur sirr na diya'—'I gave my head but not my secret'. (The line is however from a verse by Guru Gobind.)

Gobind succeeded to the guruship at the tender age of nine. He spent his boyhood studying Persian and Sanskrit and in learning the art of war. He described his mission in the following words: 'To uphold right in every place and destroy sin and evil; that right may triumph, the good may live and tyranny be uprooted from the land.' Gobind realised that to raise a fighting force from the peaceful followers of Nanak, he had not only to teach them the use of arms but also to convince them of the morality of the use of force. 'When all other means have failed, it is righteous to draw the sword,' he said. 'Light your understanding as a lamp and sweep away the filth of timidity.' With this mission in mind he set about earnestly to 'teach the sparrow how to hunt the hawk and one man have courage to fight a legion.'

On the 1st of Baisakh, A.D. 1699 the young Guru assembled his Sikhs at Anandpur (not far from the present site of the Bhakra Dam). He baptised five of them known as *Punj Piyaras* or the Five Beloved as members of a fighting fraternity which he named the *Khalsa* or the pure. He made the five, who came from different Hindu castes, drink *amrit* (sugared water) out of the same bowl and gave them new names with the suffix 'Singh' (lion).

He made them take an oath to observe the five Ks, namely, to wear the hair and beard unshorn (*kesh*); to carry a comb (*kangha*) in the hair; to wear a pair of shorts (*kuchha*); to wear a steel bangle (*kara*) on the right wrist; and always to carry a sabre (*kirpan*) on their person. The Khalsa were also enjoined to observe four rules of conduct: not to cut any hair on their body—(this was a repetition of an earlier oath); not to eat meat slaughtered in the Muslim fashion when an animal was bled to death, but only *jhatka* meat of an animal killed outright with one blow; not to smoke or eat tobacco or consume alcoholic beverage; and to refrain from carnal knowledge of Muslim women—so that while fighting the Mughal armies Sikhs would respect the person of their enemy's womenfolk. After baptising the five, Gobind was in his turn baptised by them. At the end of the ceremony they hailed each other with the new greeting—'Wah Guru ji ka Khalsa—Wah Guru ji ki Fateh'—'The Khalsa are the chosen of God—Victory be to God'.

Many explanations have been given of the ceremony of baptism. Making people of different castes drink *amrit* out of a common bowl was to break through the orthodox Hindu practice of regarding food and drink touched by a person of lower caste as polluted. The giving of the name 'Singh' which was current among Hindu martial classes to all men was a step in the same direction. A person's caste could be found out from his surname. With the standard surname the Singhs became one family. Sikh women were similarly given the common suffix 'Kaur' (princess).

The distinctive outward features of the Khalsa religion are the unshorn hair and the beard. Wearing the hair

and beard has been a tradition among Indian ascetics. By making this obligatory, Guru Gobind Singh intended to emphasise the ideal of ascetic saintliness and to raise an army of soldier-saints. It is also likely that, by making his followers easily recognisable by virtue of their turbans and beards, the Guru wanted to raise a body of men who would not be able to deny their faith when in danger but whose external appearance would invite persecution and in turn breed courage to resist it. The other symbols are largely complementary and an essential part of a soldier's equipment. The *kangha* is to keep the hair tidy; the *kuchha* was a fighting man's uniform; the *kirpan* his weapon; the *kara* a bracelet of steel which was both a symbol of humility as well as a charm worn before going to battle—a practice current amongst Hindus. The *kara* was also worn by members of ascetic orders of Hindus to signify that they were bondsmen of their Guru.

Guru Gobind Singh gave final form to the Sikh faith. He declared the institution of guruship at an end. He had the hymns of his father incorporated in the Granth Sahib and declared that after him the Sikhs were to look upon the sacred book as their guide as the symbolic representative of all the ten Gurus. Although he was a prolific writer himself, he did not insert any of his compositions in it. His writings are collectively known as the Dasam Granth—the book of the 10th Guru—and though read with reverence by all Sikhs, are not accorded the same status as the Granth Sahib. Thus the creed of the Sikhs remained the pacifist one of Nanak and the Gurus whose writings appear in the holy book, whereas the practice of the Khalsa became the martial traditions of Guru Gobind, with their justification in the stirring

message of the many lines of the Dasam Granth. Those who did not accept the changes brought about by Guru Gobond Singh began thereafter to be described as *Sahaj*



*Dhari*—those who take time to accept the new faith or those who 'take it easy'.

Guru Gobind Singh had started making preparations

for his military career some time before the first ceremony of baptism at Anandpur in 1699. He built a chain of forts and garrisoned them with Pathan mercenaries and his own trainees. He also fought many battles with the neighbouring hill rajahs. These activities, particularly the formation of the militia at Anandpur, attracted the attention of the Muslim rulers. In 1701 the governors of Sirhind and Lahore besieged the fort of Anandpur. The fort fell after three years of bitter fighting. The Guru escaped but his mother and two of his younger sons were captured. The boys aged 9 and 10 were executed by the orders of the governor of Sirhind. The Guru's mother died of grief. At Chamkaur the Guru was once more surrounded by the Mughal armies. His two remaining sons and many of his most devoted followers fell defending him. ('What does it matter if four be dead, a thousand others live to fight', wrote Gobind). The Guru disguised himself as a Muslim fakeer and slipped through the enemy cordon. The Mughals were hot in pursuit once more. At Muktsar near Ferozepur he suddenly turned on his pursuers, smashed their advance forces and once again continued his flight. He passed within bowshot of Delhi and went south to the Deccan to join the Mughal Emperor who had invited him for a personal meeting.

Guru Gobind Singh's military career was not marked with any spectacular victories. Apart from winning a few minor skirmishes in which he defeated the hill chieftains, it was a long series of desperate battles fought against heavy odds. What he succeeded in doing was to 'teach the sparrow to hunt the hawk and one man fight a legion.' The men who followed him were humble farmers

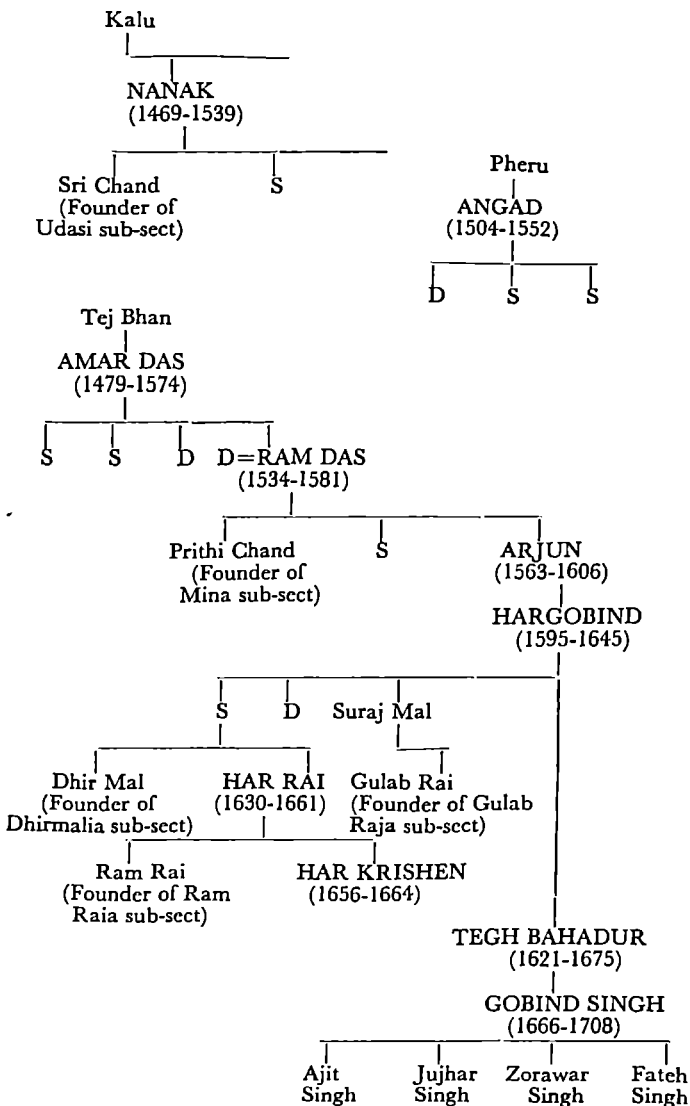


and timid tradesmen who before this venture were known to be stricken with terror at the very sight of Afghan and Pathan tribesmen. Neither defeat nor adversity shook the Guru's resolve to carry through with his crusade to destroy the oppression of the Mughal. His faith in his ultimate victory remained unshaken. Once Emperor Aurangzeb, believing that, having lost his sons and having been driven out of the Punjab, the Guru would be willing to make terms, summoned him to Delhi. The Guru answered the summons by a long composition in Persian called the Zafarnama—the epistle of victory. He listed many of the misdeeds of the Mughals and added a note of defiance, 'What use is it to put out a few sparks and raise a mighty flame instead?'

Guru Gobind's last days were spent in the Deccan with the Emperor, Bahadur Shah, who had succeeded Aurangzeb on the throne of Delhi and was more friendly to him. While halting at a small town called Nander, the Guru was murdered by one of his own Muslim retainers.

Guru Gobind Singh did not leave his followers a kingdom; but he laid the foundations of the Sikh military might by setting up a tradition of reckless valour which became a distinguishing feature of Sikh soldiery. They came to believe in the triumph of their cause as an article of faith, and like their Guru asked for no nobler end than death on the battlefield.

With clasped hands this boon I crave  
When time comes to end my life  
Let me fall in mighty strife.



## RELIGION OF THE SIKHS

A SIKH is one who believes in the teachings of the ten Gurus and the Granth Sahib. There are some small sub-sects of the Sikhs who either do not believe in all the ten Gurus, e.g. Udasis, Minas and Ram Raiyas mentioned in the family tree of the Gurus, or believe that the line of succession continued after Gobind Singh and recognise a living Guru, e.g. Nirankaris and Namdharis. But the vast majority of the Sikhs owe allegiance only to the ten Gurus and the Granth Sahib and disapprove of the aforementioned sub-sects. The only two divisions of the Sikhs are the orthodox hair-and-beard-growing *Khalsa* and the clean shaven *Sahaj Dhari*.

We shall deal with some of the cardinal principles of Sikh religion as enunciated by the Gurus and the Granth Sahib.

### 1. *Conception of God*

The Sikhs believe that there is only one God and that He is not a substantial something or a superhuman being but the abstract principle of truth. The uncompromising monotheism of the Sikh faith is affirmed in the opening lines of the morning prayer 'Jupji', which state the basic belief of the faith and are the most oft-répeated words of prayer of the Sikhs.

There is one God  
He is the supreme truth.  
He, the creator,

Is without fear and without hate,  
 He, the omnipresent,  
 Pervades the universe.  
 He is not born,  
 Nor does He die to be born again.

Before Time itself  
 There was truth.  
 When time began to run its course  
 He was the truth.  
 Even now, He is the truth.  
 Evermore shall truth prevail.

(NANAK)

The firm belief in the unity of God is repeated in the writings of the other Gurus in the Granth Sahib. The Sikhs use both Hindu and Muslim names for God, e.g. Rama and Rabb, but the name of God most current amongst the Sikhs is Wah Guru, the Great Guru or literally 'Wondrous Teacher'.

The Gurus insisted that God had no form or substance and were strongly opposed to idol worship.

They who worship strange gods  
 Cursed shall be their lives, cursed their habitations.  
 Poison shall be their food—each morsel,  
 Poisoned too shall be their garments.  
 In life for them is misery,  
 In life hereafter, hell.

(AMAR DAS, 3RD GURU)

And Guru Gobind:

Some worship stones and on their heads they bear them.  
 Some the phallus—strung in necklaces wear its emblem.

Some behold their god in the south, some to the west bow  
their head.

Some worship images, others are busy praying to the dead.  
The world is thus bound in false ritual  
And God's secret is still unread.

There are no rivers, mountains or places held sacred by the Sikh faith. 'To worship an image, to make a pilgrimage to a shrine, to remain in a desert, and yet have the heart impure is all in vain,' said Nanak. Although no places are sanctified by the Sikh faith, Sikhs do go on pilgrimage to temples associated with Gurus and large gatherings take place on their birthdays or death anniversaries.

Despite the fact that God has no form nor substance and is beyond human comprehension, Sikhism believes that human beings can reach Him by observing His commandments and by righteous living. This is made clear by Guru Nanak in the first verse of his morning prayer.

Not by thought alone  
Can He be known,  
Tho' one think a hundred thousand times.  
Not in solemn silence,  
Nor in deep meditation.  
Though fasting yields an abundance of virtue,  
It cannot appease the hunger for truth.  
No! By none of these  
Nor by a hundred thousand other devices  
Can God be reached.  
How then shall truth be known?  
How the veil of false illusion torn?  
O Nanak: thus runneth the writ divine.  
The righteous path let it be thine.

There is no fatalism nor any passive acceptance of a predestined future in the Sikh religion. 'With your own hands carve out your destiny,' said Nanak. Belief in action as a way of living and as a means of salvation is a distinctive feature of the Sikhs and their faith. Nanak revelling in rural similes, wrote:

As a team of oxen are we driven  
 By the ploughman, our teacher.  
 By the furrows made are thus writ  
 Our actions—on the earth, our paper.  
 The sweat of labour is as beads  
 Falling by the ploughman as seeds sown.  
 We reap according to our measure  
 Some for ourselves to keep, some to others give.  
 O Nanak, this is the way to truly live.

Sikhism accepts the Hindu theory of Karma and the transmigration of the soul from one form of life to another until its ultimate merger with God. The only distinction is one of emphasis on the role of human conduct in escaping from the vicious cycle of life, death and rebirth. The Sikhs believe that the highest form of life is the human and that the time to break the cycles of transmigrations is when one is born a human being. 'Thou hast been granted the human form,' said Guru Arjun, 'now is the time to meet God!' It is the actions performed during one's human incarnation which determine whether one is condemned to go through the 8,400,000 forms of life (a conventional figure) or attain salvation by the fusion of one's light with the light of God.

He who made the night and day,  
 The days of the week and the seasons,

He who made the breeze blow, the waters run,  
 The fires and the lower regions,  
 Made the earth—the temple of law.

He who made creatures of diverse kinds  
 With a multitude of names,  
 Made this law—

By thought and deed be judged forsooth  
 For God is true and dispenses truth.

There the elect His court adorn,

And God Himself their actions honours.

There are sorted deeds that were done and bore fruit  
 From those that to action could never ripen.

This, O Nanak, shall hereafter happen.

(NĀNAK)

Prayer is an integral part of righteous conduct and there is great emphasis in Sikh religion on *Nam Japana*—repeating the Name. Religious Sikhs spend a lot of time reciting the hymns of the Granth Sahib. They also listen regularly to *kirtan* (singing of hymns) by professional singers at gurdwaras morning and evening. At other times they repeat the name of God to the beads or rosary. The most popular chant is to go on repeating 'Satnam, Wah Guru'—'The True Name, the Wondrous Guru'. The repetition of the name of the Guru purifies the mind of impious thoughts and cleanses the soul of sin.

As hands or feet besmirched with slime,  
 Water washes white;  
 As garments dark with grime,  
 Rinsed with soap are made light;  
 So when sin soils the soul  
 Prayer alone shall make it whole.

Words do not the saint or sinner make.  
 Action alone is written in the book of fate,  
 What we sow that alone we take;  
 O Nanak, be saved or for ever transmigrate.  
 (NANAK)

## 2. *The Status of the Guru*

Sikhs believe in the necessity of a Guru to show the right path to the disciples. 'On meeting the Guru, doubt is dispelled and wanderings of the mind restrained,' said Nanak. The ten Gurus are now represented by the Granth Sahib. It is to this sacred book that Sikhs must turn for guidance; it is their only Guru. Nevertheless the practice of seeking advice from and spiritual solace in the company of holy men is very common.

The Sikhs do not believe that their Gurus were the incarnations of God. The Gurus themselves said that they were human and were not to be worshipped. 'I came in the course of nature and according to God's order I will depart,' said Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh, who initiated much of the ritual, was aware of the danger of his followers imposing divinity on him. He explained his mission in the following words:

For though my thoughts were lost in prayer  
 At the feet of Almighty God,  
 I was ordained to establish a sect and lay down its  
 rules.

But whosoever regards me as Lord  
 Shall be damned and destroyed. ●  
 I am—and of this let there be no doubt—  
 I am but the slave of God as other men are,  
 A beholder of the wonders of creation.



Guru Gobind Singh was equally emphatic in refuting the claims to divinity made by others:

God has no friends nor enemies.  
 He heeds no hallelujahs nor cares about curses.  
 Being the first and timeless  
 How could He manifest Himself though those  
 Who are born and die?

Not only do the Sikhs recognise no living person as Guru, they do not invest the priestly profession with any particular social or religious status. There are no religious heads of the community and all adults, male or female, are competent to perform all religious ceremonial. A class of professional readers of the Granth (hence called *Granthis*) and singers (*ragis*) exists in bigger towns and cities where the large size of the congregations make their services necessary.

### 3. *The Holy Scripture—The Granth Sahib*

The Granth Sahib, compiled by the fifth Guru, Arjun, is also called the *Adi* (first) Granth, to distinguish it from the works of Guru Gobind Singh, known as the *Dasam* Granth. The Granth Sahib is a unique religious and historical document. It is perhaps the only scripture in the world which incorporates and sanctifies the writings of people who did not subscribe to the faith. In that sense it is the only non-denominational scripture that exists. It has preserved without embellishment or misconstruction the original writings of religious men and poets and saved them from the vagaries of human memory.

The Granth is an enormous book with over 6000 verses. The language is largely that used by teachers of religion

all over India at that time. This *Santbhasha*, as it is called, is strongly flavoured with Punjabi of the 15th and 16th centuries. The hymns are not arranged in any logical order or under topics but according to ragas or measures of classical Indian music as they are all meant to be sung.

The Granth Sahib is the only object of Sikh worship. In all temples and most well-to-do homes the Granth is read every day. On special occasions it is read non-stop from cover to cover by relays of readers. This takes two days and nights and is known as the *Akhand Path*. A seven day reading is known as the *Saptah Path* and is usually undertaken in private homes when assistance from outsiders is not available.

Despite the sanctity given to the Granth, it is not treated like an idol in a Hindu Temple or the holy figures in a Catholic church. It is the source and not the object of prayer. The Sikhs revere it because it contains the writings of their Gurus and other saints they hold in esteem. To them it is more a book of divine wisdom than the word of God.

#### 4. *Society or the Sangat*

Society is given special status by the Sikh faith and tradition. The Gurus strongly condemned the Hindu caste system which divided society into different sections and excluded untouchables from its benefits. To the Sikh, society represented by the congregation (*sangat*) is the law-giver. A resolution passed by the elected representatives of the community becomes a *gurumata*—an order of the Guru.

The Granth Sahib abounds with verses condemning the caste system. Said Nanak:

There are ignoble amongst the noblest  
 And pure amongst the despised.  
 The former shalt thou avoid,  
 And be the dust under the foot of the other.

The second Guru, Angad, said:

The Hindus say there are four castes  
 But they are all of one seed.  
 'Tis like clay of which pots are made  
 In diverse shapes and forms—yet the clay is the same.  
 So are the bodies of men made of five elements.  
 How can one amongst them be high and another low?

Most of the Gurus befriended Muslims (who were considered beyond the pale) and had associates from all castes of Hindus. The last Guru, Gobind, made strong efforts to wipe out caste distinctions amongst his followers. He said he would mix the four castes just as vendors of betel-leaves mix its four constituents and make them one.

Besides disapproving of the segregation imposed by the caste system, the Gurus made no compromise with practices springing from this source. The sanctity of the kitchen and food was an important aspect of caste practices and went under the garb of hygiene. In an oft quoted and beautiful passage, Nanak said:

Once we say: 'This is pure, this unclean',  
 See that in all things there is life unseen.  
 There are worms in wood and cowdung cakes,  
 There is life in the corn ground into bread,  
 There is life in the water which makes it green,  
 How then be clean when impurity is over the kitchen  
 spread?  
 Impurity of the heart is greed,

Of tongue, untruth.

Impurity of the eyes is coveting

Another's wealth, his wife, her comeliness.

Impurity of the ears is listening to calumny.

Sikhism's crusade against the caste system has only been partially successful. Although all Sikhs have access to all gurdwaras (where they sit together, and on festivals eat together), in the villages, the Sikh Harijan castes (Mazhbis) still suffer from discrimination. Amongst the 'upper' castes, there is little or no distinction except when it comes to arranging marriages. The 'caste system' current today divides the Sikhs into three: agriculturists (Jats), non-agriculturists and Harijans. This division though based on birth is not as vicious as the caste system.

The Hindu practice of renouncing society to go and dwell in the wilderness (*vanaprastha*) did not find merit in the eyes of the Gurus. They also did not approve of asceticism, subjecting the body to penance or remaining celibate. All the Gurus led normal family lives and discharged the obligations of husbands and fathers. For them the concept of righteous living had no meaning except in the context of living in a community. Their ideal was to achieve saintliness while remaining in society—*Raj me Jog*—to be in the world but not worldly.

The lotus in the water is not wet

Nor the water-fowl in the stream.

If man would live, but by the world untouched,

Meditate and repeat the name of the Lord Supreme.

(NANAK)

Guru Gobind Singh was more forthright in denouncing asceticism. To him a yogi doing penance by standing on

one leg was like the crane which kept one eye shut as if in prayer and the other on the lookout for frogs. He also criticised the making of food fads, such as vegetarianism, a part of religion. 'Practise asceticism in this way,' he said:

Let thine own house be the forest,  
Thy heart the anchorite.

Eat little, sleep little.  
Learn to love, be merciful and forbear.  
Be mild, be patient.  
Have no lust, nor wrath,  
Greed nor obstinacy.

#### 5. *Pacifism of Nanak and Militarism of Gobind Singh*

The faith of Guru Nanak and the first five Gurus was a strictly pacifist one. Since their writings form the bulk of the Sikh scriptures, it can be categorically stated that the religion of the Sikh is one of peace and humility. With the execution of the 5th and the 9th Gurus, and the savage persecutions that followed, Sikh practice began to change from that of turning the other cheek to that of returning blow for blow. Guru Gobind Singh gave this change its philosophical justification. 'When all other means have failed,' he declared, 'it is righteous to draw the sword.'

