The Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies

3-4

Guru Gobind Singh Foundation
Chandigarh (India)

ਛ ਕਹੀਐ

ਹ ਨਾਨਕ)

Nanak

Nanak)

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia

3-4

July-December, 1994

The Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies is published, under the auspices of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust, four times a year, by the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh (India)

Subscriptions are solicited (one-year; two-year; three-year; etc.). Also, we invite significant news about Sikh affairs in different countries for world-wide propagation through this Journal.

THE GURU GOBIND SINGH JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Contents

ARTICLES AND LETTERS should be sent to the Editor-in-Chief.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR INDIA : 200 rupees per year.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR OTHER COUNTRIES : $ 35 per year.

Payable to : The Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust, Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan, Madhya Marg, Sec. 15-A, Chandigarh (India).

ADVERTISING RATES : 2000 rupees/$ 70 for whole page and 1200 rupees/$ 40 for half page.

Editorial

The Sikhs at the Crossroads of their Destiny

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia

The Sikhs are today at the crossroads of their destiny. For the first time in many decades, a process of political and ideological polarisation is gaining momentum in contemporary Sikh praxis. This polarisation is going to determine whether contemporary Sikhism and Sikh society would march to the 21st century with a futuristic vision and liberal-humanistic complextion or get bogged down in a retrogressive syndrome manifesting itself in attitudinal obscurantism, political extremism and religious fundamentalism, with the spill-over effects on the surrounding environs.

The see-saw of the mutually contradictory and confronting forces can lead to either of the two trends with consequential bearing not only on the Sikh community and its future but also on the destiny of Punjab in particular and the country as a whole. As such, what is at stake is not simplistically the fate of this or that Akali leader, or of the one or the other Akali faction; challenges in the emerging scene are larger in dimension and deeper in complexity.

When the militant-fundamentalist syndrome symbolised by Sant Bhindranwale, aided and abetted by 'diverse' political forces, each having its own end in view, started escalating gradually to its inexorable climax, very few could have anticipated the explosive potential of the phenomenon. Subsequently, the anger and anguish over Operation Bluestar and the 1984 massacre, invertedly, generated among the Sikhs a sense of empathy with what had come to be known

in heroic terms as the Sikh "sangharsh" (struggle) by the Sikh "marjeevaras" (potential martyrs).

Those with the discerning eye remained passive before the rising crescendo of the Bhindranwale cult. Certain sections of the Sikh intelligentsia joined the bandwagon; others remained content with their characteristic indifference to the immediate realities, reacting vociferously only to the events in remote lands such as Iran, Bangladesh or South Africa.

The traumatic experience of last decade needs no recapitulation to realise that once again the Sikhs are being pushed towards a similar situation, with perceptible portents of far graver tragedy than the earlier one.

This time there will be no alibi available to those who remain passive bystanders. Now is the time to assert, and to assert forcefully and fearlessly. Earlier it was Sant Bhindranwale and his internal and external abetters who ignited political extremism and religious fundamentalism. This time, the authority of Sri Akal Takht, resources of the SGPC and the organisational network of a political party are being invoked and involved in orientating Sikh politics towards a fundamentalist direction.

To understand the dynamics of the ongoing process of politico-ideological polarisation in Sikh (Akali) politics, it is essential to keep in view that the Sikh praxis of the past 70 years or so has been conditioned by an interdependent, symbiotic relationship betwwen the three main Sikh institutions - Sri Akal Takht, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and Shiromani Akali Dal. This relationship was based on the mistaken, misinterpreted, hence overexploited, notion of unity of religion and politics in Sikhism.

The debate and deliberation within the Sikh community during last one year, in which the enlightened Sikh intelligentsia played a significant role, has succeeded in

rediscovering the true import of the concept of miri-piri, which means a correlation or a differentiated unity between religion and politics, between religious and political institutions, and not their indiscriminate inter-mix, merger, or subordination of the one to the other.

It was this enlightened concept of Sikhism that heralded the secularisaiton process against theocracy way back in the medieval age itself which, as such,saw the most revolutionary challenge to the prevalent polity and system. This interpretation, which is gaining acceptance and approval day by day, would go a long way in squaring up the Sikh institutions inherited from the Sikh historical tradtion, on the one hand, and the institutions of modern secular polity, on the other hand, thus ensuring respective autonomy of the Sikh religious and political institutions without any contradiction with the secular institutions of national polity.