#### 6. *Sikhs and their Relation to the Hindus*

The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, was a Hindu of the Bedi sub-caste of Kshatriyas. All his successors were likewise of Kshatriya sub-castes. The vast majority of the followers of the Gurus also came from the Hindu

community. Most Hindu families of north-western Punjab not only revered the Sikh Gurus and read the Granth Sahib but also brought up one or more of their sons as Sikhs and gave their daughters in marriage to Sikh men. (This practice continued till recent times). Consequently, even after the Sikhs became a separate community, their relationship with Hinduism remained as close as that of parents to their offspring. And the Sikhs never really freed themselves from the dominance of Hindu customs and practices—including some which were in direct contravention of the teachings of the Gurus. The most notable amongst them was the re-emergence of the caste system amongst the Sikhs. Although there is a basic difference between the Sikh caste system and the Hindu, both in its content and its impact, it stemmed from the same mental attitude. Another instance was the Sikh attitude to the sanctity of the cow. Veneration of the cow formed no part of the teaching of the Gurus and, apart from a few stray lines of Guru Gobind Singh's regretting the slaughter of kine, had no scriptural backing whatsoever. Nevertheless, the Sikhs not only strictly abstained from eating beef, they became zealous protectors of the cow. Killing of cows was strictly forbidden during Sikh rule, and afterwards, one Sikh sub-sect, the Namdharis, made it the chief point of their agitation against the British.

Within a few years of the passing of Guru Gobind Singh, Hindu ceremonies and ritual came back into the Sikh gurdwaras. Some of the priests at the gurdwaras belonged to the Udasi sub-sect which was more Hindu than Sikh. Many Sikhs began to wear caste marks and followed Hindu customs at births, weddings and funerals.

On birth, horoscopes were cast by pundits. Marriages were arranged after consulting the constellations and frequently performed to the chanting of Vedic hymns and round sacrificial fires. The ashes of the dead were thrown in rivers considered holy by the Hindus. Brahmins were fed and offerings made to dead ancestors. Even the practice of *suttee* came back. On the death of Ranjit Singh the Sikh ruler, some of his widows were cremated with him.

This very close affinity with Hinduism explains many of the present complexities and contradictions of the Sikh community. The dividing line between the Hindus and Sikhs is so thin that features which emphasise the difference between them are strenuously advocated by those who wish to maintain the separate identity of the community. A Sikh's long hair and unshorn beard are in effect the only things which mark him out as different from the Hindu. His name, family associations, deportment, religious practices—in fact nothing else, serves the same purpose. Therein lies the secret of the concern of orthodox elements over the increasing practice amongst certain sections to discard these external symbols of their faith. The orthodox are willing to overlook defections of the spirit but not of the form. There is nothing like the same insistence on the carrying of the other 'Ks' as there is on the unshorn hair. It leads to incongruities like the absolute insistence on abstinence from tobacco (one rarely finds Sikhs smoking in public) with but little censure on the consumption of alcohol. The only explanation is that non-smoking differentiates the Sikhs from the Hindus more than non-drinking.

The tension that exists between Sikhs and Hindus is

created by the threat of the absorption of Sikhs in the Hindu fold. Sikh truculence over the denial of their rights, their extreme touchiness over insults to their creed, the fervent championship of the Punjabi language and, now, the demand for a Sikh State within the Indian Union (the Punjabi-speaking province amounts to the same thing: it is a communal demand with a linguistic sugar-coating) are explained by this phenomenon. It also explains the aggressiveness of the Punjabi Hindus towards the Sikh and their wholly irrational attitude in refusing to accept Punjabi as their language despite the fact that it is the one and only language that most of them speak.

### *7. Sikhs and Muslims*

Sikhs believe in one God and in the casteless brotherhood of man. They condemn worship of idols and images and instead pay reverence to a holy book. These are only some of the things which they have in common with Muslims. Sikh religion owes much to Islam and as a system of belief is much closer to it than to Hinduism from which it was born. Although three centuries of persecution and fighting have made the two communities hostile to each other, the Sikh and Muslim people are remarkably alike in character and temperament. Now that religious factionalism has lost its purpose in secular India, the Sikhs have a unique opportunity of fulfilling the mission of the founder of their faith and bringing the two parent communities together.



## RISE TO POWER

## BANDA SINGH BAHADUR

**W**HILE Guru Gobind Singh was in the Deccan, he met a Hindu hermit called Lachman Das who became his follower and was renamed Banda Singh Bahadur. Although Gobind had declared the line of Gurus at an end, he asked Banda to assume the leadership of the Sikhs. Soon after the Guru's death, Banda left the Deccan and came north to the Punjab. He issued a manifesto to the Sikhs calling them to arms. The Sikhs had been thirsting for revenge for the assassination of their Guru and the murder of his infant children. They flocked to Banda's banner and under his leadership overran the whole of south-eastern Punjab. In the summer of 1710 they captured Sirhind, razed the town to the ground and put its entire population along with its governor (who had ordered the execution of the Guru's sons) to the sword. From there they marched northwards to Ludhiana, Jullundur, Hoshiarpur and Pathankot; then south-eastwards to Karnal and across the river Jumna to Saharanpur. Everywhere it was the same story. Mughal soldiery was routed; Mughal officials massacred; Mughal towns destroyed. Within a couple of years of his arrival, Banda and his Sikhs became masters of most of the Punjab and struck coins in the names of their Gurus.

The Muslims of northern India were thoroughly alarmed at Banda's exploits and called for a holy war to

exterminate the Sikhs. Emperor Bahadur Shah abandoned his battles against the Rajputs and the Marathas and returned to his capital. He issued a decree outlawing the entire Sikh community. (All non-Muslims employed in the Imperial service were ordered to shave their beards). Mughal armies moved into the Punjab from either side. Banda discreetly retired to the hills. But as soon as Bahadur Shah and his governor returned to their other preoccupations, he was back on the scene. Once more the Sikhs flocked to his flag and, once more, they reoccupied most of southern Punjab.

Then the hand of fate turned against Banda. Bahadur Shah was succeeded by Farukhasiyar who ordered the governors of Lahore and Jammu to proceed against him. Banda was deserted by a large section of the Sikhs who suspected, not without reason, that he was trying to invest himself as a Guru. He had given up the simple, celibate asceticism of his earlier days. He had married a couple of wives and had begun to live in regal splendour. The Mughals surrounded Banda's forces and starved him into surrendering. He, his family and several hundreds of his soldiers were led in chains to Delhi. There they were subjected to brutal torture and then publicly beheaded in batches. On 9th June, 1716, came the turn of Banda. His infant son was placed in his lap for him to kill. Then he himself was tortured and beheaded. Throughout the sadistic orgy, he did not wince nor ask for mercy.

With the disappearance of Banda, it seemed that the Sikhs had been crushed for ever. That was not so. Within a few years they were back on the scene under the leadership of men as daring as him.

· *The Fraternity of the Misl*

For some years after the death of Banda the fortunes of the Sikhs remained at a low ebb. The Muslim governors of the Punjab were ruthless men who carried their determination to destroy the Sikhs to the extent of ordering the immediate execution of anyone who wore his hair and beard unshorn. A contemporary Persian chronicler records that the extensive plain of the Punjab was filled with blood as if it had been a dish. The temple at Amritsar was blown up many times and thousands of men, women and children brutally massacred. The Sikhs fled the plains and bided their time in the Himalayan foothills and the inhospitable regions of Bikaner.

At last the wheel of fortune turned in favour of the Sikhs. The authority of the Mughal government was weakened by the revolt of the Jat tribes all round Delhi and by the invasion of the Marathas from the south. This was followed by the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1738 which crippled the Delhi government and reduced it to a mere name. Then came a series of incursions by Ahmed Shah Abdali between 1748 and 1768. Nadir Shah and Abdali not only dealt a death blow to the Mughals, but also destroyed the power of the Jats and Marathas. And what was perhaps more important for the Sikhs, they reduced the Muslim governors of the Punjab to utter impotence. The Sikhs kept out of the way of the invaders and were content to harass their retreating forces or relieve them of the loot and free the Hindu captives they were carrying back with them. Nadir Shah was impressed by their fighting qualities. He saw Sikh horsemen emerge from the jungle, discharge their muskets and

vanish before his troops could even load their guns. He asked the governor of the Punjab about them. 'Their homes are their saddles,' replied the governor. 'They are fakeers who visit their Guru's tank twice a year, bathe in it, and disappear.' Nadir Shah warned him. 'Take care, the day is not distant when these rebels will take possession of your country.'

Nadir Shah was not wrong. Sikh assaults on Abdali's troops became more and more daring. Three times they occupied the city of Lahore while Abdali was busy elsewhere. Abdali turned on them in fury. On 5th February 1762 he surprised Sikh forces near Malerkotla and killed over 20,000. The defeat is still remembered bitterly as the *Vadda Ghallughara* or the great massacre. But even this did not destroy Sikh power. A few months after the *Vadda Ghallughara* they defeated the Afghans near Amritsar and once more took over the whole of southern Punjab. Two years later Abdali descended on them again. This time the Sikhs faced him in open combat near their sacred city and forced him to retire. On his last invasion of India in 1768, they harried his troops right up to Peshawar and occupied northern Punjab as well. Fighting the Sikhs was like slashing a sword through water.

One of the reasons for the rapid growth of Sikh power was the emergence of a band of remarkable leaders who built a unique organisation. The most outstanding of these men were Nawab Kapur Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Kapur Singh realised that the nature of operations against the Mughals and the invaders from the north-west required the break up of the Sikh army into several independent commands, with their own spheres of

operations. Hence were born the twelve *misl*s or militias. Their strength varied from 20,000 horsemen of the most powerful, the Bhangis, to a few hundred of the smaller ones. In the beginning the *misl*s were really a military brotherhood of a most democratic type. Every soldier had a voice in the deliberations and shared the booty equally with the officers. Twice a year, on the Baisakhi festival in spring and at Diwali in autumn, there was a general assembly at Amritsar where past successes and failures were discussed and future plans made. The Sikhs not only engaged the Mughals and Afghans in fighting, they also began to consolidate their hold on the outlying districts by building a chain of forts and levying revenue from towns and villages they took under their protection. After the death of Nawab Kapur Singh, the leadership of the *misl*s passed to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Jassa Singh felt strong enough to take Lahore and make it his capital. At that time the power of the Sikhs spread from the banks of the Indus in the west to the Ganges in the east, and from the Himalayas in the north to the desert wastes of Sind in the south. It was with understandable pride that coins were struck in the name of the *misl* confederacy. The inscription on them read:

By the Grace of God and the Sword to victory  
Thus was ordained by Nanak and Guru Gobind.

The *misl*s did not retain their democratic character for very long. As soon as the Sikhs dispossessed the Mughals and became landowners themselves, leadership became hereditary. It was at this time that the houses of what became subsequently the ruling Sikh families of the Punjab—Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot

and Kalsia—were founded. And as soon as they were possessed of lands and property they began to fight among themselves. It was left to Ranjit Singh to abolish the *misl* system by absorbing them and forging a powerful and united Sikh Kingdom.

## THE KINGDOM OF RANJIT SINGH

RANJIT SINGH lost his father when he was only ten years old. The burden of administering the territories held by his father and those he acquired by marriage was undertaken by his mother-in-law, Sada Kaur, who was a very astute and able woman. For the first few years Ranjit Singh let her run his affairs and led a life full of princely pleasures. At the age of seventeen a sudden change came over him. He took over the reins of administration from his mother-in-law and set out to build a kingdom for himself.

This was no easy task. There was fierce rivalry amongst some *misl*s and others were fast breaking up. From all sides of the Punjab, people were eagerly watching the disintegrating power of the *misl* confederacy and waiting to take it over. In the north and the north-east there were the Dogras and the Gurkhas; in the east were the British and the Marathas; on the western flank there were the Afghans. Ranjit Singh realised that the only chance of survival was to band the *misl*s in one and then fight the invaders from wherever they came. He abandoned the narrow *misl* mentality and took upon himself to speak for all the Sikhs, the *Sarbat Khalsa*. He left the small town of Gujranwala which had been the seat of his family and took Lahore and Amritsar from the chiefs of the rival *misl*s. Then he ousted the Pathans from the city of Kasur. Thus within a couple of years he became the ruler of the entire tract from the Indus to the Sutlej.

He was now strong enough to face the challenge from the outsiders.

He first turned to the hillmen from the north. The Rajputs had occupied Hoshiarpur and the Gurkhas were advancing along the Himalayas and had occupied mountain territories of the Punjab. The Rajputs and Gurkhas clashed and both appealed to Ranjit Singh for help. Ranjit Singh went to the assistance of the Rajputs by taking their territories under his protection. The Gurkhas invited the British to join them in invading Ranjit Singh's kingdom. The British had their own problems with the Gurkhas and asked Ranjit Singh to join them against the Gurkhas. Ranjit Singh kept aloof and encouraged a conflict between the Gurkhas and the British. The Gurkhas were defeated and the northern frontiers of the Punjab became safe.

Ranjit Singh's contact with the Marathas was brief and mainly connected with their troubles with the British. Scindia's armies led by his French generals invaded southern Punjab. Fortunately for Ranjit Singh they became involved with the English and were liquidated. The same happened to Holkar, who arrived in Amritsar with the battered remains of his army and asked Ranjit Singh for help. Under pressure from the English, the Sikh ruler expelled Holkar from the Punjab. He knew that on his northern and eastern frontiers the only power he had to reckon with were the English.

### *Ranjit Singh and the English*

Long before they had come face to face with Ranjit Singh, the English had cast covetous glances at his kingdom. As early as 1784, Warren Hastings had recorded



in a note the great power of the Sikhs 'extending from Attock to the walls of Delhi' and the danger to the British of a possible alliance between the Sikhs and the Marathas. He had advised his government to take 'reasonable means of opposition. . . . not to permit the people to grow into maturity without interruption.' The plan, Warren Hastings proposed, was to divide the Sikhs of the north and western Punjab (Majha) from those south and east of the Sutlej (Malwa).

The Sikhs had looked upon the unification of the territories occupied by different Sikh chieftains as the logical consequence of the movement started by Guru Gobind Singh. Sikh rulers of the lands south of the Sutlej, Patiala, Nabha and Jind had accepted this position. Ranjit Singh had visited these territories and settled disputes between them and they had voluntarily paid tribute to their sovereign. At one time the British had themselves refused to receive deputations from, or to give protection to these states against Ranjit Singh and thus clearly recognised his suzerainty over all Sikh territories. Suddenly British policy changed and British guns rolled northwards to back it up. Charles Metcalfe announced to Ranjit Singh that British hegemony extended right up to the Sutlej. Ranjit Singh ignored him and crossed the Sutlej again to prove his contention. He visited Faridkot, Ambala, Thanesar and Patiala and was welcomed by the Sikh chiefs. Metcalfe sent him a note protesting against the act of 'hostility'. The chiefs concerned were also told that they had no choice about being 'protected'. British troops moved up to Patiala and Ludhiana, and their commander issued a proclamation that he was there to defend British possessions.

Ranjit Singh had either to go to war or submit. For some time he toyed with the idea of going to war. He moved his troops to the Sutlej and strengthened the garrisons at Gobindgarh and Phillaur. But he soon realised that his soldiers were no match for the British and their trained Indian mercenaries. And if he allowed himself to be provoked into a fight, the British would annex his kingdom as they had annexed all the others in India. On 25th April, 1809, he signed a treaty of 'friendship' at Amritsar conceding all British demands. Before signing he laconically remarked to Metcalfe: 'Do not let the same injury arise in friendship, which would be the result of enmity!'

The first task was to modernise his army and put his house in order. This he proceeded to do with great thoroughness. There was nothing narrow-minded about his plans. He recruited the best fighting men available without consideration of religion or state. His new army had units of Gurkhas, Biharis, Oriyas, Punjabi Mussulmans, Pathans as well as Sikhs. He set up iron foundries in Lahore to make cannon and cannon balls and trained a body of Mussulman gunners to man them. He hired nearly a hundred foreigners—French, Italian, German, Irish and Greek—to drill his troops. He did not, however, put much faith in the loyalties of these foreigners. 'German, French or English,' he said, 'all these European bastards are alike.' In the Anglo-Sikh wars which took place only 10 years after his death, not one of the foreign officers in the employ of the Sikh court fought on the side of the Sikhs; many offered their services to the British. The generals who led his armies in the campaigns were all Punjabis: Mohkam Chand, Diwan

Chand, Fatch Singh Ahluwalia, Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phoola Singh. Along with these men, Ranjit Singh had two men whose advice he had sought in all matters of state. Fakir Azizuddin was his chief adviser on diplomatic affairs; Raja Dina Nath took over administrative and revenue matters.



Ranjit Singh did not have to wait very long for an opportunity to put his reorganised army in the field. Shah Shuja the ruler of Afghanistan was ejected from Kabul and came to Ranjit Singh for help. Before Ranjit

could come to his aid, Shuja was taken prisoner and sent to Kashmir. Ranjit's armies rescued Shuja and defeated his enemies at Attock. Shuja had to yield the Koh-i-noor as his wife had promised, but fearing more demands, he fled the Sikh court and went to the British for protection. In 1818 Ranjit captured Multan and the neighbouring districts. The next year he annexed the whole of Kashmir to his kingdom. Four years later the tribes of the frontier rose in a religious war against the Sikhs. Ranjit's armies decimated the Afghan and Pathan forces and the whole of the North-West Frontier Province right up to the Khyber Pass passed under Sikh control.

The British were not satisfied with taking over the Sikh states south of the Sutlej. When Ranjit Singh advanced southwards to Sindh, they forestalled him and took the Amirs under their 'protection' as well. The only direction in which Ranjit Singh could expand was the north against the Pathans and the Afghans. He also had to make sure that he was strong enough to meet the British challenge when it came.

All that remained for Ranjit Singh to do was to go further north-west to Kabul and take Afghanistan. For some time he seriously considered doing so. But this did not suit the English, and as had happened before, they were a step ahead of the Sikh ruler. They entered into negotiations with Shah Shuja and 'persuaded' Ranjit Singh to back the Shah's claim to his throne. Ranjit Singh gave in and in July 1838 put his signature to a treaty which finally defined the limits of the one frontier which had been left undefined. A year later (1839) he was dead.

*Ranjit Singh's Character and Achievements*

The most popular hero of Sikh history is Ranjit Singh. He is to the Sikhs what Sivaji is to the Marathas or Bonaparte to the French—a man who rallied a disunited people, roused them to a supreme effort and made them masters of the land. His earlier years showed little promise of greatness and the elements seem to have conspired against him. He was stricken with small-pox which deprived him of one eye. He was small, dark and ugly. He was deprived of the discipline of a father's authority and dissipated his youth. (The love of wine, women and horses remained with him to the last.) But it seemed as if a call had come to him to lead his people to their destiny. He liquidated the warring *mists* and united them into the Khalsa brotherhood. He expanded the basis of his state from a religious to a secular one, giving positions of trust and power in civil and military matters to Muslims and Hindus without any discrimination whatsoever. He raised India's most powerful fighting force and for the first time in two thousand years of the history of Hindustan turned the tide of invasion and brought the traditional conquerors of India, the Pathans and Afghans, to their knees. These achievements are themselves enough to endear him to the hearts of all Indians. To add to these was Ranjit Singh's lovable character. Even at the height of his power, he did not lose the common touch. This gave the peasant folk from whom he had risen a sense of kinship with him. In the gaudy pomp and splendour of his court, he lived a life of simplicity always dressed in plain white clothes. He was courteous in speech and utterly humble in his dealings with men of religion. He was known to step down from his throne to wipe the dust

off the feet of Muslim fakeers with his long grey beard. He did not mind soliders who had fought with him taking liberties with him and being rude and familiar. It is said that once when he was riding in procession on his biggest elephant, his general, Akali Phoola Singh, shouted at him from a balcony: 'O thou one-eyed one, where did you buy that he-buffalo you are riding?' The King joined his palms and replied with great humility: 'Maharaj, it is one of the gifts granted by you.'

There are many other anecdotes told of his complete lack of haughtiness. He was a stern but kind ruler. Despite his many conquests, he did not allow any wanton destruction of life or property. Throughout his life he never passed a sentence of death.

Many times Ranjit Singh led his armies to battle, fought in the forefront and risked his life like any common soldier. Although he took liberties with his own life, he took no chances when the security of the State was involved. He was single-minded in his pursuit of setting up a powerful Sikh Kingdom. He used every weapon in his armoury—craft, cunning, diplomacy, bullying, humility and compromise—to achieve this end. A well-known anecdote gives a clue to his character and the reason for his success. It is said that his favourite courtesan jibed at his ugliness and asked: 'Where were you when God was doling out good looks?' The Monarch replied with complete presence of mind: 'I was busy seeking power.'

## ANARCHY, ANGLO-SIKH WARS AND THE ANNEXATION

THE DEATH of Ranjit Singh was virtually the death of the Sikh Kingdom. The revenue and judicial system which had been organised by a chosen band of administrators and propped up by his own personality began to totter. Taxes were not collected in time and the pay of the civil and military personnel fell in arrears. The army which Ranjit Singh had built into a first class fighting force and which he had kept under stern personal discipline became like a monster unleashed. Many Europeans fled the country and Punjabi officers were reduced to drill-masters without any authority over their men. Control passed to the *panchs* elected by the soldiers who bargained for conditions of service with the officers. To cap this state of chaos, rival factions sought to put up their own nominees on the throne. Within four years three rulers, Kharak Singh, his son Naunihal Singh, and Sher Singh ascended the throne and were murdered along with their supporters and members of their families including women and children. In 1842 the last Sikh ruler, the six year old Dalip Singh, the youngest son of Ranjit, ascended the throne with his mother, Rani Jindan, as regent. The sanguine drama of murder and reprisal continued behind the palace walls. The army grew in numbers till it had trebled itself—but without any direction or discipline of any sort.

The English knew that the Sikh Kingdom was ripe

and ready to fall. All it needed was a little shaking.

The British government had for a long time coveted the Sikh Kingdom. Ranjit Singh had frustrated their designs. He could match their wiles as his army could match theirs in strength. At the time of his death the British had suffered a serious reverse in Afghanistan and did not have either power or excuse to move against the Sikhs. Within five years the situation had changed and the British again became aggressive. They raised the strength of their army in the Punjab from 2,500 men to 8,000; then from 8,000 to 14,000, and finally to 32,000 men with 68 guns. A strong line of reserves was also built up at Meerut; and the cantonments at Ferozepur, Ambala, Kasauli and Simla heavily garrisoned. In the summer of 1845, seventy thirty-ton boats built in Bombay were brought to the banks of the Sutlej and training in bridge-building started under the very noses of the Sikh soldiers guarding the frontier on the other side. Then the Governor-General, Sir Henry Hardinge himself came to the Punjab to plan the campaign with his Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gough. The two met early in December at Ambala.

The location of the pontoon bridge left no doubt in the minds of the Sikhs where the British army would strike. The Sikhs decided that if the British wanted war, they would have it in their own territory. On the 11th, December 1845 the Sikh army forded the river a few miles above Ferozepur and took their positions for battle.

The British had everything except the Sikh soldiers on their side. The court, including Rani Jindan, were anxious to come to terms with them if their possessions were guaranteed. The Chief Minister, the Commander-



in-Chief and most of the senior officers had assured them of co-operation. The fight put up by the leaderless rank and file of Ranjit Singh's army surprised both the British and the traitorous Sikh ruling classes. They mauled the British army at Mudki. The next day, and for two more, the Sikhs waited for reinforcements promised by their commanders to finish the job. The reinforcements were deliberately held back. Instead of gunpowder, sackloads of sand and rape-seed were sent. The British received reinforcements and defeated the Sikhs at Ferozeshahr. Two more engagements were fought, one at Aliwal and the other at Sabraon, where the Sikhs were completely routed.

The treaty of surrender was signed at Lahore in March 1846 by which nearly half of the kingdom was handed over to the British and Kashmir sold for a paltry sum to Gulab Singh, a Dogra courtier of Ranjit Singh. The young Maharaja Dalip Singh was taken under protection by the British Resident who was entitled to maintain an army of his own in the Sikh capital. Said Lord Hardinge: 'We must bear in mind that, by the Treaty of Lahore, the Punjab was never intended to be an independent State . . . In fact, the native prince is in fetters, under our protection and must do our bidding.'

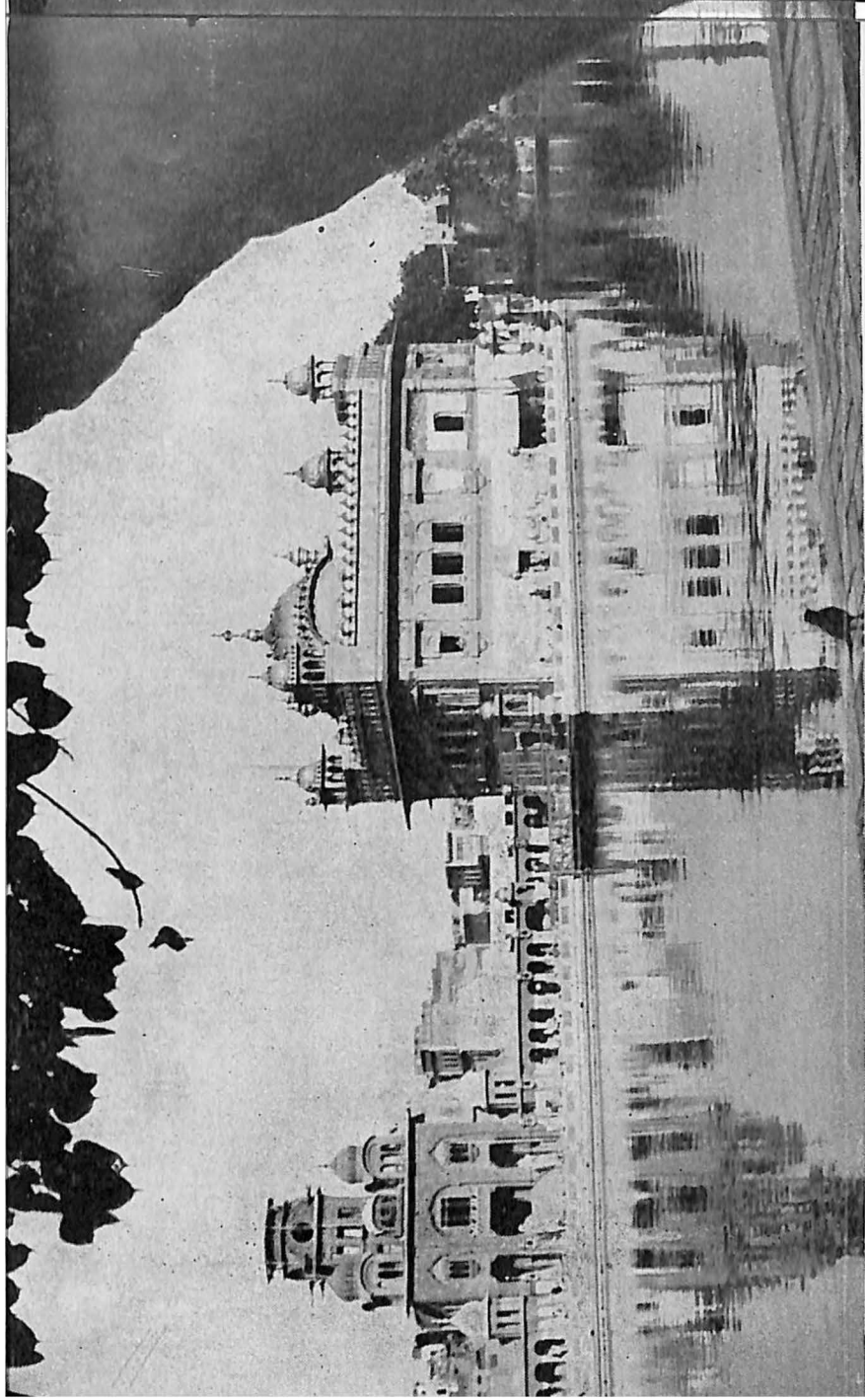
At long last it dawned upon Rani Jindan and the Sikh ruling class that they had been duped by the British. But it was too late to undo the effects of their treachery. On the British side, Lord Dalhousie replaced Lord Hardinge as Governor-General. He believed that the right to annex the Punjab was 'beyond cavil'. He wrote: 'The task before me is the utter destruction and prostration of the Sikh power, the subversion of its dynasty, and the subjection

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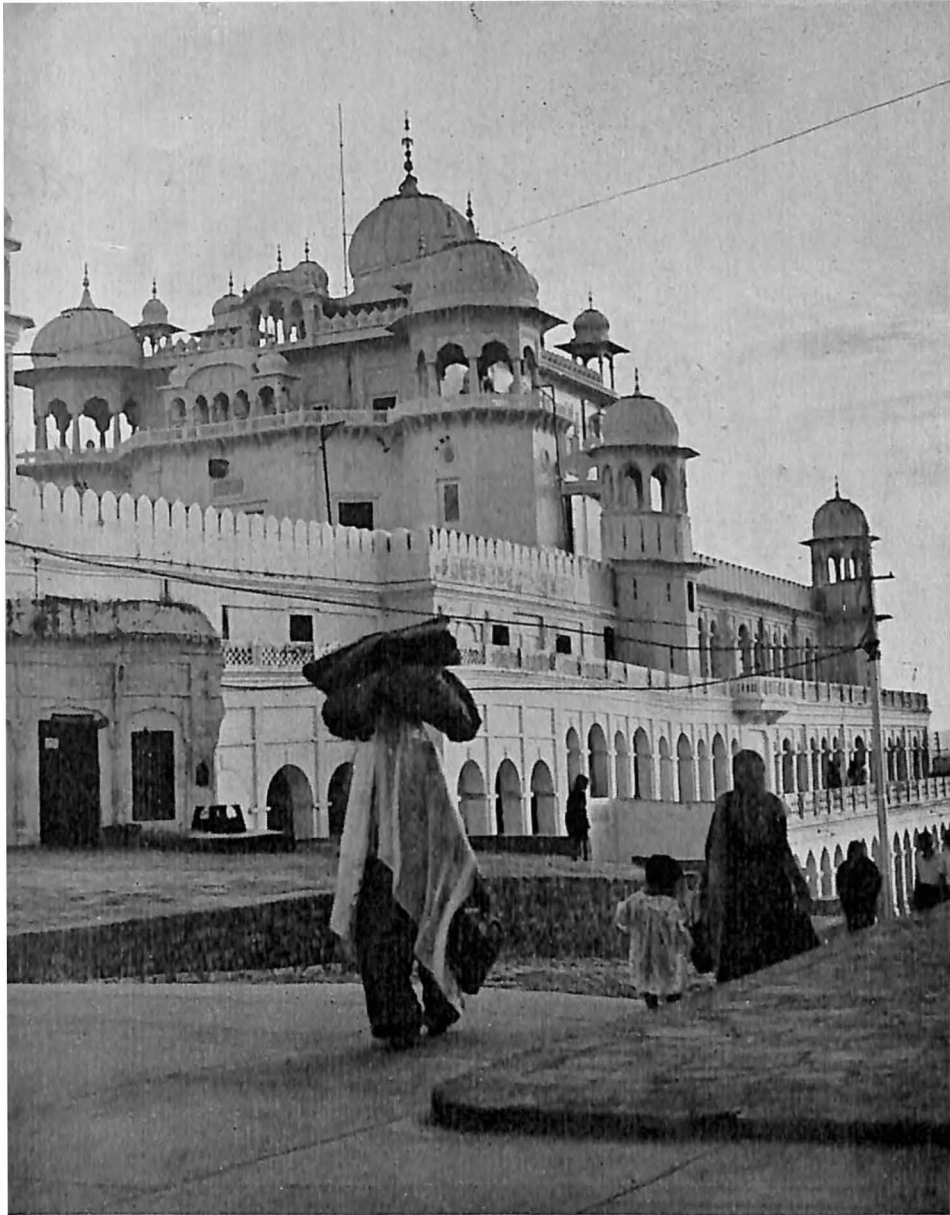


1. Golden Temple of Amritsar—the holiest of the Sikhs' holy shrines.



2. Nihang Sikhs—Suicide squads of the Sikh armies.

*Photo: Nagarajan*



3. Anandpur Gurdwara—birthplace of the Khalsa.

*Photo: Nagarajan*



4. Sword Fighting  
at Anandpur



5. Mother and Child

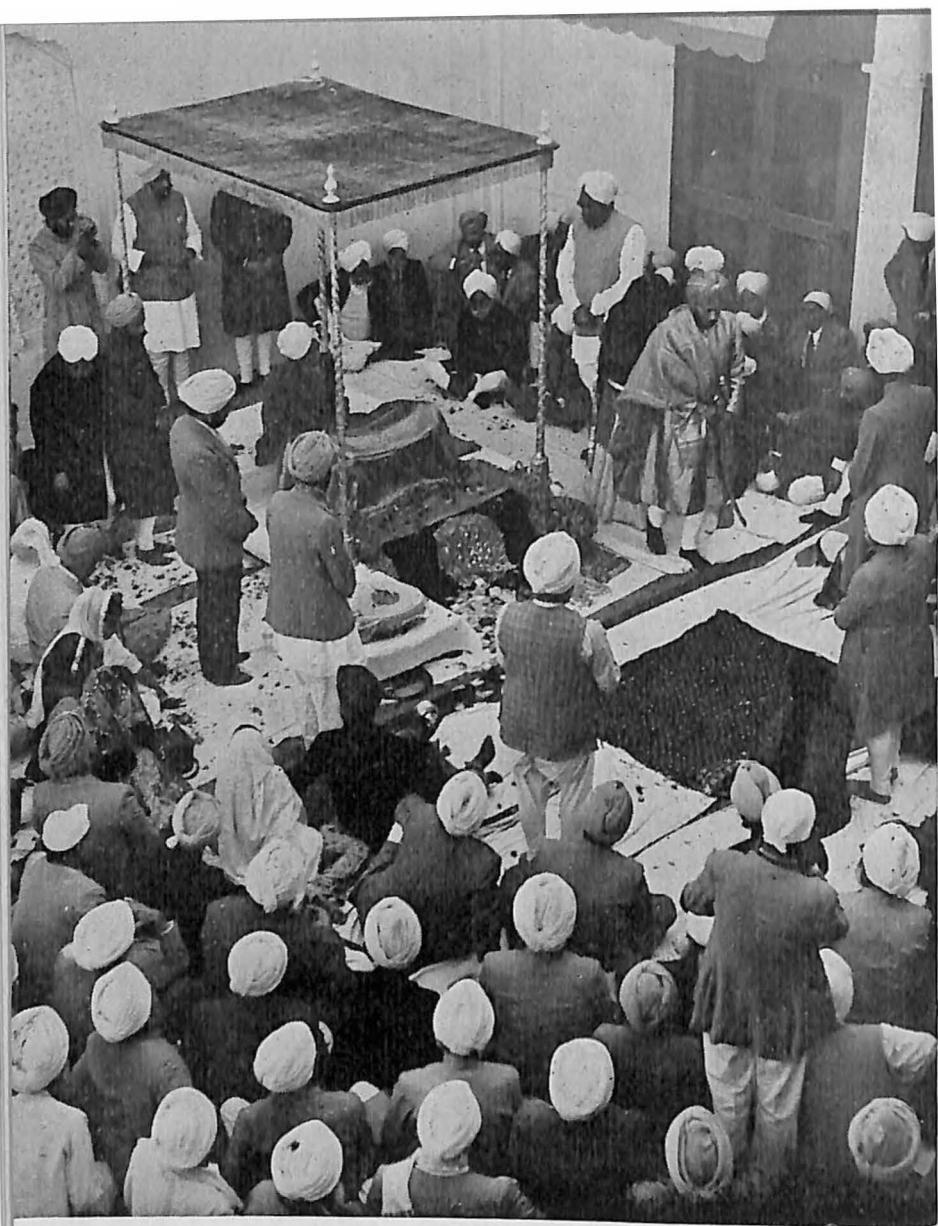
6. Peasant and Son  
*Photo: Nagarajan*



7. Peasant and Daughter  
*Photo: Arya*

8. In Search of a Wife—a Sikh Bridegroom  
*Photo: Nagarajan*

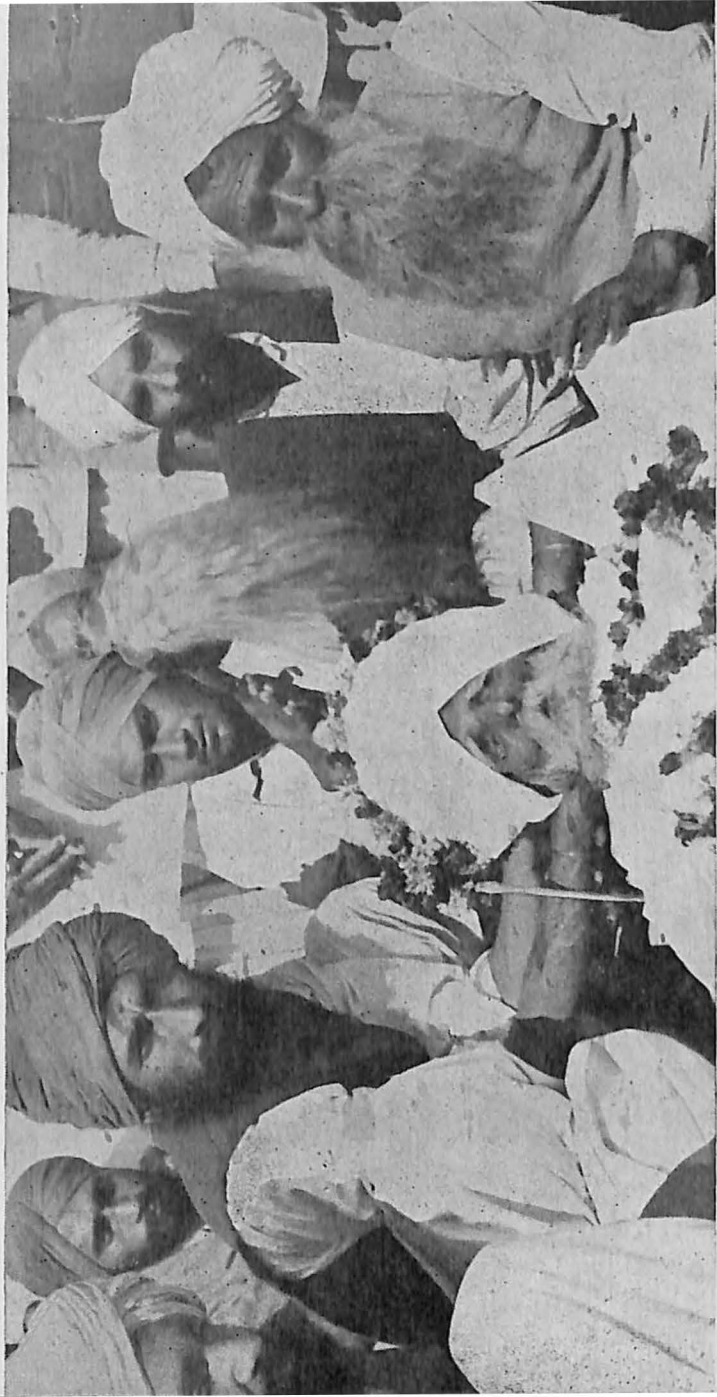




9. A Sikh Wedding—four times round the Granth Sahib.

*Photo: Harbans Singh*





10. Death of a Patriarch.—the body dieth; the soul is immortal.

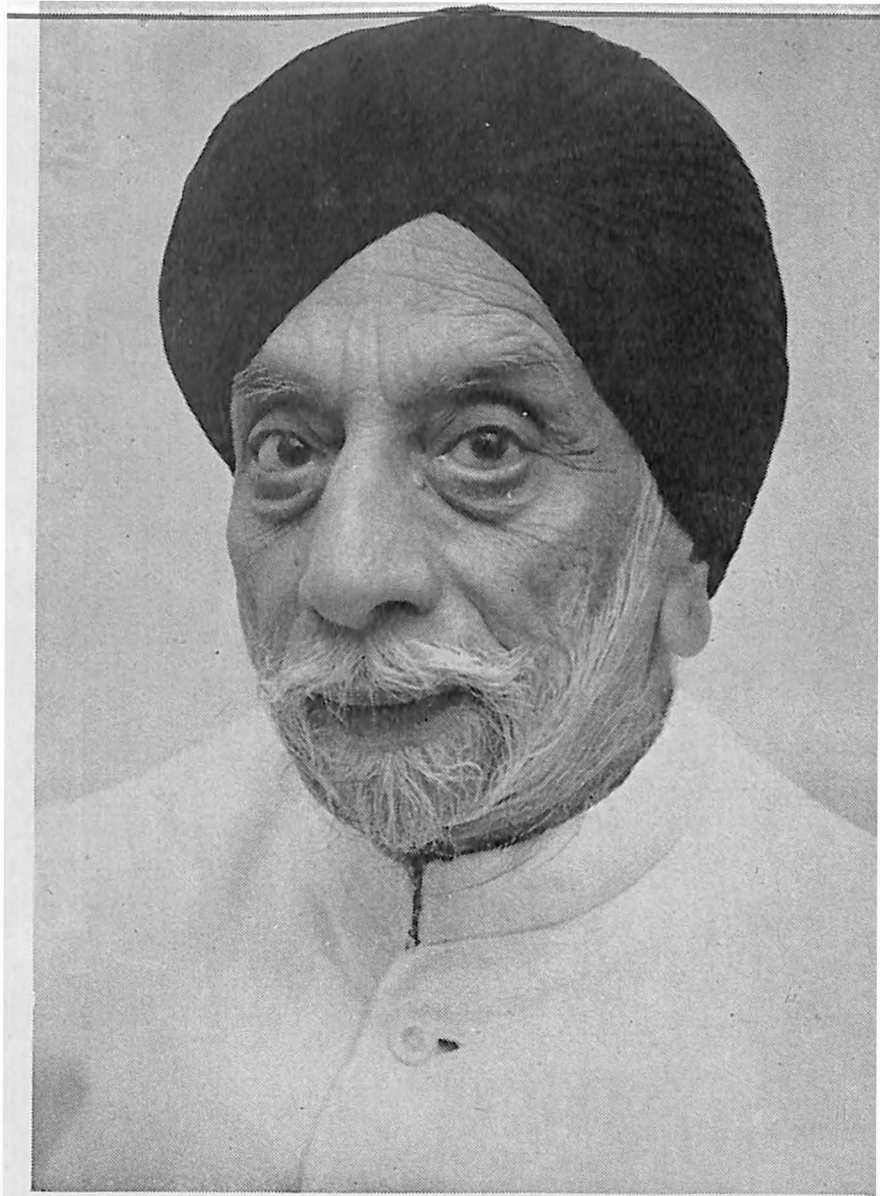
*Photo: Shyamlat*



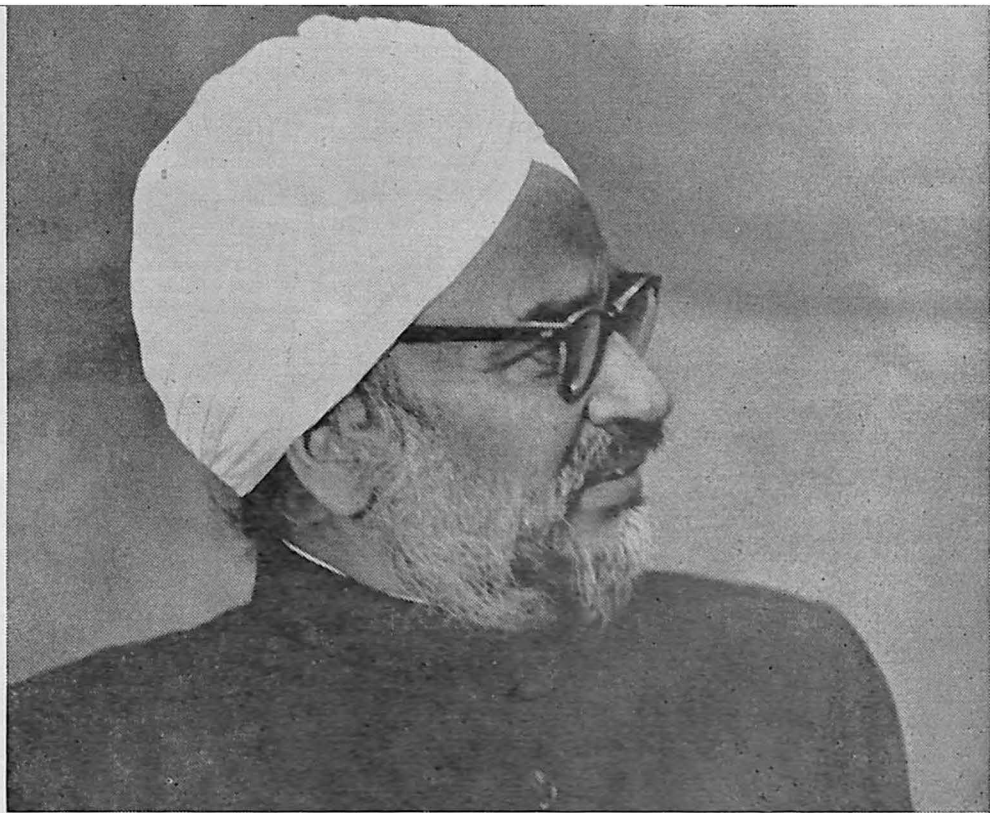
11. Master Tara Singh  
*Photo: Statesman*