The earlier mistaken notion has been conveniently exploited by traditinal leadership in misusing religious institutions, symbols, sentiments as well as religious resources for political ends, leaving the Sikh shrines in hopeless conditions of mismanagement.

In the context of the new Sikh awakening, the notion that only the clergy-blessed political party can claim to be the true representative of the Sikh community is being questioned. This is as it should be, for the source and repository of all power in Sikhism is the Guru Panth, the "sangat" and not the clergy. A clear distinction that stands out today between the supreme Takht as an institution and its Jathedar as the incumbent individual has also restored the sanctity of Sri Akal Takht.

Another myth that the fount of the Akali political power is SPGC, which alone can invest the Akali Dal with political legitimacy, would meet the same fate if the present state of mismanagement of the Sikh shrines continues. In the process

of the polarisation under discussion, the Sikh mind is becoming more and more agitated that at the cost of Sikh shrines, the SGPC authorities are using this religious institution for partisan political ends. A day is not far off when the enlightened Sikh opinion would assert itself forcefully to ensure that the SGPC platform, its resources and the aura associated with, should not be misused as a ladder for political power and pelf, and that only those persons should man the SGPC hierarchy who, rising above temptations of party politics, can devote their whole time, their whole attention, to the gurdwaras management for which this institution was created. According to the preamble to the 1925 Sikh Gurdwaras Act, the SGPC was created for "better administration of certain Sikh Gurdwaras"; the entire schemata of the Act is oriented accordingly.

But over the decades the SGPC has become intertwined with the party politics at the cost of proper gurdwaras management; this inter-dependent relationship has injected political motives into the religious praxis of the SGPC and harnessed religious means for political ends. It is high time that the SGPC was de-politicised.

It may be stressed here that the Shiromani Akali Dal did not originate as a political party. Akali volunteers waged a heroic struggle for the liberation of the Sikh shrines from the degenerate hereditary "mahants" and took charge of the liberated shrines. For the overall management, a body named the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee was created by the crusading Sikhs themselves in 1920; this body came to have a statutory basis with the passing of the 1925 Sikh Gurdwaras Act.

If the first phase of the Gurdwaras Reform Movement was to liberate the Sikh shrines from the hereditary *"mahants,"* the second phase, today, demands liberation from the "legal *mahants"* - as Master Tara Singh called hte politicalised elements in the SGPC. It was only with the passage of time

tha the Shiromani Akali Dal got transformed into a political party replacing the Central Sikh League.

It is high time, again, for the liberation of the SGPC from party politics; this religious institution of the Sikhs needs to be depoliticsed. For this, it is essential that the forthcoming SGPC poll should be fought on non-partisan. non-political basis. Through amendement of the 1925 Act, a provision should be added that the SGPC office-bearers, on being elected as such, shall not take part in active party politics. Autonomous functioning of the three main institutions of the Sikhs - Sri Akal Takht, the SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal(s)-in their respective arenas, is the need of the times. This is imperative for positive crystallisation of the polarisaion process also, under discussion. By another statutory amendemnet in the Act, Sri Akal Takht - the most significant symbol of the temporal aspect of the Divine Sovereignty vesting in *Khalsa Panth* (the collectivity of the Sikh people) - should be given on independent status, higher than that of the Shiromani Gurdwaras Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), The proper domain of Sri Akal Takht encompasses the temporal concerns of historical significance of the Sikhs in particular and the humanity in general, distinguishable from the exigencies of day to day party politics falling within the domain of the normal democratic processes reflecting the will of the Sikh community without fear or favour of the clergy-there being no clergy as an institution envisaged in Sikhism [I have discussed these ideological issues in depth in my book : *The Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine.]*

Sikhism and Islam

Kapur Singh

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in the 15th century in the north of India that had already been politically integrated to the organised world of Islam for almost 500 years. Arabic was already the official and cultural language at Lahore, a place only a few miles from the birth-place of the Sikh Prophet. Islam, and its culture, was not only the dominant strain of the world civilization and culture of those days, but had also percolated into the common idioms and modes of thought of the north-western Punjab. It was in this milieu that the oecumenical religion of Sikhism took birth. Guru Nanak not only was in intimate contact with the Moslem learned men and centres of religion of Islam of those days, but he also made a close study of the basic Islamic literature. His knowledge of the fundamental Hindu sacred texts, now being revealed through a critical study of the Sikh Scripture, is not only pleasantly surprising but it also impresses. Needless to say that, Guru Nanak was thoroughly conversant with the texts and the teachings of the Koran. Since Guru Nank was a Prophet in his own right and according to his own claim, he neither gives direct quotations nor makes precise references to Hindu and Muslim texts, as a mere scholar would be expected to make, and, it is, therefore, only a trained scholar of Comparative Religion who can spot out and pin-point the exact sacred texts which Guru Nanak had in mind when delivering a particular Revelation.