12. Pratap Singh Kairon





13. Hukam Singh, Speaker, Lok Sabha



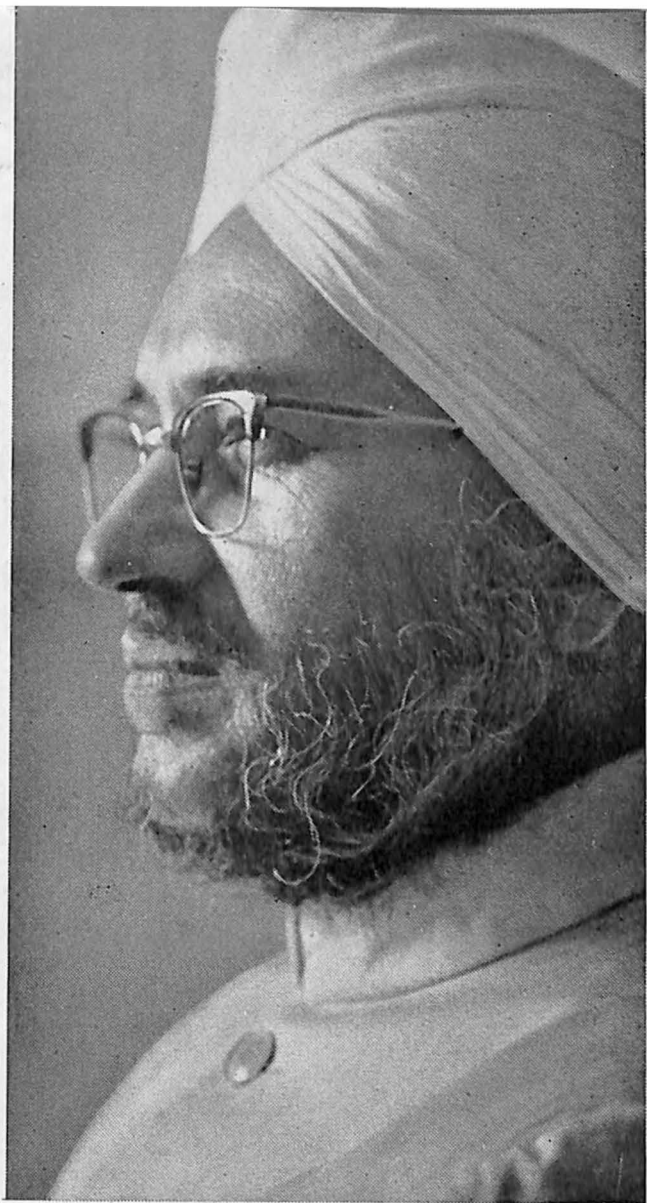
14. Sardar Swaran Singh, Cabinet Minister



15. The late Prime Minister Nehru and the Maharajah of Fatawa inspecting Sikh troops.



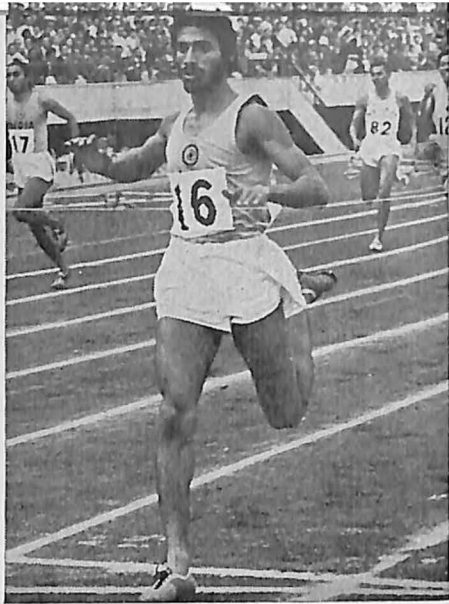
16. Amrita Pritam—Poet and Novelist



17. Tarlok Singh, Member, Planning Commission

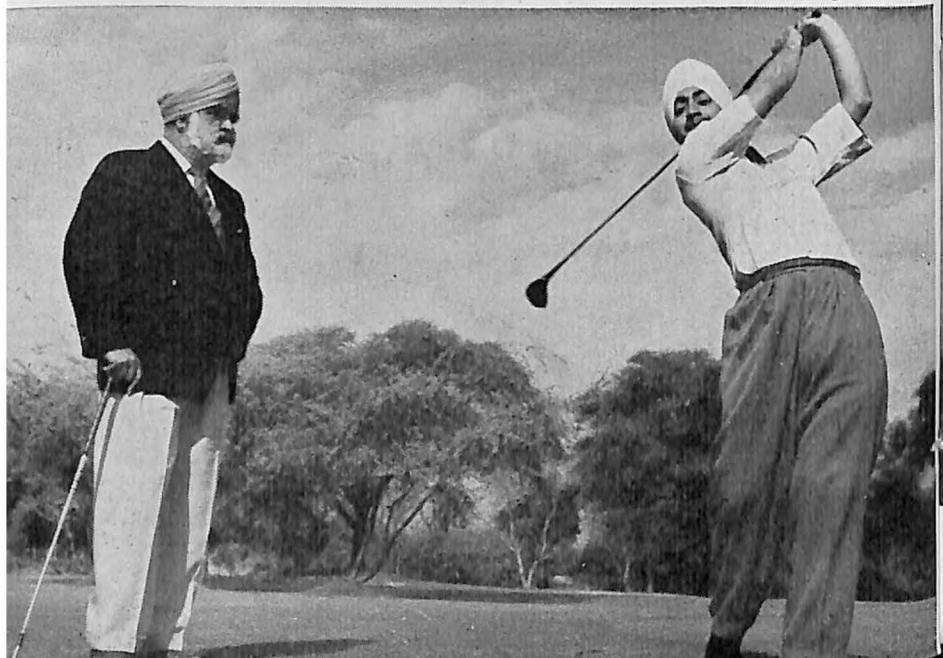


18. India wins World Hockey Title at Melbourne. Skipper—Balbir Singh.  
*Photo: Vernon Ram*

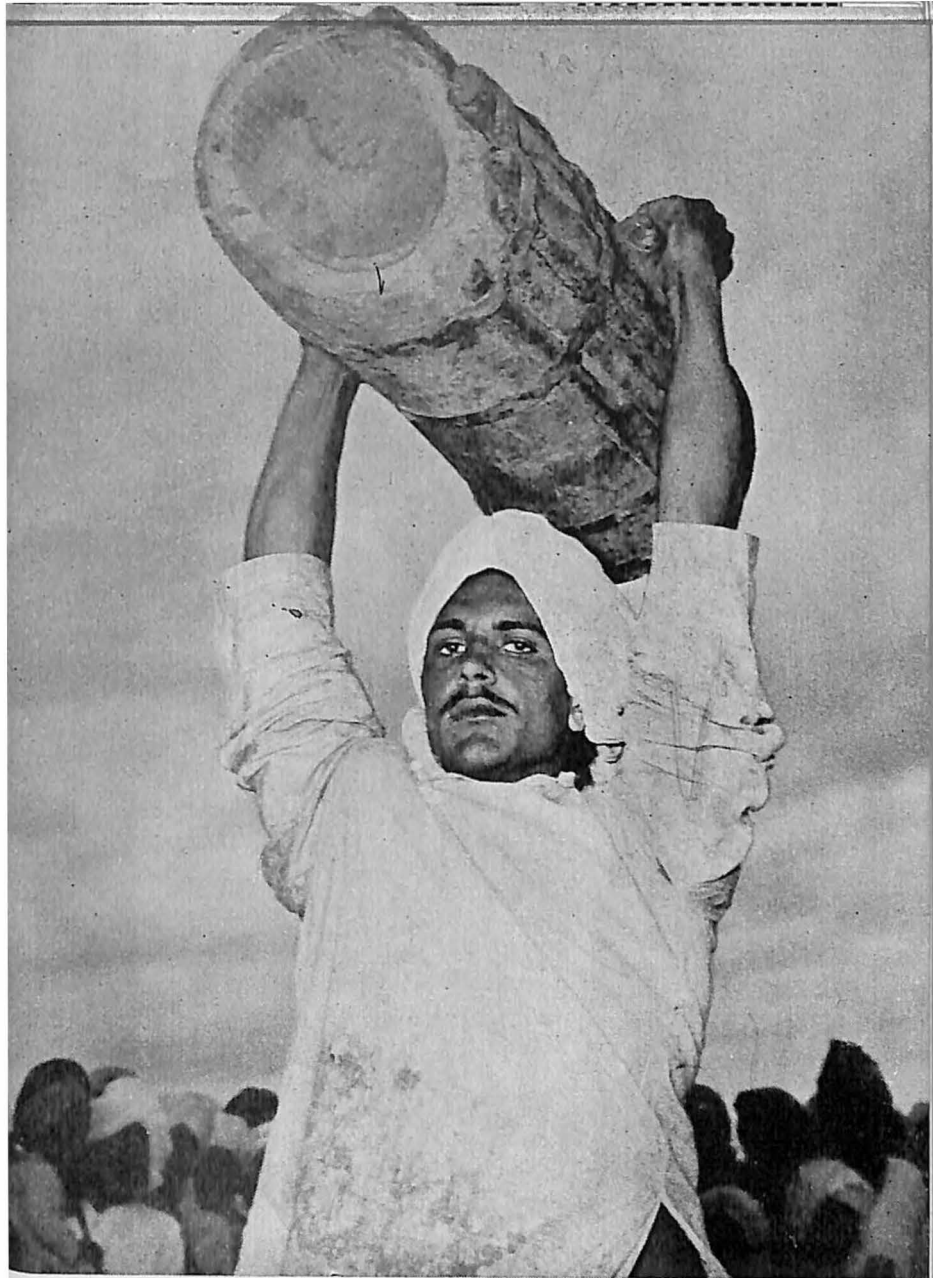


19. Milkha Singh wins a Gold Medal for India.  
*Photo: Vernon Ram*

20. Teenage National Champion—Ashok Malik and father ex-champion Iqbal Malik.  
*Photo: Nagarajan*







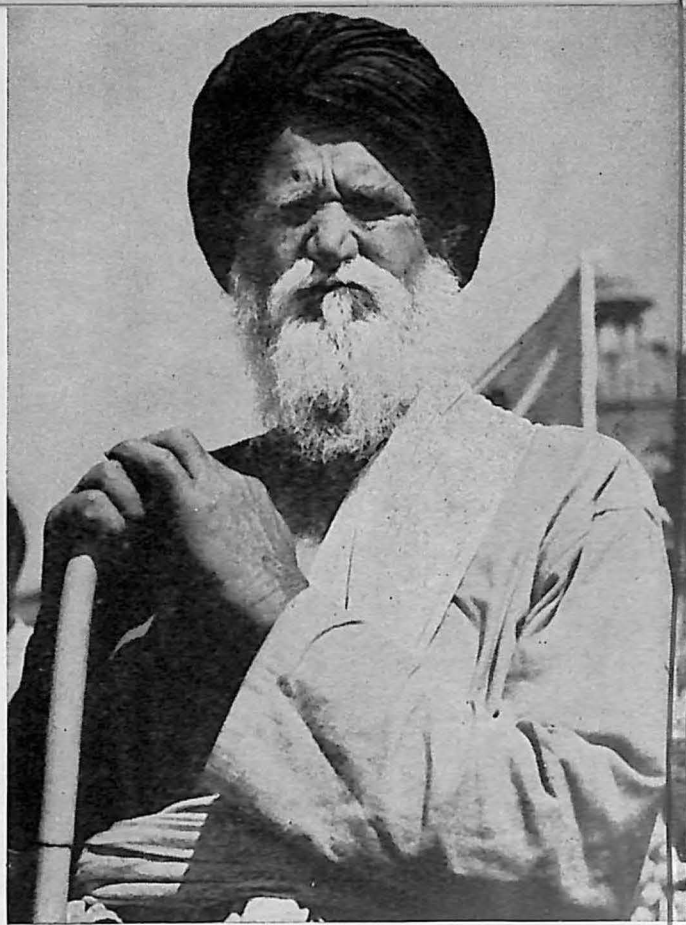
21. Village Weight Lifter—two maunds? easy!

*Photo: Nagarajan*



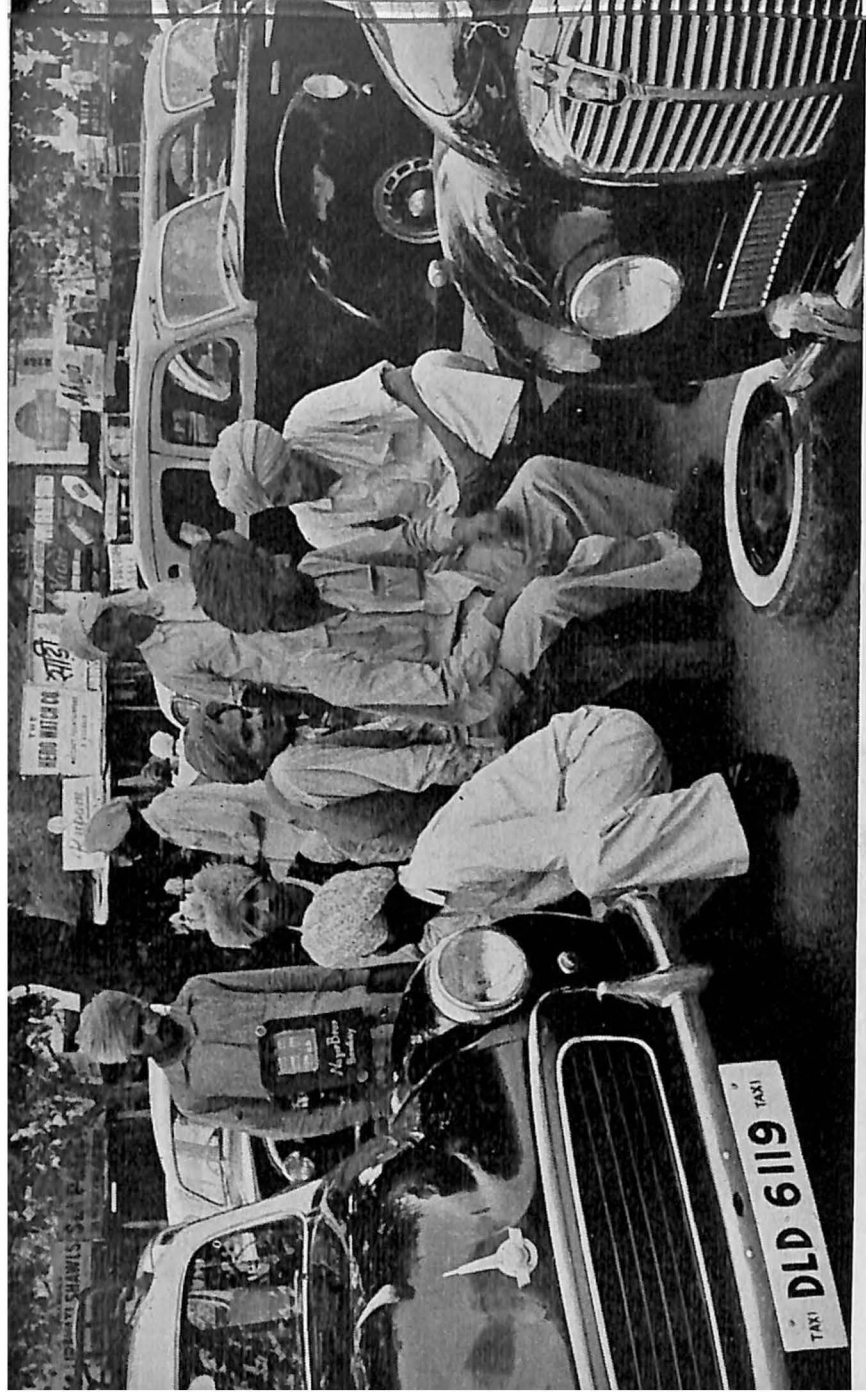
22. Grandmother at the Wheel.

*Photo: Nagarajan*



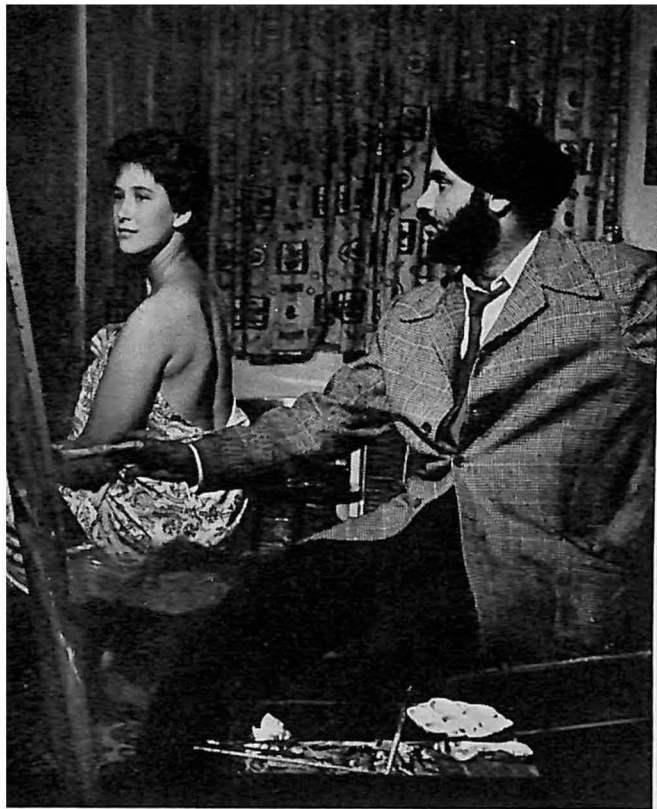
23. Old but not Ancient.

*Photo: Nagarajan*



24. Taxi Drivers—Anything mechanical is grist to their mill.

Photo : Nagarajan



25. Serbjeet Singh

*Photo: Jasjeet Singh*



26. Jagjit Singh—Winner of the Kalinga Prize

## THE NEW DISPENSATION

## SIKHS AND THE MUTINY

FOR THE first three years after the annexation, the Punjab was governed by a board of three members consisting of two brothers, Henry and John Lawrence and a Mr Mansel. Then Lord Dalhousie abolished the board and made John Lawrence Chief Commissioner of the Punjab and the two men fashioned a policy which changed the face of the province. All big *jagirs* were confiscated and the Sikh landed aristocracy which had a stake in the fortunes of the royal family was liquidated as an economic and political factor (only the estates of chieftains of south-eastern Punjab who were under British protection during Ranjit Singh's time were spared). This in turn resulted in the elevation of the class of peasant proprietors who were, as they always had been, the backbone of the Sikh nation. The Sikh soldiery was disbanded, but the best part of it was incorporated in the British army and very soon the proportion of Sikhs under British colours exceeded that of any other community. Another step which assured the loyalty of orthodox Sikhs was the issue of a regulation by which all Sikh soldiers were obliged to wear their hair and beards unshorn as prescribed by their faith. Along with these orders went reforms which affected the whole province. Old canals were reopened and many new ones dug. New roads were laid. Railway, postal and telegraphic communication was set up. The Punjab knew a period of prosperity

and peace which was in marked contrast to the chaos and bloodshed of the years after Ranjit Singh's death. It was not surprising that when most of the north and east of India rose in revolt against the British in 1857, the Punjab remained loyal. The Sikhs had two other reasons for throwing their weight on the side of the British in quelling the Mutiny. Only ten years earlier the whole of India had furnished troops to the British and helped them to crush an independent Sikh State. There were Biharis, Oriyas, Rajputs and Marathas among the many other Indians fighting on the British side in the Anglo-Sikh wars. The Sikhs could hardly be expected to join their erstwhile enemies. They also did not look upon the Mutiny as a war of independence. (As indeed it never was until the Indian government decided to invest it with that status a hundred years later in complete disregard of proven historical facts.) There was no identity of purpose between the Hindu and Muslim mutineers nor between those of Bihar and U.P. and those from Maharashtra. The Marathas wanted back their kingdoms; the Muslims wanted to re-establish Mughal rule and had rallied round the aged Bahadur Shah. The Sikhs had bitter memories of Mughal rule in the Punjab and its re-establishment could in no sense be looked upon as liberation from foreign rule.

#### MOVEMENTS OF REFORMATION

Three important movements of reformation took place soon after the annexation of the Punjab by the British. The motive force behind them was the desire to restore to Sikhism the purity of the faith of the Gurus. With the possession of power and wealth, the Sikh *nouveau riche*

class had strayed a long way from the Spartan traditions prescribed by the Gurus. They were also meant to check the tendency amongst the Sikhs to merge back into the Hindu fold—a tendency which has coloured much of the social and political outlook of the Sikh community over the last hundred years. Of these reformist movements, the first two, the Nirankari and the Namdhari, ended up by setting up sub-sects of their own; the third called the Singh Sabha, turned from a movement of religious and social reform to a political party.

### *The Nirankaris*

The originator of the Nirankari movement was a man called Dyal Das (1783-1858) of Peshawar. He was born a Hindu and was never baptised as a Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh. Nevertheless he preached against idol worship and the practice of Hindu ceremonial by the Sikhs. The area of operation of Dyal Das and his two sons who succeeded him was the North-West Frontier Province and northern Punjab, mainly the district of Rawalpindi. The Nirankaris set up a centre of their own at Dyal Sar, recognised Dyal Das and his successors as gurus and began to revere the *Hukam Nama* or the Book of Ordinances of their founder along with the Granth Sahib. For these reasons they were and are disowned by orthodox Sikhs.