When such a critical study of the Revelations of Guru Nanak is made, there is left no doubt in the mind of a balanced scholar that even when apparently affirming or repudiating a particular doctrine or text, the Guru almost

always amplifies his own statement by added nuances of critical exposition. An appraisal of this character alone can make it clear that Guru Nanak had a definite and positive attitude towards the Koran.

The Koran has three distinct elements in its texts : (a) Dissertations on the nature of God and man's relation to Him, (b) pronouncements on social organisation and ethics, (c) statements on Judaic mythology. Guru Nanak ignores the last as irrelevant to the Message that he has to preach to the mankind. He also considers this as uninteresting, for, he makes very sparse, if at all, even passing references to it. With regard to the second element in the Koran, namely, the laws and principles of social organisation and social ethics, Guru Nank would seem to reject most of them as contingent and non-perennial. It is the first element in the Koran which the Guru takes seriously and on which he had made a large number of pronouncements. The space and scope of this piece forbids any detailed discussion of this point and I would, therefore, just state that Guru Nanak seems to find most of it as worthy of consideration and even assent and he has explicitly incorporated its essentials in the Sacred Book of the Sikhs, the *Guru Granth*, though only after a personal digestion and re-interpretation.

I must make this statement slightly clearer.

In *sura* 2, called *Albaqr, the Cow*, for instance, amid brief disquisitions on a multitude of subjects, including pilgrimages, divorce, menstruation, the rights of women, proposals of marriage, and the need for killing the adversaries of Islam, there appears, quite unexpectedly, one of the grandest verses of the Koran, the famous *Throne-verse* :

There is no God, save Him, the living, the eternal;
Slumber overtaketh Him not, nor doth sleep weary Him.
Unto Him belongeth all things in Heaven and on the earth.
Who shall intercede with Him save by His Will.

His Throne is as vast as the Heavens and the earth,
And the keep of them wearieth Him not.
He is the exalted, the mighty One."

It is this beautiful and noble text which claims the attention and general assent of Guru Nanak and it is this text which he has matched by his own famous text, the *Sodar, That Gate,* or *The Gate,* as there being no definite article in the Indo-Sanskritic languages, *the* can only be expressed as *that.*

"Like what is that Gate ?
With what compares that Abode ?
By sitting where He sustains All ?"

Then in this text Guru Nanak goes on to imply that the formal nature of this *"Throne"* is best comprehensible by human mind through reference to those areas of Reality that pertain to sound and feeling rather than those that pertain to visual and spatial aspects of reality, as is implicated by the Koranic text. Herein Guru Nanak has the advantage of his acquaintance with the categories of the *Samkhya* school of Hindu philosophy that categorises sound as the subtlest element of sensibilia and perception. It is only by a careful and critical analysis of such parallel texts in the Koran and the *Guru Granth,* that the true interrelationship between Islám and Sikhism can be properly understood.

Another grand verse, *sura* 24, in the Koran goes under the name of *mishkatual-anwar, The tabernacle.* This is the text to which the Mohammedan mystics and Sufis have returned again and again, never tiring of the mysterious Lamp whose rays bathe the whole universe :

"God is the Light of the Heavens and earth,
The similitude of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp,
And the lamp is within a glass,
And the glass, as it were a pearly star.
This lamp is lit from a blessed tree,
An olive neither of the east nor of the west;

Almost this oil would shine though no fire touched it.
Light upon Light, God guideth whom He will to His Light,
And He speaketh in parables to men, for He knoweth all things."