The partition of the Punjab deprived the Nirankaris of their headquarters and scattered their small following in all parts of the country.

The Nirankaris are fast merging back into the Sikh fold. The present head of the sub-sect is Hara Singh.

### *The Namdharis*

The Namdhari movement was also initially a movement of religious reform restricted to the Sikhs living in the north-western regions. Soon after its inception both its character and location changed. Ram Singh (1815-85) became the head of the community and set up his headquarters in the village of Bhayani in the Ludhiana district. In 1857 they broke away from the parent community by initiating baptismal rights and a code of conduct, *Rahatnama*, of their own. Ram Singh enjoined strict vegetarianism and austere living. His followers began to dress in pure white and wrapped their turbans flat across the forehead (instead of wearing them at an angle). The Namdharis placed great emphasis on the incantation of prayer. Hours of chanting often produced a state of frenzy which made them shriek (*kook*). Hence the Namdharis are often referred to as kookas.

The number of Namdharis increased rapidly. Ram Singh not only became a religious leader of some importance but also began to wield considerable temporal power. He began to hold court, exchange presents with the rulers of states and keep an armed escort. In 1871 the organisation came into conflict with the authorities. The Namdharis took the law into their own hands in trying to suppress the slaughter of kine which had been re-introduced by the British after having been banned for many years under Sikh rule. A number of Muslim butchers were murdered in Amritsar and Ludhiana. At Malerkotla a band of Namdharis clashed with the forces of the Nawab and after a skirmish were taken prisoners. The English Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur arrived on the scene and without any trial had fifty of the



prisoners blown off by cannons and another sixteen hanged. The headquarters of the organisation at Bhayani was ransacked. Ram Singh and twelve of his closest colleagues were arrested and deported. Ram Singh lived in exile in Rangoon for thirteen years and died there in 1885.

After this debacle, the Namdhari gurus restricted their activities to purely social and religious affairs. Guru Pratap Singh (D. 1961) owned a string of excellent race-horses. The present head of the sect is Guru Jagjit Singh.

The number of Namdharis is roughly estimated at a figure of 100,000 largely recruited from the Ramgarhia caste to which Ram Singh himself belonged. Their numbers are increasing steadily. The Namdharis are a fairly compact body of men who succeed in sending representatives of their own to the Punjab Assembly and to Parliament. Their present headquarters is at Sirsa in the district of Hissar.

### *Singh Sabha*

The Singh Sabha movement started in the 1870's and aimed at a renaissance of Sikh religion through education and literature. Its main concern in its early days was to preserve the community from the inroads of Hindu and Christian missionaries who sought to find converts from amongst the illiterate Sikh peasantry and in the process, denigrated the Sikh Gurus and their teachings.

The Singh Sabha movement received active support from the government for its educational programme. The Sikhs were given by the Viceroy Lord Landsdowne 'the

foremost place amongst the true and loyal subjects of Her Majesty the Queen Empress'. Men like the Governor of the Punjab and the Commander-in-Chief became patrons of the organisation and assisted it in raising funds. In a short time, several branches of the Singh Sabha were opened in different parts of the province and Sikh schools and colleges were built in the larger towns and villages. The famous Khalsa College of Amritsar was founded in 1892.

On the literary front, the movement was lucky in eliciting the enthusiasm of poet Vir Singh. He founded the Khalsa Tract Society and the weekly journal Khalsa Samachar. The services of Mr Macauliffe were procured to produce his volumes on Sikh religion. It is to this day the chief work on the Sikh faith in the English language.

An important innovation introduced in 1908 was an education committee to organise annual educational conferences in different parts of the country. New educational institutions followed in the wake of these conferences.

With the rise of political consciousness, the Singh Sabha, because of its close association with the government and the upper middle-class nature of its leadership, began to lose its popularity with the masses. Its political facet was represented by a body called the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The politics of the Chief Khalsa Diwan were pro-British and indifferent if not hostile to the nationalist movement.

## RISE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

### (a) *The Ghadr Conspiracy*

Political consciousness amongst the Sikh masses is a phenomenon of the present century. The causes were

largely economic. For the first fifty years of British rule the Sikhs had all they wanted. The agriculturists, who were the backbone of the community, were given new lands in north-west Punjab where the introduction of canal irrigation had changed a barren desert to the most prosperous granary of India. They were recruited in large numbers in the army and the police and had much more than their legitimate share in the services. Then things began to change. The large holdings in the canal colonies became smaller as families multiplied in numbers. There were a series of poor monsoons and twice in five years famine conditions prevailed in south-eastern Punjab which had no irrigation system. Families from these regions moved into the canal colonies. The land was no longer able to provide the sustenance it used to and younger men left their homes to seek fortune elsewhere. They went east to Bengal (the taxi drivers of Calcutta are to this day largely Sikh), then to Burma, Malaya and China. They set up small businesses and many were employed in the police or as watchmen. From China a large number went to Canada and the United States. In Canada many got jobs laying tracks for the Canadian Pacific Railway and others set up as lumbermen in British Columbia and Victoria. In the United States they took to farming in California.

Contacts with the world outside made the emigrants conscious of the absence of political rights in their own country. The American and Canadian governments passed laws to keep Asiatics out of the American continent. Sikh settlers could not believe that the Canadians would discriminate against coloured people from the Empire—particularly those whose loyalty to the British crown was

proverbial. But two waves of emigration of about 4,000 Sikhs in the years 1906 and 1907 led the Canadian government to enact legislation virtually banning Indians from entering their country and taking steps to expel those that were there. This was a rude shock to the Sikhs. They appealed to the Canadian people and to the British government. They were rebuffed both in Ottawa and London. Sikh men and women were insulted in the streets, beaten up by hoodlums and subjected to pogroms organised by white Asian-baiters. They turned to the Indian government for help. They were told to return to the Punjab, and those who did, were kept under surveillance as having been contaminated by the free world. Out of sheer desperation the emigrants decided to band themselves together and fight for their rights. In March, 1913 their representatives organised the Ghadr (mutiny) party with the avowed aim of ousting British rule from India by all available means.

Three months later took place the disgraceful episode of the Komagata Maru. This was a Japanese vessel chartered by Sikh emigrants going to Canada. The ship and its passengers satisfied every single condition that the Canadian government had imposed on would-be immigrants. Nevertheless the Komagata Maru was held up in Vancouver harbour for several weeks and its passengers refused permission to disembark. No food or fresh water was allowed to be supplied to the ship. Instead, the Canadian police tried to board it by force to arrest the leaders. When it was frustrated, Canadian warships surrounded the boat and threatened to blow it up. The Komagata Maru was forced to turn back with its disillusioned cargo. When it docked at Budge Budge harbour

near Calcutta, the Indian police put a cordon round the disembarking passengers and tried to force them into a waiting train without consulting them about their destinations. A scuffle ensued. The police opened fire and killed twenty-three men. The rest were put in chains and packed into prisoners' compartments to be taken to the Punjab. Some of them overpowered their guards during the night and jumped off the running train and joined other returned emigrants in an attempt to overthrow British rule by acts of terrorism. They decided to organise a general rising against the government on a specified date in the February of 1915. The attempt was a dismal failure. The bulk of the community was still loyal to the British and was deeply involved in helping it in the war which had broken out a few months earlier. The terrorists were rounded up and tried by specially constituted courts. Many were sent to the gallows. Many more to life imprisonment in the Andamans and the jails of the Punjab. Most of them spent their youth and middle age in prison. When they were released, they were old men without any possessions or families and full of bitterness. These old men (known as Babas) formed the nucleus of the Communist movement in the Punjab.

The Great War (1914-18) witnessed the high water mark of collaboration between the Sikhs and the British government. Thousands of young men volunteered to fight and laid down their lives on the German and Turkish fronts. Many more helped with funds and material. It is the estimate of Sir John Maynard that the contribution of the Sikh community in men and material was ten times that of any of the other communities of India.

When the war ended, the Sikhs, not without reason, expected to be compensated for their services. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were a blow to Sikh expectations. The community which had done so much more than any other in the war, which paid 40% of the land revenue of the province and formed 25% of the electorate, was treated with less consideration than other minorities—particularly the Muslims (who, with a population of 10% in Bihar, were given 33% representation). Bewilderment led to bitterness as the story of the treatment of Sikhs in foreign lands and the trials and executions of members of the Ghadr party gained currency. Then came the clash over the control of Sikh shrines. And the community which in 1918 was reckoned by the British as the most loyal of all in India, became within the short span of four years the most rebellious and took its place in the vanguard of the freedom movement.

*(b) Agitation over Shrines*

The movement that led to the final break of the Sikhs with the government was the agitation known as the Akali movement over the possession of their shrines. Sikh gurdwaras had always been many other things besides places of worship. They were meeting places, schools and rest-houses for travellers. Most of the historic gurdwaras were well endowed and not only had the revenues of large tracts of land attached to them but made enormous incomes from offerings. By convention, the priestly duties in most of the well-known gurdwaras were performed by Mahants some of whom belonged to the Udasi order which had not fully accepted the faith of Guru Gobind Singh. They were inclined to introduce worship of Hindu

idols alongside reverence to the Granth. Gradually the posts of Mahants became hereditary and from being performers of religious ceremonies they became religious heads owning temples and their fortunes. Some of them were men of loose character and carried on their debauchery within temple precincts. It was only natural for the Sikhs to want to preserve their shrines for purely Sikh form of worship and have some say in the management of incomes to which they contributed. Legal processes proved wholly inadequate for the purpose. Since the Mahants were in possession and possession was nine points of the law, cases lodged in courts dragged on for as many as twenty years without any result. Then the Sikhs decided to have recourse to direct action by ousting the Mahants and occupying gurdwaras in the name of Committees of management set up by them. At first both the Mahants and the government realised the justice of the case. Some gurdwaras passed peacefully into the hands of the committees which reappointed the Mahants to carry on their priestly functions on fixed remuneration.

The political situation in the Punjab suddenly deteriorated. The peaceful agitation launched by Mahatma Gandhi took a violent turn and the government countered it with brutal force. In April 1919 took place the tragic massacre of Jallianwala Bagh where General Dyer fired on an unlawful (but peaceful) meeting and killed and wounded over 1,500 men, women and children. This was followed by the notorious order compelling all citizens passing a particular spot where a white nurse had been lynched by the mob to crawl on their bellies. Many of the victims of the firing and the insolent order

were Sikhs. In any case, the incidents had taken place in their sacred city and attracted the attention of the entire community. While the rest of the country was still reeling from the shock of Jallianwala, the Mahants of Sikh temples were protesting their loyalties to the British.

For reasons best known to the government it decided to extend repression of political activity to this purely religious agitation. It began to back the Mahants against the Sikh congregations. The year 1921 saw a series of tragedies. There was a fracas at Taran Taran resulting in a few deaths. A month later the Mahant of Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, had 130 Sikh worshippers who had come to take possession of the shrine butchered by his hirelings. Then the movement was launched in full force. The government provided the incentive by making a series of false moves and withdrawing under pressure of the agitation. Without any excuse the keys of the Golden Temple were taken away. They were returned after several thousand volunteers had been beaten and arrested. This affair was followed by an order banning the wearing of kirpans which most orthodox Sikhs carried in conformity with their religious practice. Many thousands were arrested for contravening the order before the order was withdrawn. In the summer of 1922 the biggest passive resistance movement was launched at Guru Ka Bagh—a small plot of land attached to a gurdwara. The Mahant had forbidden the Sikhs to take timber from the land as was their practice for the use of the kitchen attached to the gurdwara. The police came to his assistance and began to arrest Sikhs for trespass. Batches of hundreds marched in peaceful processions to Guru Ka Bagh and were given a merciless



thrashing with lathis and arrested. After many months, the land was handed over to the committee of management. Meanwhile, yet another campaign was started at Nabha. The Maharajah who had made no secret of his sympathies with the movement was deposed and sent out of the Punjab. A batch of passive resisters who marched into the state to offer prayers for the deposed Maharajah were fired on by the police and forty Sikhs were killed. Amongst the many arrested was Jawaharlal Nehru who had come to see things for himself. The crowning piece of folly had yet to come. When it seemed that the whole thing was over and a bill to regulate the management of the Sikh shrines was being canvassed, the government struck once more. One night in the autumn of 1923, fifty-seven leaders of the movement were arrested. They were charged with conspiracy to overthrow British rule in order to set up a Sikh State. The trial went on for three years and all but a few were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment.

The movement ended with the passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act and the release of the leaders. In the five years of agitation over 30,000 men and women had gone to jail, nearly 400 had been killed and over 2,000 wounded. 700 village officials were dismissed and over Rs. 15 lakhs realised in fines and forfeitures. The political results were even more far-reaching. The British lost forever the support and loyalty of the Sikh community.

### POLITICAL PATTERN

The three movements whose history has been briefly outlined set the pattern of Sikh politics for the period

right up to Independence and partition of the Punjab in 1947. The loyalist party with loose affiliations with the Singh Sabha became the Chief Khalsa Diwan. Its popularity declined rapidly and it ceased to matter politically after 1940. The main body of the Ghadrites—particularly the active terrorists known as the Babas—became the nucleus of the future Communist party in the Punjab. The party which led the movement to recover the shrines was known as Akali. Since the Congress party had also expressed sympathy with the agitation, there were two fairly distinct groups of people in it, viz. those solely concerned with communal problems and those who looked upon the movement as part of a larger movement for the freedom of the country. For many years the two groups remained together under the towering personality of Baba Kharak Singh (D. 1963). Somewhat later they broke apart. The larger group under the leadership of Master Tara Singh and Gyani Kartar Singh took control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (known by its initials as the S.G.P.C.) which controlled the Sikh shrines and the *Akali Dal*— a paramilitary organisation of volunteers. The others aligned themselves with the Indian National Congress. This second group did not produce any one outstanding leader but they added to the strength of Sikhs who were purely Congressite in sympathy and raised them to positions of power. Notable examples of those who benefited by the influx of Akali-nationalists in the ranks of the Congress are men like Pratap Singh Kairon (Chief Minister of the Punjab—1958-64) and Swaran Singh (Minister in the Central Cabinet).

The most important factor in Sikh politics is the

control of the S.G.P.C. which manages gurdwaras in the Punjab and has a say in the affairs of all others. The income from offerings is more than Rs. 50 lacs per year. The S.G.P.C. appoints personnel for the management of gurdwaras and controls innumerable Sikh schools and colleges. For many years the Akali Party monopolised the S.G.P.C. Now the Congress and even the Communists have begun to challenge that monopoly.

### SECOND WORLD WAR AND PARTITION

When the second World War started in 1939, the Sikh masses were indifferent to its fortunes because they believed like the rest of India that they had been dragged into the conflict without being consulted. Despite the exhortations of leaders like Master Tara Singh who wished to maintain Sikh representation in the armed services, new recruits were hard to find. A large proportion of those who went over to the Japanese-sponsored Indian National Army were Sikhs, amongst them well-known leaders like General Mohan Singh (who first founded the National Army) and Colonel Niranjan Singh Gill (later Indian Ambassador in Ethiopia and Thailand).

When the war ended it was obvious to everyone that the days of British rule were numbered. In the impasse between the Congress party which demanded independence for a united India and the Muslim League which demanded the creation of Pakistan as a condition precedent to the transfer of power, the Sikhs were on the horns of a dilemma. Any partition of the Punjab on the basis of communities would divide the Sikhs into two equal halves. Sociologically the Sikhs were allied to the Hindus

and politically to the Indian National Congress. Their aversion to the demand for a division of the country turned to animosity for Pakistan as communal riots broke out all over northern India. Starting from Calcutta in August 1946, they spread to East Bengal, Bihar and the Punjab. When the time came for them to decide whether or not they would accept the partition, hundreds of Sikh villages in north-western Punjab had been destroyed by Muslim mobs and many thousand refugees had fled to safety to eastern and southern districts. The Sikhs had no choice but to accept partition, and, when Pakistan was set up in August 1947, to abandon their homes, lands, temples, in fact every material possession and flee to India.

The partition of the Punjab and independence had four important consequences for the Sikh community.

- (1) Nearly 2½ million Sikhs poured out of Pakistan into India. These Sikhs were the most prosperous peasantry of India and owned rich agricultural lands in canal colonies. They changed places with landless Muslim tenantry and had to take the little that was available in East Punjab. This resulted in a substantial increase in the number of Sikhs in certain contiguous regions. The economically disgruntled refugees in compact Sikh areas gave birth to the idea of an autonomous Sikh State.
- (2) Ruling families which wielded considerable influence in the affairs of the community before 1947 were eliminated as a political force particularly when Pepsu (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) was merged with the Punjab.

Although many members of these families were able to win their way into elected assemblies and councils, this was largely due to their ability to square the Congress party caucus rather than to their influence or popularity. In Marxist terminology, effective power passed from the feudal to the petit bourgeois class—the small peasant proprietor and the petty tradesman.

- (3) In secular India, privileges enjoyed by certain minority communities were abolished. Sikhs who were up till then given preferential treatment in recruitment to the armed forces and civil services had to compete with other communities on the basis of merit. Sikhs who observed Sikh forms and symbols for the economic benefits that accrued began to give them up.
- (4) The abolition of separate electorates and the introduction of joint electorates made the Sikhs who were a minority in most districts of the Punjab politically subservient to the Hindu majority. The Sikh communal point of view came to be expressed in purely communal organisations like the S.G.P.C. or in the few areas where they outnumbered the Hindus.

For some years to come, Sikh politics is likely to be concerned with the control of the S.G.P.C., the establishment of the Punjabi-speaking state and measures to preserve the separate identity of the Sikh people.

### *The Punjabi Suba*

The Indian Constitution recognises 14 major languages

including Punjabi. On the principle of having states boundaries drawn on linguistic basis, all languages spoken in compact geographical regions have been given administrative units of their own. The only exception is Punjabi. The Sikhs construe this as discrimination against their community and have been agitating for a Punjabi Suba. In recent years two mass civil disobedience movements have been launched resulting in the imprisonment of over 50,000 passive resisters. The agitation has been suspended owing to the emergency caused by the Chinese invasion in October 1962.

The Punjabi Suba as envisaged by the Sikhs will comprise of the Punjabi speaking districts of East Punjab and Ganganagar district of Bikaner. It will be over 35,000 square miles—hence larger than Kerala or Nagaland. It will have over 12 million people of which a little more than half will be Sikhs.

PART III

*THE CULTURAL HERITAGE*

## PUNJABI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

PUNJABI is spoken by more than twenty million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs living in India and Pakistan. Thus its literary heritage comprises writings of people of three different faiths using three different scripts—Arabic, Devanagri and Gurmukhi. It has consequently been enriched by the incorporation of concepts current in writings of other languages employing these scripts, e.g. Arabic, Persian, Urdu and the many off-shoots of Sanskrit. This spicy pot-pourri is further flavoured by dialects which give Punjabi its peculiar robustness and masculine vigour.

It is not easy to fix dates of any language, particularly one whose ancestry is as varied as that of Punjabi. Some scholars take it back to the 12th century, some place it even earlier. In the absence of authentic records, it is safer to begin with known writers whose work forms a part of our literature. Of these there are two main groups, the Muslim Sufis and the Sikh Gurus. The two streams mingled at a fairly early date and became as it were the parents of the language.

*The Sufis*

Although the Sufis followed closely on the Muslim invasions of India, their impact on Indian life and letters had to wait until they had learnt the language and customs of the people. By the time they did that, their religious ardour had been considerably cooled and they



were willing to accept and even revere faiths other than their own. Sufi headquarters in the Punjab were at Pakpattan near Multan; their impact on religious thought was therefore more pronounced in this region. The Sikh Gurus, particularly the founder Guru Nanak, studied them with as much reverence as he did the Hindu saints of the Bhakti movement.

The Sufis like the Bhaktas looked upon the relationship between God and man as that between a lover and his sweetheart separated by Maya or illusion. Separation could only be overcome by an intense longing and loving. This was the constant theme in most of their writing. It was expressed by Bulhey Shah in an oft-quoted verse:

Love hath ever a new spring.  
 I am tired of the words of the Vedas,  
 Of the learning of the Koran.  
 I am tired of prayer. Obeisance  
 Hath bruised my forehead.  
 I found not God in Hindu holy places  
 Nor on pilgrimage to Mecca.  
 Only he that hath found love finds Light.

This theme recurs in the writings of the Sikh Gurus and is also the motif behind the three great epics of the Punjab, Heer-Ranjha, Sassi-Punnoo and Sohni-Mahiwal. In all of them, after a lifetime of separation and longing lovers meet in death. Echoes of this abound in the poems of Bhai Vir Singh who is the biggest landmark in Punjabi poetry.

The Sufis lived in villages and their vocabulary remained refreshingly rustic. Their similes and metaphors came from the day-to-day activities of peasants: plough-

ing, weaving, churning of butter-milk etc. and the cross-currents of joint family life, e.g. the loves of sisters for their brothers and their tensions with their wives; the tyranny of the mothers-in-law and the girls' longing for the paternal home etc., etc. The Sikh Gurus, particularly Guru Nanak, made frequent use of these familiar occupations and situations to convey their message.

Another notable contribution of the Sufis to Punjabi writing was the introduction of certain forms of verse which were current in Persian literature, e.g. the *Siharfi* and the *Kafi* and the popularisation of *Bara-Mah*. The *Bara-Mah* or the twelve months gave poets full liberty to describe the beauty of the seasons and string along anything else they wanted to say. Some of the richest descriptions of nature in Punjabi poetry owe their origin to the practice of composing *Bara-Mahs*. Warris Shah has a delightful one in his *Heer-Ranjha* and that of Guru Nanak incorporated in the Granth Sahib is probably the most beautiful of all in the language. The *Siharfi* or the acrostic, where a verse starts off with a letter of the alphabet as its cue, was used by the Sikh Gurus, but was abandoned soon after and never revived.

### *Writings of the Sikh Gurus*

Most of the Sikh Gurus employed verse for expressing their thoughts and the writings of Nanak, Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, Arjun and Tegh Bahadur are preserved in the Granth Sahib. The two outstanding contributors to the Sikh scriptures are the first Guru Nanak and the fifth Guru Arjun.

Guru Nanak preached through his poetry. Most didactic poetry suffers from a cramping narrowness

imposed by the purpose for which it is written, but Guru Nanak's poetry displays a remarkable freedom of expression. The beauty of pastoral Punjab: the ripening corn fields, the break of dawn and the awakening of birds, the graceful flight of deer in the woodlands, the majesty of monsoon clouds and the music of rainfall, aroused him to religious and poetic frenzy. His *Bara-Mah* which is amongst the last of his compositions shows how Nanak blended his teaching with his love of nature. The following verses are taken from spring, summer and the monsoon:

*Spring*

It is spring and all is seemly.  
The bumble-bee is on the blossom  
And the woodlands are in flower  
But there is a sorrow in my soul.

The Lord my Master is away.  
If the husband comes not home, how can a wife  
find peace of mind?  
Sorrows of separation waste away her body.  
The Koel calls in the mango grove,  
Its notes are full of joy.  
But there is a sorrow in my soul.

The honey-bee hovers about the blossoming bough  
A messenger of life and hope;  
But O Mother of mine, 'tis like death to me  
For there is a sorrow in my soul.

How shall I banish sorrow and find blessed peace?

Spake the Guru:

Welcome the Lord in your soul  
As a wife welcomes her master when she loves him.

*Summer*

In the summer the sun scorches.  
 Skies are hot.  
 The earth burns like an oven.  
 Waters give up their vapours.  
 It burns and scorches relentlessly.

The sun's chariot passes the mountain tops.  
 Long shadows stretch across the land  
 And the cicada calls from the glades.  
 The beloved seeks the cool of the evening.  
 If the comfort she seeks be in falsehood,  
 There will be sorrow in store for her.  
 If it be in truth,  
 Hers will be a life of joy.

Spake the Guru:

My life and life's ending are at the will of the Lord.  
 To Him have I surrendered my soul.

*Monsoon*

The season of rain has come.  
 My heart is full of joy,  
 My body and soul yearn for the Master  
 But the Master is gone abroad.  
 If He return not, I shall die pining for Him.

The lightning strikes terror in my heart.  
 I stand all alone in my courtyard  
 In solitude and sorrow.

O Mother of mine, I stand on the brink of death.  
 Without the Lord I have no hunger nor no sleep  
 I cannot suffer the clothes on my body.

Spake the Guru:

She alone is the true wife  
Who loses herself in the Lord.

And again:

Lost in a maze of falsehood  
I waste my wanton youth.  
River and land are one expanse of water  
For it is the monsoon the season of merry-making.

It rains  
The nights are dark  
Frogs croak contentment  
Peacocks cry with joy  
The *papeeha* calls—pecoo peeco

The fangs of serpents that crawl,  
The stings of mosquitoes that fly, are full of venom.  
The seas have burst their bounds in the ecstasy  
Of fulfilment.

I alone am bereft of joy, whither  
Shall I go?

Spake the Guru:

Ask the Guru the way  
He knoweth the path which leads to the Lord.

Guru Arjun expresses the same deep sentiments in his poetry as Guru Nanak. His verse abounds with jewelled phrases and has a haunting melody produced by the use of alliteration and repetition of words. A beautifully worded hymn craves for union with God:

‘O blissful night, long be thy hours  
 O wretched sleep, be brief.  
 I have a tryst with the Lord I love  
 I long for the dust of His feet.’

*Sukhmani* is Guru Arjun’s most popular composition. He is undoubtedly the most sung of all poets of the language as over 2,000 of the verses of the Granth Sahib, which is the greatest work of Punjabi literature, are from his pen.

Guru Gobind Singh was perhaps the most erudite of all the Sikh Gurus and was familiar with both Hindu mythology and Islamic theology. He was a patron of art and letters, and had fifty-two poets in his own court. He wrote in Braj and Persian. Unlike his predecessors, he did not restrict himself to expressing the glory of God in his verse. Guru Gobind Singh’s writings have moral as well as political significance. The martial spirit which he infused amongst his followers is expressed in the vigorous poetry of his famous *Zafarnama*—Epistle of Victory, addressed to Emperor Aurangzeb. His *Jaap Sahib* is to this day a source of inspiration to his followers. An example of the vigour of Gobind Singh’s composition is the following:

Eternal God, Thou art our shield,  
 The dagger, knife, the sword we wield.  
 To us protector there is given  
 The timeless, deathless, Lord of Heaven,  
 To us all-steel’s unvanquished might,  
 To us all-time’s resistless flight,  
 But chiefly Thou, protector brave,  
 All-steel, will Thine own servant save.

No great literature was produced by the Sikhs during their struggle for power nor during the brief period of

Sikh rule when more store was set on' Persian than on Punjabi. But while they were busy conquering and consolidating their kingdom, two Muslims, Bulhey Shah (1680-1758) and Warris Shah (1735-98), wrote verse which is the finest example of romantic and mystic Punjabi poetry. Warris Shah's epic *Heer-Ranjha* is the most popular work of Punjabi literature. Its verses are recited and sung in every village in the province even to this day.

### CONTEMPORARY PUNJABI LITERATURE AND ART

#### *Poetry*

The band of writers who led the renaissance of Punjabi writing after the annexation were connected with the Singh Sabha movement to which we have made reference in an earlier chapter. Of these, the most important was Vir Singh (1872-1957). In the eighty-five years of his life, Vir Singh produced more than perhaps any other Indian writer, dead or living. His works would certainly take as much room as a full set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. He wrote fiction, drama, poetry and commentaries on the sacred texts.

Vir Singh's writing has to be viewed with reference to the social and political conditions at the end of the nineteenth century, when he started writing. His novels which made his name known in millions of homes were written at a time when the Punjabis were beginning to doubt the achievements of their ancestors. English historians harped on the crude and corrupt Sikh rule, which they had replaced by an 'enlightened' one. Sanskrit scholars belittled the religion of the Sikhs as a poor imitation of

the Vedic and ridiculed its forms and symbols as barbarous. Vir Singh's novels, *Sundari*, *Vijay Singh*, *Satwant Kaur* and *Baba Naudh Singh* had as their central theme the heroism and chivalry of the Sikhs and the ethical excellence of their religion. This was set in contrast to the servility of the masses and the oppression of the Pathan and Mughal rulers. The Sikhs devoured Vir Singh's novels with enthusiasm and gratitude. But with the passing of that peculiar mental state, the novels lost their appeal. To the present-day reader, they appear somewhat insipid. Their place is not in literature but in history.

Vir Singh himself gave up writing fiction and took to translating and explaining the scriptures in a series of pamphlets, and in his weekly paper the *Khalsa Samachar*. Along with these appeared his poems which gave him the most honoured place among Punjabi poets.

Vir Singh first experimented in blank verse. A long poem, *Rana Surat Singh*, was published in 1905. The theme, as usual, was religion. His technique and mastery over the language was impressive. No one had successfully written blank verse in Punjabi before; Vir Singh turned out a work of sustained excellence where alliteration and onomatopoeia, rhythm and repetition, produced a lilting melody with all the languor and sensuousness of a summer afternoon. Thereafter Vir Singh wrote the lives of two Sikh Gurus: *Kalgidhar Chamatkar*, the life of Guru Gobind, followed by *Guru Nanak Chamatkar*.

In between these biographies, Vir Singh published several collections of verse employing a short metre hitherto not used by Punjabi poets. The most popular of these were in the form of rubaiyat (familiar to the readers of Omar Khayyam). In these he expressed his philosophy



and mysticism, where the love of God and of human beings, the spiritual and the sensual, moral and divine, moved in a colourful kaleidoscope, beautiful and baffling. There was always an underlying sense of humility, at times almost masochistic:

Thou didst pluck and tear me from the branch,  
 Held me, breathed the fragrance,  
 And—cast me away.  
 Thus discarded, trodden underfoot and mingled with  
 the dust  
 All I remember—and with gratitude  
 Is the memory of the touch.

And again—in one of his most quoted verses:

In a dream you came to me,  
 I leapt to hold you in my embrace,  
 It was but fantasy I could not hold.  
 And my arms ached with longing.  
 Then I rush to clasp your feet.  
 To lay my head thereon.  
 Even these I could not reach  
 For you were high and I was low.

In another verse Vir Singh expressed his belief in the superiority of faith over reason:

I made my mind a beggar's bowl.  
 I begged the bread of learning door to door;  
 With crumbs that fell from houses of learning  
 Did I cram it.  
 It was heavy,  
 I was proud,  
 I was a Pandit.  
 I strove to walk in the clouds,

But even on the earth I stumbled.  
 One day I went to my Guru  
 And placed the bowl before him as an offering.  
 'Dirt', he said, 'dirt'.  
 And turned it upside down.  
 He threw my crumbs away,  
 Scrubbed his bowl with sand,  
 Rinsed it with water,  
 Cleansed it of the filth of learning.

Most people's creative years are over by the time they reach sixty. Not so Vir Singh's. He continued writing till a few months before his death. He did not belong to the school of fiery poets who are consumed in the flames of their own making. The life he led and the poetry he wrote was in the puritanical tradition—chaste in language, clean in thought, warm in expression and inevitably, long-lived. His *Merey Saiyan Jio* made the name of Vir Singh known to people other than those who speak Punjabi. He was given the Sahitya Akademi Award for the most outstanding book published in Punjabi.

Even amongst the younger generation, poetry remains the most popular form of literary expression. Hardly a month goes by without the emergence of a new poet. Newspapers and magazines devote a large part of their space to poems and a Punjabi Kavi darbar will still draw a larger crowd than a political or a religious meeting. Most of this new poetry is, however, of indifferent quality. Two exceptions of the rule of mediocrity are Mohan Singh and Amrita Pritam.

Mohan Singh, editor of the monthly magazine *Panj Darya*, made a promising start with his *Savey Patr*, *Kusumbra* and *Adhavatay*. He came to be justifiably recognised as

the best of the younger poets. His later works—particularly *Kuch Such*—published after partition, showed a strong left-wing bias, where political emotion was given precedence over poetical form. But Mohan Singh's Marxism did not go beyond championing the underdog and an exhortation to activity. He has once more been able to recapture the spontaneous beauty of his earlier work and if the standard of output continues, he may well become one of the greatest poets in the language—for many summers lie before him. In a recent and unnoticed ghazal he expressed his 'revolutionary' sentiment:

The pitch-black within the pitcher has burst  
Spilling the milk-white of the moonlight;  
'Tis time we talked of a new dawn  
And gave up the gossiping of the night.

I grant that autumn's touch  
Hath robbed some leaves of their sap.  
Sorrow not for what is lost and gone.  
With hope anew fill thy lap.

How long on the ancient vault of heaven  
Idle fantasies draw and hold them dear?  
Come let us caress the earth's tresses  
Come let us talk of something near.

Amrita Pritam has been the rage of littérateurs in both the Punjabs, the Pakistani and the Indian. She is not a "progressive", nor has she a message to impart. She writes poetry for no other reason except that she must. She is not erudite, but her poems have a naiveté and charm of simplicity which more than compensate for the absence of thought-content. There is a soft refrain of the folk-

lore and ballad in most of her writings. Sometimes the love for the jewelled phrase, the lilt of words carries her off the tangent and the central theme gets confused. In one poem—one of her own favourites—the lover addresses his sweetheart:

Awake, my love!  
 Thy eyes are heavy with dreams,  
 Dreams of days gone by,  
 When breezes were with odours woven  
 (Does that make thee sigh?)  
 Out of black of the moonless night  
 Let a myriad stars thy tresses light.

The poem which has spread Amrita Pritam's conquest across the Pakistan border is addressed to Warris Shah, who has become symbolic of the good old days when Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs lived happily as brothers. Her poem is a lament on the partition of the province and the massacres that followed in its wake:

O comforter of the sorrowing, rise and see thy Punjab,  
 Its fields are strewn with corpses, blood runs in the  
 Chenab.

Our five rivers are poisoned by the same hand  
 That uses the poisoned water to irrigate the land.

Popularity has come Amrita's way somewhat easily and she frequently seeks applause at the cost of quality. (The opening lines of most of her poems are usually the best; thereafter there is a sad tapering off). But she is young and with a great future before her. She has also been honoured by the Sahitya Akademi with an award for *Sunehre*.

### *Prose*

The outstanding figure in contemporary Punjabi prose writing is Gurbaksh Singh. Gurbaksh Singh started life as an engineer and his studies took him to the United States. After his return he abandoned engineering for a mission to propagate modernism. He set up a community town called Preet Nagar and started putting across his ideas through a monthly magazine, *Preet Lari*. Gurbaksh Singh's book of essays, *Sanvin Padhri Zindagi*, established him as the best essayist and writer of Punjabi prose. He has been steadily moving leftwards in his politics and has been to China, Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia attending 'Peace' conferences. Although much of his writing is now avowedly propagandist, it is undeniably of good calibre, having been enriched by experience of the world outside and reflecting modern trends in foreign literature.

### *Novels and Short Stories*

Punjabi novelists have produced very little of any significance. The best-known amongst them is Nanak Singh who has written more than 30 novels and continues to produce one or two every year. Although his stories are interesting, they are far-fetched and his language leaves much to be desired.

One form of creative writing in which Punjabis have achieved some success is the short story. The general standard of short stories which appear in Punjabi magazines is good. The best of the Punjabi story tellers is Kartar Singh Duggal. He has published over a hundred short stories and a large number of novels which are really collections of short stories strung together. His

*Naunh Tey Mas* will remain a landmark in Punjabi fiction for some years to come. It has a masterly portrayal of peasant character and a skilful handling of a theme where pastoral peace rapidly moves to a tragic climax of communal massacres. It is refreshingly free from communal bias. The same standard of objectivity is retained in a later work, *Larai Nahin*. Unlike other contemporaries who are Marxist and agnostic, Duggal has veered distinctly towards religion. His latest collection of short stories *Karamat* indicates a fervent attachment to the faith.

### *Punjabi Drama and Stage*

There is virtually no Punjabi Drama because there is no stage in the Punjab. Lots of people write plays most of which are unplayable being in effect long dialogues without any dramatic content. A few that get acted are of very poor quality.

However, three names deserve mention. Prof. I. C. Nanda who at the behest of the English social worker, Norah Richards, wrote and produced plays to put across progressive ideas. His *Subhadra* was written to encourage widow remarriage, and the most celebrated, *Lily Da Vivah* to make fun of dowry seekers. Balwant Gargi holds the current Punjabi stage with several plays, some of which have been translated and enacted in Russia. The most popular dramatist is Sheila Bhatia whose ballet version of Warris Shah's *Heer-Ranjha* has been the most successful venture of the type. Both Gargi and Sheila Bhatia have close leftist affiliations and look to communist-sponsored groups to put their works on the stage.

### *Sikh Painters*

There is no distinct school of Sikh painting but Sikh artists have made notable contribution to the different schools that flourished in northern India at different times—notably the Pahari and Kangra. Sikh artists and craftsmen were employed to paint frescoes and decorations in several historical monuments. Examples of their work can be seen in the mausoleum of Ranjit Singh and in some of the temples. During British rule a family of Sikh artists of whom one Kapur Singh was the most prominent, produced etchings and line drawings. Many of these are now in the archives of the Punjab Government.

The most outstanding Indian painter of modern times was Amrita Shergil (1913-41). Although Amrita received her art training in Paris, the traditional Indian schools, particularly the Rajput and the Pahari, influenced her. In the short span of less than ten years of mature work, Amrita produced canvasses which put her amongst the best contemporary painters of her time. Her paintings have been acquired by the Government of India and are hung in the National Gallery in New Delhi.

Two Sikh artists whose work has received attention are S. G. Thakur Singh and Sobha Singh. Thakur Singh paints landscapes and monuments very much in the manner of coloured photographs. His portraits show the influence of the Bengali school. Sobha Singh has painted many scenes from Sikh history and Punjabi folk tales. His work is popular amongst the masses.

There are a large number of young men and women painting and sculpting. The only one who has risen above the level of mediocrity is Serbjeet Singh (b. 1925). He has

painted a number of large canvasses depicting the Kulu valley and the rugged mountain scenery of the Indo-Tibetan frontier. Unlike other Indian artists, his lines are bold and his colour combinations daring. Serbjeet Singh is a film producer by profession and paints only in his spare time.

### *Folk Songs and Dances*

There is nothing particularly Sikh about the folk songs and dances of the Punjab. All three communities, the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs sing the same songs to the same tunes and dance the same dances to the same rhythm. There are lullabys (*lori*) and songs sung at weddings (*ghori*); there are songs of love and separation of the sort there are in all languages of the world. However, there is something distinctive in Punjabi folk songs. Among no other people in the world is a sister's pride in her brother and a daughter's love for her mother sung so often and with so much feeling. In addition there are *Bolis* and *Tappas* which are also-typical of the State. But the most often sung theme of Punjabi folk song is the immortal love story of Ranjha put in beautiful verse by Warris Shah and Damodar.

### *Folk Dances*

The most famous folk dance of the Punjab is the *Bhangra*. After the wheat crop has been harvested, the men tie bells on their ankles and put on white shirts, brightly coloured lungis and fancy waistcoats with large mother-of-pearl buttons. They form a ring round a group of two or three men who beat the drums and set the tempo of the dance. The men go round in a circle



stamping to the beat of the drum. They clap their hands, turn and twist their bodies with gay abandon. The dancing is interspersed with singing when the dancing stops and one man sings a couple of lines at the top of his voice. As soon as he finishes, the dance is taken up with greater energy and speed with the men raising their arms to the skies and yelling 'Ho, Ho, Ho' in unison or shouting encouragement 'O, Balley, Balley', or just making as much noise as they can. The *Bhangra* goes on for hours with new people joining in as the others drop off. It ends in a frenzied whirl when everyone is utterly exhausted.

Traditionally the *Bhangra* is associated with the wheat harvest and was danced on moonlit nights, but these days it is performed on any joyous occasion.

The *Giddha* is the feminine counterpart of the *Bhangra*. Here the dancers form a ring round a girl with a drum (the drum is often dispensed with) and go round in circles in mincing steps with hands raised up to their shoulders or clapping to keep time. They pirouette and strike their palms against their neighbours'. As in the *Bhangra* the dancing is interspersed with singing.

PART IV

*THE SIKH WAY OF LIFE*

## THE SIKH WAY OF LIFE

**T**HE vast majority of Sikhs are peasants living in scattered villages and hamlets. Being reasonably prosperous by standards prevalent in India, most of them have nice, comfortable homes with courtyards where their cattle are tethered. Families of sons of one father continue to live jointly under the governance of the mother until the land is divided.

A Sikh village is like any other village in the Punjab except for the Gurdwara which usually stands in the centre. It can be recognised from a long distance because of its tall flag-pole draped in a yellow sock and the triangular yellow flag with the Sikh symbol consisting of a quoit with a dagger in the centre and two swords crossing beneath.

Sikh peasants eat the healthiest of food. Although they are not vegetarians by conviction, few can afford to eat meat except on special occasions like weddings. (Their favourite meat is the goat). The Sikh's staple diet is wheat, buffalo milk and milk products. They are great ones for eating curds and drinking butter-milk. During the winter months, mashed mustard plant in the form of spinach capped with liberal blobs of butter supplement the wheat cakes. This diet is the chief reason for the Sikh's excellent physique and virility. It explains the Sikh's prodigious stamina, his dominance in the Indian world of sports and his fighting qualities. An English dietician carried out an interesting experiment with albino rats. He fed groups

with the food of different Indian communities. At the end of eighty days the rats eating the Sikh diet weighed more than the rats eating the diet of any other community, Pathan, Rajput, Maratha or Gurkha.

### *Sikh Temple*

A Sikh temple is called a *gurdwara*—the gateway-of-the-guru. The central object of worship in the *gurdwara* is the Granth Sahib. The holy book is placed on a low cot and draped in cloths, usually of embroidered silks. Above it is an awning as the emblem of royalty. The Granth Sahib is ceremonially opened every morning and wrapped up and put to rest in the evenings. Both men and women read it and while reading, they or somebody standing beside them, wave a flywhisk made of white yak's hair.

Before entering a *gurdwara* the worshipper has to take off his shoes (in bigger ones, wash his feet as well) and have his or her head covered. People generally avoid stepping on the threshold because there is dust from the feet of pilgrims on it and is therefore too sacred to be trod upon. The worshipper will collect the dust by running the flat of his palms on the threshold and spread it on his forehead. Then he goes up a gangway leading to the Holy Book, places his offering of money on the cloth draping it, goes down on the knees and makes obeisance by rubbing the forehead on the ground. He then retraces his steps without turning his back on the Granth and joins the congregation—men on the right besides the party of singers and women at the back and on the left side of the Book.

Four gurdwaras associated with Guru Gobind Singh have been marked with special sanctity and are known as the four *takhts* (thrones of the guru). One is at Patna where he was born; the second at Anandpur in Ambala District where the first ceremony of baptism was performed; the third is the Akal Takht (the throne of the timeless one) in the Golden Temple at Amritsar from where all important edicts issue to the community, and the fourth at Nanded in Hyderabad, Deccan, where the Guru died. In addition, there are many other historic gurdwaras to which Sikhs go on pilgrimage. There are many associated with Guru Nanak as his birthplace at Nanakana Sahib and a big one at the site of his encounter with a Muslim divine at Hasan Abdal. These and nearly 200 others, including the site of the martyrdom of the 15th Guru Arjun at Lahore are now in Pakistan. On the Indian side, the place of the execution of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh at Fatehgarh in Patiala and the site of the imprisonment and martyrdom of the 9th Guru Tegh Bahadur in Chandni Chowk of Delhi are amongst the most frequented.

### *Sikh Festivals*

Sikhs observe all the festivals celebrated by the Hindus of northern India. They wear yellow on Basant Panchmi, or the Spring Festival, sprinkle coloured water on Holi, assemble at the Baisakhi fair and light lamps at Diwali. Only the religious part of the ceremonial takes place in the gurdwara instead of the Hindu temple. In addition to these, they have a few others of their own. Of these six are important, viz. the birthdays of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, the martyrdoms of the 5th Guru

Arjun, the 9th Guru Tegh Bahadur and the two sons of Gobind; the day of the founding of the Khalsa and Hola Mohalla chiefly celebrated at Anandpur soon after Holi.

The usual form is to take out the Granth Sahib in procession through the city. The Holy Book is placed on top of a flower-bedecked van. On either side two men carry the Sikh ensigns (Nishan Sahib). Five men, representing the first five converts, march in front of the van with drawn swords. The women walk behind the van. The men group themselves into parties of singers and go in front. With them are the usual paraphernalia of Indian processions: brass bands, pipers, acrobats, wrestlers and sword and stick experts. Another prominent feature of Sikh celebrations is the mass feeding of worshippers at the *guru ka langar* (the kitchen of the Guru). Sometimes as many as 50,000 people are fed on these occasions.