Now, Guru Nanak has taken an unmistakable note of this text. Guru Nanak was also familiar with certain Hindu sacred texts (*Vaikunth and Dipaoarijvalanam* in the *Garudapauranam*) that speak of the Lamp that guides men here and hereafter. Guru Nanak has revealed a text which not only takes note of all these Moslem and Hindu sacred texts but which constitutes the Guru's own disquisition on the Lamp that guides. Guru Nanak opens by declaring :-

"My Light is the Name of One and only God.
And its oil is the pain and suffering :
The former is consumed and the latter is then done away with.
And, lo, there is now no-doing between I and Death."

A large number of similar texts in the Guru Granth, are, in this manner, grounded in the Islamic and Hindu sacred texts but invariably the former have the content and identity of their own.

This is the true and correct relationship between Islam and Sikhism. As for Guru Nanak's attitude towards the Muslim Prophet Mohammed, it has to be a matter of inference, for, nowhere in the voluminous *Guru Granth*, the name of the Moslem Prophet occurs, directly or indirectly, though Koran is mentioned by name more than once. The Sikh doctrine on the subject is sharp and clear : the born is perishable, and all praise is due to the Timeless. In so far as the Guru perceived excellence in Mohammed he attibuted it exclusively to the grace of God.

Revitalization in a Sikh Community[1]

Arthur W. Helweg

Understanding the relationship between values and beliefs of a people and their social organization and individual actions are important in explaining human behaviour. This is especially true among migrant communities, such as the Sikhs in England, for their perceptions, goals and beliefs strongly influence the adaptive modes chosen to accommodate to their new situation. Yet, as this article will show, an immigrant society's ideals and goals often follow, a pattern of changing response to their host society.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the general understanding of the interactional relationship between cultural, social and individual behaviour.[2] More specifically, this study will examine migrants with the case material focusing on one particular community, that is Sikhs of village origins from Punjab, India, who take up a new abode in England.

The Interaction of Culture, Society and Personality

The systemic influence of culture, society and personality on one another is a concern for those desiring to understand human behaviour, but different views are still set forth as to what aspect dominates. For example, Emile Durkheim[3] argued that man creates god in his own social image. More recently, Marvin Harris,[4] by building and modifying the works of Karl Marx, maintains that culture, society and personality are determined by the technology and economic base of a community. Parsons[5] and his associates[6], however, explain that units may mutually affect each other in various degrees of force at different times — they have not agreed on a prime mover.

With immigrant communities, there is often a resurgence of conservatism where the group tries to revitalize or emphasize its distinctiveness from the host society. This is not always the case since groups may want to assimilate. A good example of assimilation is the Germans in the United States during World War II, although before the World Wars, the German immigrants in the States maintained their own German language, clubs, stores, churches and neighbourhoods. In fact, it was possible in some areas to live and interact without encountering non-German culture. With the outbreak of World War I and later World War II, many did cast off their German heritage and became indistinguishable from the American norms.

More recently, however, due to the extra access to social resources being awarded to minorities in the United States, immigrant communities including some affluent groups, are attempting to emphasize their distinctive heritage.[7] Generally, however, immigrant groups want to be marketable in their new abode but they want their cluture to survive, eespecially to have their children to maintain their heritage. It was partially to understand this process of immigrants desiring to revitalize their culture that this author and his wife [8] spent several years studying the twenty- year history of one Sikh immigrant community located in England.

Why do immigrants prefer to insulate themselves or maintain a distinctiveness from the host community ? Many leave their home region at considerable risk to start life anew in an alien land; why do they continue to look back to their place of origin to guide and evaluate ? Some of the mechanisms used by ethnics insulating themselves have been discussed by Fredrik Barth.[9] Barth and others have often observed that among immigrant communities there is a resurgence of ideas and behaviour which may even be of an older vintage than what is presently being practised by the sending society – a process which is the focus of this inquiry.

The People Studied

The migrant Sikh Jat peasants, the people who are the focus of this study, left their villages in India to work in the industrial region of Gravesend, Kent, England. Being Sikhs,[10] they are members of a soldier-saint brotherhood founded by Guru Nanak in the 15th Century - itself a revitalization movement to unite warring Hindus and Muslims in the Punjab plains of India. Being Jats[11] they are proud of their *zamindari* or land-owning status. Their actual acreage may be meagre but they still claim equality with rulers. These peasants, who originated from rural Indian, insulated themselves from Western ideals which had given some urban Indians a sense of inferiority and a desire to emulate their British rulers. All three of these factors, i.e., religion, Jat status and rural origins, contribute to these immigrants being a proud people.