### *Sikh Ceremonies*

**BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD:** There are no recognised ceremonies connected with the birth of a child. Among some sections of Sikhs it is customary to recite the first five verses of the morning prayer in the ears of a newborn babe (very much like the Muslim ceremony of whispering the *fatiha*) but the practice is by no means universal.

The christening or naming ceremony is well established. The Granth is opened at random and the child has to be found a name beginning with the first letter of the first word on the top of the page.

Sikhs of north-western Punjab have ceremonial and

festivity when a child's hair is plaited for the first time (Gundana) just as the Hindus celebrate the first shaving of a child's head (Mundan). Among some families, a child's initiation to reading the Granth Sahib (Charni lagana—attachment to feet of the Lord) is a matter of elaborate ceremonial at the gurdwara followed by feeding of the poor; amongst others, a child is introduced to the Granth without any fuss.

**PAHUL OR BAPTISM:** When boys and girls attain puberty and are old enough to understand the obligation of their faith, they are baptised. The ritual connected with this ceremony is the same as performed by Guru Gobind Singh at the first baptismal in A.D. 1699. The baptism is performed before the congregation. Five orthodox Sikhs are chosen to initiate the new convert. *Amrit* is prepared by mixing sugar in water and stirring it with a *Khanda* (double-edged dagger) to the recitation of selected passages of the scriptures including Guru Gobind Singh's composition the Jaap Sahib. The initiate then takes the vows of the Khalsa faith. Each vow is read out loudly and the novice signifies his acceptance by bowing before the Granth. Palmfuls of *Amrit* are splashed in his face with the cry 'Sri Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Sri Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh.'

The Pahul, like the thread ceremony amongst the Hindus, is looked upon as a new birth and sometimes the baptised person take on another name. The pahul not only imposes all the obligations of the faith, it also confers rights. Thereafter a person has access to the holiest shrine—like the Akal Takht in the Golden Temple at Amritsar where the sacred relics of the Gurus are placed. He or she has also then the right to enter into matrimony.

**MARRIAGE:** A Sikh marriage is patterned after the Hindu and differs from it only in minor detail. The important difference is that the religious texts which the Sikhs use are not Vedic but from the Granth Sahib. A Sikh wedding is described as *Anand Karaj*—the ceremony of bliss. The bridegroom leaves his home on horseback accompanied by his friends and relations (Barat or Junj). They arrive at the bride's house in a procession with music. There they are received by the male relatives of the bride (Milni) and entertained to dinner. The bridegroom is taken indoors and is subjected to a lot of leg pulling by the sisters and girl friends of the bride. In the case of arranged marriages this is often the first time the bridal pair see each other.

A Sikh wedding takes place before sunrise. In the early hours of the dawn, professional singers (ragis) sing hymns prescribed for morning worship (*Asa di war*). When the morning hymns are over, the pair are asked to come and sit in front of the Granth. A priest first tells them of the obligations of married life. Thereafter he reads the hymns on marriage from the Granth. The ragis follow this by singing the words. The bridegroom steps in front holding one end of a sash while the bride holds the other end and follows him. The brothers and near male relatives of the bride help her round the Granth behind her groom. These circumambulations (*lawan*) round the Granth are repeated four times and the couple are pronounced man and wife.

A few hours after the marriage the bride leaves her parental home (*doli*) with her husband. In many peasant communities where people are married very young, the marriage ceremony is in effect only one of betrothal and



the bride returns to her parents until she attains puberty. The marriage is consummated when she leaves her home for the second time (*muklawā*).

Although the ceremony of *lawan* described above is the only one prescribed for Sikhs, amongst the peasantry the custom of taking women—usually widows—under protection by simply casting the mantle (*chaddar*) is prevalent. The children of such unions are recognised as legitimate.

**DEATH:** There is no prescribed ceremonial on the occasion of death but some hymns have been chosen to be recited when death takes place. The only strict injunction is against lamentation and breast-beating which is very common in northern India. The mourners sit around the deceased and recite the morning prayer.

Before being taken for cremation, the corpse is bathed and dressed in the emblems of the faith. The Sikhs cremate their dead and, as with the Hindus, the funeral pyre is lit by the son or nearest male relative. The ashes are thrown into rivers, if possible, in the Beas at Kiratpur. Sikhs are forbidden from erecting memorials to the dead or celebrating death anniversaries at *Sradhs*. A period of mourning varying from 4 to 10 days depending on the age of the deceased is prescribed during which people come to condole. It is customary to remove all furniture from the house and sit and sleep on the floor. On the last day of mourning friends and relatives assemble in the house to participate in the singing of hymns and recitation of the *Granth Sahib*. If the occasion is the death of the head of the household, his eldest son is officially recognised as the new head by having a turban

tied on his head in front of the assembled friends and relatives.

### *Sikh Names*

All Sikh men are named 'Singh' and all Sikh women 'Kaur'; but all Singhs and Kauras are not Sikhs. The name Singh which means lion and its female counterpart 'Kaur' were common amongst the Hindu martial classes like the Rajputs and Gurkhas long before Guru Gobind Singh made them obligatory for all his followers. The Guru had two objects in view when he made the ordinance. The easiest way of telling a person's caste was by his name. In making all Sikhs 'Singhs' he made them into one casteless fraternity. The choice of 'Singh' and 'Kaur' taken as they were from a fighting people had obvious psychological value.

The fact that all Sikhs are Singhs does not cause as much confusion as one might believe. With popular first names like Balwant, Dalip, Harbans, Joginder, Jaswant etc. it is usual to attach another, e.g. the name of the village as in Pratap Singh *Kairon* or Sohan Singh *Bhakna*. Quite often descriptive words are coined for the incumbents to distinguish them. Thus two Pritam Singhs living in the same street may after some time accept third names descriptive of their appearance to differentiate them, e.g. Pritam Singh Dhiddal (one-with-a-paunch) and Pritam Singh Ainki (one-who-wears glasses). Following the English custom the practice of using two initials before a name has been adopted by the more anglicised, e.g. A. S. Malik (Maliks are Ahluwalias) or B. S. Grewal (Grewals are a tribe of Jats), or, in the American form Dalip S. Saund (Saunds are Ram-

garhias). This re-introduction of the caste in the name is contrary to orthodox tradition. The literati usually have poetic names under which they write and which they use as appendages to their real names, e.g. Sohan Singh 'Josh' (fervour), Hira Singh 'Dard' (suffering) or Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir' (wayfarer).

Amongst Sikhs, the first names for men and women are common: only the suffix 'Singh' and 'Kaur' distinguish the sex, e.g. a Sundar Singh's sister can be a Sundar Kaur. Sikh girls of the middle classes have begun to take on Hindu names like Usha, Uma, Kamla etc. without the suffix 'Kaur' because such names are exclusively effeminate.

The Sikhs are no more conscious of the meaning of names they give to their children than parents of any other community. The permanent suffix 'Singh'—lion, can result in many ludicrous combinations, e.g. Gopal Singh—the lion of the cow-herds, Santa Singh, the saintly lion, or, like the name of the author himself, the happy lion. Some names are however given with the meaning in mind. Thus a child born at his mother's parents (Nanakey) will often be named Nanak as was the founder of the faith, or, if it is a girl, Nanaki. Then there are a set of wishful names. During Mughal rule many boys were named Delhi-Tor-Singh (the-lion-who-will-break-Delhi); during the British rule such names became London-Tor-Singh. These sorts of names were current amongst Nihang Singhs. Because of the military tradition, names like Jarnail (General), Karnail (Colonel) or Kaptan (Captain) became current. Among the peasants a fair child is often named as Angrez (English), or a Bugga (White). There are some names which are not

found amongst the sophisticated city dwellers and obtain only among rustics, e.g. Shanghara, Jhimma, Balkar.

Sikh names like the faith derive both from Muslim and Hindu sources. Thus names like Iqbal, Nawab, Qurban, Mubarak are Persian and of Muslim origin. The majority of Sikh names are however of Sanskrit and of Hindu lineage: Ranjit, Surjit, Daljit (victors in battle) or Baldev (the god of power). Even English names have now come into vogue amongst the princely families. Peter, David, Billy or Anne, Pearl, and Honey are known to be used in preference to the real Sikh ones. And an ambitious but anglicised father living in Delhi is known to have named his four sons Gentle Singh, Humble Singh, Noble Singh and Simple Singh.

#### *Modes of Address*

The Sikh equivalent of Mr or Esquire is Sardar. A married Sikh woman is a Sardarni. When one does not know the name, it is best to address a Sikh as Sardar Sahib and his wife as Sardarni Sahiba. These modes of address are current amongst the upper classes. Amongst the peasantry and the working class a man is referred to as Bhaiji or Bhai Sahib (brother) and a woman as Bibiji (mistress) or Bhainji (sister). Amongst the aristocracy the head of the family is addressed as Raja Sahib and his wife as Rani Sahiba; the elder son is addressed as Tikka Sahib and his wife as Tikkarani; and the young sons as Kunwars and their wives as Kunwarranis.

One also comes across professional titles attached to names. The commonest is Gyani for a scholar or theologian as for Gyani Kartar Singh—the political

leader. The Akali leader Tara Singh is referred to as Masterji or Master Tara Singh because he was once a schoolmaster.

### *The Turban*

Many Indians wear turbans in preference to hats but Sikh men because of their unshorn hair do so invariably. And because of the hair their turbans have a distinct pattern.

A Sikh boy may change from plaited hair to a knot on the head and begin to tie a turban from any age starting from five years upwards. After a year or two of turban tying by his parents, he begins to tie it himself. It is remarkable how in this simple operation of winding between three to six yards of muslin so many different styles can emerge.

The colour of a turban does not signify anything except that pure white is worn at mourning, pink at weddings and bright yellow at the Basant festival (in honour of the mustard flower which is in blossom at the time). The practice of wearing black to signify sorrow was started by the Akalis during the days of their agitation against British rule. This has now changed to steel blue—the favourite colour of Guru Gobind Singh's soldiers—and is worn by followers of Master Tara Singh.

There are various styles of tying turbans. The peasants usually wrap them over their heads without any concern for their form. In the cities two or three distinct forms can be detected. The most popular is the Patiala style with the two sides of the turban meeting in a sharp angle on the forehead. The Tipu Sultan-style has the same angle but is flattened out on the top and is broader. Both

these are usually worn over an under-turban of a different colour (or coloured ribbons by the dandies) which show beneath the angle. The Namdhari turban is always pure white and wrapped flat across the forehead.

### *Sikh Humour*

Sikh jokes and jokes about the Sikhs are two different things; the only thing they have in common is that they are largely made up by Sikhs themselves. Sikh jokes are usually about the tough and militant Nihangs; their sexual virility, their simple-mindedness and behaviour under the influence of *bhang* (hashish) to which they are reputed to be extremely partial. The Nihangs have coined a vocabulary of their own, most of which traces back to their militant past and adversity in battle. An individual will refer to himself as a *fauj* or an army, or, *sawa lakh*, i.e. one hundred and twenty-five thousand men. Large numbers of them have been reduced to beggary. But they do not 'beg' for alms, they impose a 'tax' and demand it of the people they visit. The poorest of food is given fancy names. Thus onions are *ruppa* or 'silver', parched gram 'almonds', wild berries 'grapes' and chillie, the 'quarrelsome dame'. When they want to urinate they ask 'Can I frighten off a cheetah?' A satisfactory performance at the lavatory is described as the 'conquest of the great fort of Chittor'.

Jokes about the Sikhs are invariably about their simple-mindedness. For many years these have been hitched on to the seniormost Sikh Minister in the Punjab or the Central Government. As a rule Indians are extremely sensitive about fun being made of them and resent even the mildest leg-pull. The Sikhs are an exception

to this rule. They not only enjoy anecdotes about themselves but are also the authors of most of them. This attitude is born out of a sense of confidence that in any sphere of activity, physical or mental, in any profession: farming, soldiering, medicine, science or art, they can and do outsmart their sister communities the Hindus, Muslims or Christians. It is very much the same case as that of the Scots who perpetuate the legend of their meanness in the confidence of being more generous than their denigrators.

### *Sikh Greeting*

There are two forms of greetings current amongst the Sikhs. The more familiar one is to join the palms of one's hands and say 'Sat Sri Akal' which means—God is Truth. Another form practised largely by men and in addressing large gatherings is to join one's palms and say loudly 'Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa' which means—the Sikhs are the chosen of God. With the same gesture the other person replies even louder 'Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh'—God be victorious.



## DETAILS OF THE ILLUSTRATIONS

- FRONTISPIECE** *A Sikh Procession:* The Sikhs are the most politically conscious of all Indian Communities. These marchers belong to the right-wing Akali party. Sikhs are equally prominent in the Congress and left-wing parties. Political factions have also bedevilled the Sikh community since its inception. -
1. *Golden Temple of Amritsar*—the holiest shrine of the Sikhs: It was built by the Gurus and renovated by Ranjit Singh. It was here that Guru Arjun compiled the 'Adi Granth'—the sacred scriptures of the Sikhs.
  2. *Nihang Sikhs:* The Nihangs were the suicide squads of the Sikh Army and were chiefly responsible for Sikh victories over the Pathans. Even today many Sikhs like to dress like these ancient warriors.
  3. *Anandpur Gurdwara:* This is the Gurdwara at Anandpur (near Bhakra Dam) where Guru Gobind Singh baptised the first batch of Sikhs in 1699 which gave birth to the Khalsa.
  4. *Sword Fighting:* Nihangs gather in large numbers at Holi at Anandpur and carry out mock battles just as their ancestors did 200 years ago.
  5. *Mother and Child:* Sturdy Jat Sikh stock—the backbone of the Sikh community. Sikh



children are named soon after birth; the initial letter is taken from the first letter of the word of the Sloka of the Granth Sahib which may happen to turn up at the naming ceremony.

6. *Peasant and Son*: Proud father shows off his son after a wrestling match. The boy floored challengers of his age from neighbouring villages.
7. *Peasant and Daughter*: Sikh women have beautiful eyes. This young lady also knows what to do with them.
8. *In Search of a Wife*: Strapping young bridegroom clad as if going to battle. A Sikh wedding is very much like the Hindu in the Punjab. Most marriages are still arranged by the parents.
9. *A Sikh Wedding*: The bridal couple go round the Holy Granth four times while wedding hymns are sung. The bride's relations help her in her rounds symbolising the giving away. Sikh weddings take place in the early hours of the morning.
10. *Death of a Patriarch*: Sikhs are forbidden to indulge in lamentation on death.
11. *Master Tara Singh*: Leader of the Akali party and the most powerful figure in the Sikh community. He was gaoled many times by the British Government in the freedom movement, and by the Indian Government in his attempt to safeguard the rights of his community.
12. *Pratap Singh Kairon*: First Sikh to be Chief

Minister of the Punjab. He was educated in the United States. He spent many years in British prisons in the freedom movement,

13. *Hukam Singh, Speaker, Lok Sabha*: Hukam Singh, at one time a staunch supporter of the Akali Party and protagonist of the demand for a Punjabi-speaking State. Now a member of the Congress and an opponent of the Panjabi Suba. He was elected Speaker of the Lok Sabha with Congress support.
14. *Swaran Singh, Cabinet Minister*: Swaran Singh, a lawyer from Jullundur, has been at the helm of Sikh political affairs for the last twenty years. He has held many important posts in Mr Nehru's cabinet.
15. *Prime Minister Nehru and the Maharajah of Patiala inspecting Sikh troops*: The number of Sikhs in the Indian Army is lower than it used to be.
16. *Amrita Pritam—Poet and Novelist*: Amrita Pritam, perhaps the most distinguished woman poet and novelist of India today. She was the first woman to win the President's award for literature. Many of her novels have been translated into Hindi and one, "The Skeleton", into English.
17. *Tarlok Singh—Member, Planning Commission*: Tarlok Singh, one of the most distinguished members of the Indian Civil Service was the man behind the resettlement of five million Sikh and Hindu refugees from Pakistan. He was one of the authors of India's Five Year

Plans. He is now a member of the Planning Com- mission.

18. *India Wins World Hockey Title at Melbourne:* Five of India's eleven including the Captain Balbir Singh were Sikhs.
19. *Milkha Singh* wins a gold medal for India. All the five gold medals won by India at the Asian games were won by Sikh athletes.
20. *Teenage National Champion, Ashok Malik and his father Iqbal Singh Malik.* Two of India's best golfers who represented the country in the World Championship in Scotland. Iqbal Singh has won the Indian Championship several times. Ashok became the Indian title holder at 19 and is the youngest reigning national champion in the world.
21. *Village Weight-Lifter:* Accent on physical fitness is a distinguishing feature of Sikh peasant life. Wrestling, kabaddi, shot putting and sprinting are favourite pastimes of Sikh Jats.
22. *Grandmother at the Wheel:* Sikh women are tough like other peasant folk; work harder than their men, even during the gossip hour they spin their charkhas.
23. *Old but not Ancient:* A typical Sikh peasant of today. He had come 200 miles to march in a protest procession in Delhi.
24. *Taxi Drivers:* Next to tilling the soil or becoming a soldier, a Sikh's preference is for something mechanical. The transport systems

of most cities of Northern India are run by Sikhs.

25. *Serjeet Singh*: Film producer and painter of landscapes. Other well-known Sikh contemporaries are S. G. Thakur Singh, Sobha Singh, Kirpal Singh, and Jaswant Singh. The famous Amrita Shergil was also Sikh.
26. *Jagjit Singh*: Winner of the Kalinga Prize.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE SIKHS

5 April	1469	Birthday of Guru Nanak
	1604	Compilation of the Adi Granth by the 5th Guru, Arjun, at Amritsar
30 May	1606	Execution of Guru Arjun at Lahore
11 Nov.	1675	Execution of the 9th Guru, Tegh Bahadur at Delhi by the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb
30 March	1699	Guru Gobind Singh (10th Guru) performs ceremony of baptism at Anandpur. The birth of the militant Khalsa
27 Dec.	1704	Execution of Guru Gobind Singh's infant sons by the Governor of Sirhind
7 Oct.	1708	Assassination of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded in Hyderabad (Deccan)
12 May	1710	Banda Bairagi sacks Sirhind and overruns most of the Punjab
9 June	1716	Execution of Banda and 700 of his followers at Delhi
	1747-68	Invasions of Ahmed Shah Abdali and the rise of the 12 Sikh misls in the wake of chaos created by him. Rise of Sikh leaders: Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Ala Singh, Charat Singh Sukerchakia and others
14 June	1761	3rd Battle of Paniput. Ahmed Shah Abdali destroys Mahratta power in Northern India

5 Feb.	1762	Ahmed Shah Abdali defeats the Sikhs with great massacre. <i>Wadda Ghallughara</i> . Blows up the temple at Amritsar
17 Oct.	1762	Sikhs celebrate Diwali at Amritsar. Resolve to become rulers of the Punjab. Force Ahmed Shah Abdali to retreat
16 April	1765	Sikhs capture Lahore
13 Nov.	1780	Birth of Ranjit Singh
7 July	1799	Ranjit Singh captures Lahore
13 April	1801	Ranjit Singh crowned Maharajah of the Punjab
	1802	Ranjit Singh takes Amritsar
25 April	1809	Treaty of Amritsar with the English. Ranjit Singh forced to renounce all claims to Sikh territories east of the river Sutlej
1 June	1813	Ranjit Singh acquires the Koh-i-noor from Shah Shuja
2 June	1818	Ranjit Singh captures Multan
5 July	1819	Ranjit Singh defeats Jabbar Khan and takes Kashmir
14 March	1823	Ranjit Singh defeats the Afghans at the Battle of Nowshera and reduces the North-West Frontier Province.
30 April	1837	Battle of Jamrud. Death of General Hari Singh Nalwa
27 June	1839	Death of Ranjit Singh
5 Nov.	1840	Deaths of Maharajahs Kharak Singh and Nao Nihal Singh
15 Sept.	1843	Assassination of Maharajah Sher Singh

### 1ST SIKH WAR

18 Dec.	1845	Mudki
21 Dec.	1845	Ferozshahr

28 Jan.	1846	Aliwal
10 Feb.	1846	Sabraon
8 March	1846	Treaty of Lahore. Maharajah Dalip Singh placed under British tutelage. Kashmir sold to Gulab Singh

### 2ND SIKH WAR

18 April	1848	Revolt of Diwan Mul Raj of Multan
1 Jan.	1849	Chillianwala
21 Feb.	1849	Gujerat
29 March	1849	Annexation of the Punjab
17 Jan.	1872	Kooka Rebellion. Execution of Namdharis at Malerkotla. Baba Ram Singh exiled
	1873	Birth of the Singh Sabha Movement
	1908	Beginning of Sikh Educational Conferences. Building of Khalsa Schools and Colleges
March	1913	Foundation of the Ghadr party at Washington
May	1914	Voyage of the Komagata Maru. 27th Sept. Police kill 21 Sikh emigrants at Budge Budge
14 April	1919	Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh at Amritsar. General Dyer opens fire on public meeting killing over 1000 people. Sikh rift with Government widens
20 Feb.	1921	Massacre of Sikh worshippers at Nanakana. Akali agitation to take over Sikh shrines gathers momentum
Nov.	1925	Sikh Gurdwaras Act. Sikh shrines pass under the control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.)

- 3 June 1947 Government announce plan to partition the Punjab dividing Sikh population into two equal halves. Communal riots get more frenzied
- 15 Aug. 1947 Independence of India. Exodus of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million Sikhs from Pakistan to India



## JUPJI — THE MORNING PRAYER

*There is One God  
 He is the supreme truth.  
 He, The Creator,  
 Is without fear and without hate.  
 He, The Omnipresent,  
 Pervades the universe.  
 He is not born,  
 Nor does He die to be born again.  
 By His grace shalt thou worship Him.*

*Before time itself  
 There was truth.  
 When time began to run its course  
 He was the truth.  
 Even now, He is the truth  
 And  
 Evermore shall truth prevail.<sup>1</sup>*

## 1

Not by thought alone  
 Can He be known,  
 Though one think  
 A hundred thousand times;  
 Not in solemn silence  
 Nor in deep meditation.  
 Though fasting yields an abundance of virtue  
 It cannot appease the hunger for truth,

<sup>1</sup> These lines, which are not in verse, are known as the *Mool Mantra*—the basic belief.

No, by none of these,  
 Nor by a hundred thousand other devices,  
 Can God be reached.  
 How then shall the Truth be known?  
 How the veil of false illusion torn?  
 O Nanak, thus runneth the writ divine,  
 The righteous path—let it be thine.

## 2

By Him are all forms created,  
 By Him infused with life and blessed,  
 By Him are some to excellence elated,  
 Others born lowly and depressed.  
 By His writ some have pleasure, others pain;  
 By His grace some are saved,  
 Others doomed to die, re-live, and die again.  
 His will encompasseth all, there be none beside.  
 O Nanak, He who knows, hath no ego and no pride.

## 3

Who has the power to praise His might?  
 Who has the measure of His bounty?  
 Of His portents who has the sight?  
 Who can value His virtue, His deeds, His charity?  
 Who has the knowledge of His wisdom?  
 Of His deep, impenetrable thought?  
 How worship Him who creates life,  
 Then destroys,  
 And having destroyed doth re-create?  
 How worship Him who appeareth far  
 Yet is ever present and proximate?  
 There is no end to His description,  
 Though the speakers and their speeches be legion.

He the Giver ever giveth,  
 We who receive grow weary,  
 On His bounty humanity liveth  
 From primal age of posterity.

## 4

God is the Master, God is truth,  
 His name spelleth love divine,  
 His creatures ever cry: 'O give, O give,'  
 He the bounteous doth never decline.  
 When then in offering shall we bring  
 That we may see his court above?  
 What then shall we say in speech  
 That hearing may evoke His love?  
 In the ambrosial hours of fragrant dawn  
 On truth and greatness ponder in meditation,  
 Though action determine how thou be born,  
 Through grace alone come salvation.

O Nanak, this need we know alone,  
 That God and Truth are two in one.

## 5

He cannot be proved, for He is uncreated;  
 He is without matter, self-existent.  
 They that serve shall honoured be,  
 O Nanak, the Lord is most excellent.

Praise the Lord, hear them that do Him praise,  
 In your hearts His name be given,  
 Sorrows from your soul erase  
 And make your hearts a joyous heaven.

The Guru's word has the sage's wisdom,  
 The Guru's word is full of learning,

For though it be the Guru's word  
God Himself speaks therein.

Thus run the words of the Guru:  
"God is the destroyer, preserver and creator,  
God is the Goddess too.  
Words to describe are hard to find,  
I would venture if I knew."

This alone my teacher taught,  
There is but one Lord of all creation,  
Forget Him not.

## 6

If it please the Lord  
In holy waters would I bathe,  
If it please him not,  
Worthless is that pilgrimage.  
This is the law of all creation,  
That nothing's gained save by action.  
Thy mind, wherein buried lie  
Precious stones, jewels, gems,  
Shall opened be if thou but try  
And hearken to the Guru's word.

This the Guru my teacher taught,  
There is but one Lord of all creation,  
Forget Him not.

## 7

Were life's span extended to the four ages  
And ten times more,  
Were one known over the nine continents  
Ever in humanity's fore,

Were one to achieve greatness  
 With a name noised over the earth,  
 If one found not favour with the Lord  
 What would it all be worth?  
 Among the worms be as vermin,  
 By sinners be accused of sin.  
 O Nanak, the Lord fills the vicious with virtue,  
 The virtuous maketh more true.  
 Knowest thou of any other  
 Who in turn could the Lord thus favour?

## 8

By hearing the word  
     Men achieve wisdom, saintliness, courage and  
     contentment.  
 By hearing the word  
     Men learn of the earth, the power that supports  
     it, and the firmament.  
 By hearing the word  
     Men learn of the upper and nether regions,  
     of islands and continents.  
 By hearing the word  
     Men conquer the fear of death and the elements.  
 O Nanak, the word hath such magic for the  
     worshippers,  
     Those that hear, death do not fear,  
     Their sorrows end and sins disappear.

## 9

By hearing the word  
     Mortals are to godliness raised.  
 By hearing the word  
     The four-mouthed are filled with pious praise.

By hearing the word  
 Are revealed the secrets of the body and of nature.  
 By hearing the word  
 Is acquired the wisdom of all the scriptures.  
 O Nanak, the word hath such magic for the  
 worshippers,  
 Those that hear, death do not fear,  
 Their sorrows end and sins disappear.

## 10

By hearing the word  
 One learns of truth, contentment, and is wise.  
 By hearing the word  
 The need for pilgrimages does not arise.  
 By hearing the word  
 The student achieves scholastic distinction.  
 By hearing the word  
 The mind is easily led to meditation.  
 O Nanak, the word hath such magic for the  
 worshippers,  
 Those that hear, death do not fear,  
 Their sorrows end and sins disappear.

## 11

By hearing the word  
 One sounds the depths of virtue's sea.  
 By hearing the word  
 One acquires learning, holiness and royalty.  
 By hearing the word  
 The blind see and their paths are visible.  
 By hearing the word  
 The fathomless becomes fordable.

O Nanak, the word hath such magic for the  
 worshippers,  
 Those that hear, death do not fear,  
 Their sorrows end and sins disappear.

## 12

The believer's bliss one cannot describe,  
 He who endeavours regrets in the end,  
 There is no paper, pen, nor any scribe  
 Who can the believer's state comprehend.  
 The name of the Lord is immaculate.  
 He who would know must have faith.

## 13

The believer hath wisdom and understanding;  
 The believer hath knowlege of all the spheres;  
 The believer shall not stumble in ignorance,  
 Nor of death have any fears.

The name of the Lord is immaculate,  
 He who would know must have faith.

## 14

The believer's way is of obstructions free;  
 The believer is honoured in the presence sublime;  
 The believer's path is not lost in futility,  
 For faith hath taught him law divine.

The name of the Lord is immaculate,  
 He who would know must have faith.

## 15

The believer reaches the gate of salvation;  
 His kith and kin he also saves.

The believer beckons the congregation,  
 Their souls are saved from transmigration.

The name of the Lord is immaculate,  
 He who would know must have faith.

## 16

Thus are chosen the leaders of men,  
 Thus honoured in God's estimation;  
 Though they grace the courts of kings,  
 Their minds are fixed in holy meditation.  
 Their words are weighed with reason,  
 They know that God's works are legion.

Law which like the fabled bull supports the earth  
 Is of compassion born;  
 Though it bind the world in harmony,  
 Its strands are thin and worn.  
 He who the truth would learn  
 Must know of the bull and the load it bore,  
 For there are worlds besides our own  
 And beyond them many more.  
 Who is it that bears these burdens?  
 What power bears him that beareth them?

Of creatures of diverse kinds and colours  
 The ever-flowing pen hath made record.  
 Can anyone write what it hath writ?  
 Or say how great a task was it?  
 How describe His beauty and His might?  
 His bounty how estimate?  
 How speak of Him who with one word  
 Did the whole universe create,  
 And made a thousand rivers flow therein?  
 What might have I to praise Thy might?



I have not power to give it praise.  
 Whatever be Thy wish, I say Amen.  
 Mayst Thou endure, O formless One.

## 17

There is no count of those, who pray,  
 Nor of those who Thee adore;  
 There is no count of those who worship,  
 Nor of those who by penance set store.  
 There is no count of those who read the holy  
 books aloud,  
 Nor of those who think of the world's sorrows  
 and lament,  
 There is no count of sages immersed in thought  
 and reason,  
 Nor of those who love humanity and are benevolent.  
 There is no count of warriors who match their  
 strength with steel,  
 Nor of those who contemplate in peace and are  
 silent.

What might have I to praise Thy might?  
 I have not power to give it praise.  
 Whatever be Thy wish, I say Amen.  
 Mayst Thou endure, O formless One.

## 18

There is no count of fools who will not see,  
 Nor of thieves who live by fraud,  
 There is no count of despots practising tyranny,  
 Nor of those whose hands are soiled with blood  
 There is no count of those who sin and go free,  
 Nor of liars caught in the web of falsehood,  
 There is no count of the polluted who live on filth,

Nor of the evil-tongued weighed down with calumny.  
Of such degradation, O Nanak, also think.

What might have I to praise Thy might?  
I have not power to give it praise.  
Whatever be Thy wish, I say Amen.  
Mayst Thou endure, O formless One.

## 19

Though there is no count of Thy names and  
habitations,  
Nor of Thy regions uncomprehended,  
Yet many there have been with reason perverted  
Who to Thy knowledge have pretended.

Though by words alone we give Thee name and  
praise,  
And by words reason, worship, and Thy virtue  
compute;  
Though by words alone we write and speak  
And by words our ties with Thee constitute;  
The word does not its Creator bind,  
What Thou ordainest we receive.  
Thy creations magnify Thee,  
Thy name in all places find.

What might have I to praise Thy might?  
I have not power to give it praise.  
Whatever be Thy wish, I say Amen.  
Mayst Thou endure, O formless One.

## 20

As hands or feet besmirched with slime,  
Water washes white;

As garments dark with grime  
 Rinsed with soap are made light;  
 So when sin soils the soul  
 Prayer alone shall make it whole.

Words do not the saint or sinner make,  
 Action alone is written in the book of fate,  
 What we sow that alone we take;  
 O Nanak, be saved or for ever transmigrate.  
 Pilgrimage, austerity, mercy, almsgiving and charity  
 Bring merit, be it as little as the mustard seed;  
 But he who hears, believes and cherishes the word.  
 An inner pilgrimage and cleansing is his meed.

## 21

Pilgrimage, austerity, mercy, almsgiving and charity  
 Bring merit, be it as little as the mustard seed;  
 But he who hears, believes and cherishes the word,  
 An inner pilgrimage and cleansing is his meed.

All virtue is Thine, for I have none,  
 Virtue follows a good act done.  
 Blessed Thou the Creator, the prayer, the primal  
 Truth and beauty and longing eternal.  
 What was the time, what day of the week,  
 What the month, what season of the year,  
 When Thou didst create the earthly sphere?  
 The Pandit knows it nor, nor is it writ in his Puran;  
 The Qadi knows it not, though he read and copy  
 the Koran.  
 The Yogi knows not the date nor the day of  
 the week,  
 He knows not the month or even the season.  
 Only Thou who made it all can speak,  
 For knowledge is Thine alone.

How then shall I know Thee, how describe, praise  
and name?

O Nanak, many there be who pretend to know,  
each bolder in his claim.

All I say is: "Great is the Lord, great His name;  
What He ordains comes to be,"

O Nanak, he who sayeth more shall hereafter  
regret his stupidity.

## 22

Numerous worlds there be in regions beyond the  
skies and below,

But the research-weary scholars say, we do  
not know.

The Hindu and the Muslim books are full of  
theories; the answer is but one.

If it could be writ, it would have been, but the  
writer thereof be none.

O Nanak, say but this, the Lord is great, in  
His knowledge He is alone.

## 23

Worshippers who praise the Lord know not  
His greatness,

As rivers and rivulets that flow into the sea  
know not its vastness.

Mighty kings with domains vaster than the ocean,  
With wealth piled high in a mountainous heap,  
Are less than the little ant

That the Lord's name in its heart doth keep.

## 24

Infinite His goodness, and the ways of exaltation;  
Infinite His creation and His benefaction;

Infinite the sights and sounds, infinite His great  
 design,  
 Infinite its execution, infinite without confine.

Many there be that cried in pain to seek the end  
 of all ending.  
 Their cries were all in vain, for the end is past  
 understanding.

It is the end of which no one knoweth,  
 The more one says the more it groweth.

The Lord is of great eminence, exalted is His  
 name.  
 He who would know His height, must in stature  
 be the same.

He alone can His own greatness measure.  
 O Nanak, what He gives we must treasure.

## 25

Of His bounty one cannot write too much,  
 He the great Giver desires not even a mustard seed;  
 Even the mighty beg at His door, and others such  
 Whose numbers can never be conceived.  
 There be those who receive but are self-indulgent,  
 Others who get but have no gratitude.  
 There be the foolish whose bellies are never filled,  
 Others whom hunger's pain doth ever torment.  
 All this comes to pass as Thou hast willed.  
 Thy will alone breaks mortal bonds,  
 No one else hath influence.  
 The fool who argues otherwise  
 Shall be smitten into silence.  
 The Lord knows our needs, and gives,

Few there be that count their blessings,  
 He who is granted gratitude and power to praise,  
 O Nanak, is the king of kings.

## 26

His goodness cannot be priced or traded,  
 Nor His worshippers valued, nor their store;  
 Priceless too are dealers in the market sacred  
 With love and peace evermore.  
 Perfect His law and administration,  
 Precise His weights and measures;  
 Boundless His bounty and His omens,  
 Infinite mercy in His orders.  
 How priceless Thou art one cannot state,  
 Those who spoke are mute in adoration,  
 The readers of the scriptures expatiate,  
 Heaving read, are lost in learned conversation.  
 The great gods Brahma and Indra do Thee  
 proclaim,  
 So do Krishna and his maidens fair;  
 Siva and the Saivites do Thee name;  
 The Buddhas Thou made, Thy name bear.  
 The demons and the demi-gods  
 Men, brave men, seers and the sainted,  
 Having discoursed and discussed  
 Have spoken and departed  
 If Thou didst many more create  
 Not one could any more state,  
 For Thou art as great as is Thy pleasure,  
 O Nanak, Thou alone knowest Thy measure.  
 He who claims to know blasphemeth  
 And is the worst among the stupidest.

27

## SODAR

*(Te Deum)*

Where is the gate, where the mansion  
 From whence Thou watchest all creation,  
 Where sounds of musical melodies,  
 Of instruments playing, minstrels singing,  
 Are joined in divine harmony?  
 There the breeze blow, the waters run and the  
 fires burn,  
 There Dharmaraj, the king of death, sits in state;  
 There the recording angels Chitra and Gupta write  
 For Dharmaraj to read and adjudicate.  
 There are the gods Ishwara and Brahma,  
 The goddess Devi of divine grace;  
 There Indra sits on his celestial throne  
 And lesser gods, each in his place.  
 There ascetics in deep meditation,  
 Holy men in contemplation,  
 The pure of heart, the continent,  
 Men of peace and contentment,  
 Doughty warriors never yielding,  
 Thy praises are ever singing.  
 From age to age, the pundit and the sage  
 Do Thee exalt in their study and their writing.  
 There maidens fair, heart bewitching,  
 Who inhabit the earth, the upper and the lower  
 regions,  
 Thy praises chant in their singing.  
 By the gems that Thou didst create,  
 In the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage,  
 Is Thy name exalted.  
 By warriors strong and brave in strife,  
 By the sources four from whence came life.

Of egg or womb, of sweat or seed,  
 Is thy name magnified.  
 The regions of the earth, the heavens and the  
 universe  
 That Thou didst make and dost sustain,  
 Sing to Thee and praise Thy name.  
 Only those Thou lovest and with whom Thou  
 art pleased  
 Can give Thee praise and in Thy love be steeped.  
 Others too there must be who Thee acclaim,  
 I have no memory of knowing them  
 Nor of knowledge, O Nanak, make a claim.  
 He alone is the master true, Lord of the word,  
 ever the same,  
 He Who made creation is, shall be and shall ever  
 remain;  
 He Who made things of diverse species, shapes  
 and hues,  
 Beholds that His handiwork His greatness proves.  
 What He wills He ordains,  
 To Him no one can an order give,  
 For He, O Nanak, is the King of Kings,  
 As He wills so we must live.

## 28

As a beggar goes a-begging,  
 Bowl in one hand, staff in the other,  
 Rings in his ears, in ashes smothered,  
 So go thou forth in life.  
 With earrings made of contentment,  
 With modesty thy begging bowl,  
 Meditation the fabric of thy garment,  
 Knowledge of death thy cowl.  
 Let thy mind be chaste, virginal clean,



Faith the staff on which to lean.<sup>1</sup>  
 Thou shalt then thy fancy humiliate  
 With mind subdued, the world subjugate.

Hail! and to thee be salutation.  
 Thou art primal, Thou art pure,  
 Without beginning, without termination,  
 In single form, for ever endure.

## 29

From the store-house of compassion  
 Seek knowledge for thy food.  
 Let thy heart-beat be the call of the conch shell  
 Blown in gratitude.

He is the Lord, His is the will, His the creation,  
 He is the master of destiny, of union and separation.

Hail! and to thee be salutation.  
 Thou art primal, thou art pure,  
 Without beginning, without termination,  
 In single form, for ever endure.

## 30

Maya, mythical goddess in wedlock divine,  
 Bore three gods accepted by all,  
 The creator of the world, the one who preserves,  
 And the one who adjudges its fall.

<sup>1</sup> In the original, the author makes reference to the 'Ayece Panth', a religious order now defunct, but apparently held in great estimation in the lifetime of the Guru, Having failed to find anything which would throw light on this sect in any of the translations or commentaries, I have thought fit to make reference to it only in the footnote.

But it is God alone whose will prevails,  
 Others but their obedience render.  
 He sees and directs, but is by them unseen.  
 That of all is the greatest wonder.

Hail! and to Thee be salutation.  
 Thou art primal, thou art pure,  
 Without beginning, without termination,  
 In single form for ever endure.

## 31

He hath His prayer-mat in every region,  
 In every realm His store.  
 To human begins He doth apportion  
 Their share for once and evermore.  
 The Maker having made doth His own creation  
 view.  
 O Nanak, He made truth itself, for He himself is  
 true.

Hail! and to thee be salutation.  
 Thou art primal, Thou art pure,  
 Without beginning, without termination,  
 In single form, for ever endure.

## 32

Were I given a hundred thousand tongues instead  
 of one,  
 And the hundred thousand multiplied twenty-fold,  
 A hundred thousand times would I say, and say  
 again,  
 The Lord of all the worlds is one.  
 That is the path that leads,  
 These the steps that mount,

Ascend thus to the Lord's mansion  
 And with Him be joined in unison.  
 The sound of the songs of heaven thrills  
 The like of us who crawl, but desire to fly.  
 O Nanak, His grace alone it is that fulfils,  
 The rest mere prattle, and a lie.

## 33

Ye have no power to speak or in silence listen,  
 To grant or give away,  
 Ye have no power to live or die.  
 Ye have no power to acquire wealth and dominion,  
 To compel the mind to thought or reason,  
 To escape the world and fly.

He who hath the pride of power, let him try and see.  
 O Nanak, before the Lord there is no low or  
 high degree.

## 34

He Who made the night and day,  
 The days of the week and the seasons,  
 He Who made the breezes blow, the waters run,  
 The fires and the lower regions,  
 Made the earth—the temple of law.

He Who made creatures of diverse kinds  
 With a multitude of names,  
 Made this the law—  
 By thought and deed be judged forsooth,  
 For God is true and dispenseth truth.  
 There the elect His court adorn,  
 And God Himself their actions honours;  
 There are sorted deeds that were done and bore  
 fruit

From those that to action could never ripen.  
This, O Nanak, shall hereafter happen.

## 35

In the realm of justice there is law;  
In the realm of knowledge there is reason.  
Wherefore are the breezes, the waters and fire,  
Gods that preserve and destroy, Krishnas and  
Shivas?

Wherefore are created forms, colours, attire,  
Gods that create, the many Brahmas?

Here one strives to comprehend,  
The golden mount of knowledge ascend,  
And learn as did the sage Dhruva.

Wherefore are the thunders and lightning,  
The moons and suns,  
The world and its regions?

Wherefore are the sages, seers, wise men,  
Goddesses, false prophets, demons and demi-gods,  
Wherefore are there jewels in the ocean?  
How many forms of life there be,  
How many tongues,  
How many kings of proud ancestry.

Of these things many strive to know,  
Many the slaves of reason.  
Many there are, O Nanak, their numbers are legion

●

## 36

As in the realm of knowledge reason is triumphant  
And yields a myriad joys,  
So in the realm of bliss is beauty resplendent.

There are fashioned forms of great loveliness;  
 Of them it is best to remain silent  
 Than hazard guesses and then repent.  
 There too are fashioned consciousness, under-  
 standing, mind and reason  
 The genius of the sage and seer, the power of  
 humans superhuman.

## 37

In the realm of action, effort is supreme,  
 Nothing else prevails.  
 There dwell doughty warriors brave and strong,  
 With hearts full of godliness,  
 And celestial maidens of great loveliness  
 Who sing their praise.  
 They cannot die nor be beguiled,  
 For God Himself in their hearts resides.  
 There too are congregations of holy men  
 Who rejoice for the Lord in their midst presides.

In the realm of truth is the Formless One  
 Who, having created, watches His creation  
 And graces us with the blessed vision.  
 There are the lands, the earths and the spheres  
 Of whose description there is no limit;  
 There by a myriad forms are a myriad purposes  
 fulfilled,  
 What He ordains is in them instilled.  
 What He beholds, thinks and contemplates,  
 O Nanak, is too hard to state.

## 38

If thou must make a gold coin true  
 Let thy mint these rules pursue.

In the forge of continence  
 Let the goldsmith be a man of patience,  
 His tools be made of knowledge,  
 His anvil made of reason;  
 With the fear of God the bellows blow,  
 With prayer and austerity make the fire glow.

Pour the liquid in the mould of love,  
 Print the name of the Lord thereon,  
 And cool it in the holy waters.

For thus in the mint of truth the word is coined,  
 Thus those who are graced are to work enjoined.  
 O Nanak, by His blessing have joy everlasting.

## SHLOK

*(Epilogue)*

*Air, water and earth,  
 Of these are we made.  
 Air like the Guru's word gives the breath of life  
 To the babe born to the great mother earth  
 Sired by the waters.  
 The day and night our nurses be  
 That watch us in our infancy.  
 In their laps we play.  
 The world is our playground.  
 Our acts right and wrong at Thy court shall come to  
 judgment,  
 Some be seated near Thy seat, some ever kept distant.  
 The toils have ended of those that have worshipped Thee,  
 O Nanak, their faces are lit with joyful radiance—  
 many others they set free.*

## THE SIKHS TODAY

The Sikhs are the most colourful community of India. Although there are only five million of them (less than two per cent of the country's population) they appear more numerous because of their distinctive appearance. They excel as farmers, soldiers, athletes and artisans; their contribution to the cultural life of the country is equally significant.

This book gives a brief account of their religion, history, cultural and political life, customs and ways of living. It is written by a man who is an acknowledged authority on the subject and who has made the study of his community his sole mission in life.



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