Gravesend, the receiving city, lies about twenty miles east of London on the south bank of the River Thames, across from Tilbury Harbor. It is a natural focus for immigration because it is a part of the greater London industrial region, and jobs are likely to be more plentiful than in many other areas. Gravesend's western sector is crowded with paper mills, cable, rubber, printing, cement, engineering, ship building and ancillary industries. These all boost Gravesend's economy and make it an ideal community for immigrant settlement.

In 1981, roughly 7,797, or 8 per cent of Gravesend's population of 94, 756 was made up of immigrants. There were about 127 Pakistanis, 279 Caribbeans and the remainder of Indian origion. Of the latter, most were Punjabi Sikh Jats, mainly from villages in Doaba[12]; about 20 per cent were Ramgarhias[13] (a number of whom were Kenyan Asians) and 1 per cent were Hindus.[14] Gravesend's Indian population will be referred to here as "Gravesindians" and the community as "Gravesindia."

The vast majority of Gravesindians are Punjabi Sikh Jats from the Jalandhur Doab area of Punjab, India. Most of them knew each other directly or indirectly via inter-village communication before leaving India. Twenty percent of the Gravesindians are Ramgarhias.

Gravesend, being a port, has continually endorsed itinerant colonials, among whom, some had been from South Asia. After World War II, Britain needed labourers to man its industry, so she turned to members of her former Empires, males from the West Indies and North India. Thus, immigrants began arriving in the industrial centers of the U.K. to fill the voids not occupied by England's indigenous man power. Gravesend was one such reception centre which received Sikhs from Punjab.

The initial settlers, in the early 1950s and 1960s, were primarily males who left their wives and children in their home village. Their goal was to live as frugally as possible in the new land of wealth, and then return to India as "Barra Sahibs" or big and important men in their village. They lived in crowded rooming houses, where two or three males shared a single bed – the individuals going on shift yielded their mattress to those returning from their jobs. These Sikhs took pride in their abilities to work longer hours and harder than their English counterparts. Their main concern was to maximize their assets, which often entailed logging up to 90 hours a week.

Socialization consisted of three things : stopping at a corner pub for a beer after a work shift, making a visit to their Sikh Gurdwara, and visiting their rooming house to sleep. These early years were a time when men drank together and interacted, with little concern about being good Sikhs, maintaining Punjabi culture, or keeping a proper image among their brethren or the English hosts. The testimony of one of the few Gravesindian children helps to illustrate the attitude of the time :

> In the early years.... my mother dressed us in clothes like English children. My brother and I associated with English friends. As our parents did not want us to be different in any way, they assured our learning the English language properly.

The few Punjab families that resided in Gravesend wanted to become an integral part of British society instead of being concerned with their cultural heritage.

Revitalization of Gravesindia

British public resentment against coloreds increased. In 1960 the immigrants realized that restrictions on Commonwealth immigration would be imposed by 1962. As in other parts of Britain, a fear gripped the Gravesindians who sent for their friends and relatives to come to Britain before the doors to this land of opportunity would be closed. Thus the influx of Asians to England increased considerably with wives, children, sisters and mothers arriving to balance out the predominantly male population.

With these new arrivals came new concerns. Not only did they have to consider the anti-Asian feelings being expressed by the host community but social goals began to shift. Whereas before men composed the dominant element of the community and their goals were the acquisition of monetary resources, with the arrival of women and children, cultural issues were given greater consideration. Issues such as Sikh women maintaining purity, Jat children becoming good Sikhs, and Sikhs shaving their hair all became sources of concern, especially in an environment where Christian beliefs were threatening the norms parents wanted their children to adhere to. Thus, social pressures were reestablished. As one female explained :

> When our relatives came, everything changed drastically. The women would come to our house and say, "Don't you think Nimi's hair should be braided now that she is ten,"

> or "Nimi should not go to school with bare legs (that is wear dresses like the English girls) otherwise she will grow up being immodest." Immediately my mother's attitutde changed. I was no longer to be like the English, but was now to dress and be like Punjabi villagers.

However, there were still many Gravesindian men who were not willing to maintain the symbols of their faith, although they pressured their wives and children to be obedient to the teachings of their Guru. Many men followed a double standard, lenient values for themselves and stricter norms for their wives and children.

By 1965, an organization called "The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K." was established. The unofficial leader of this initially small band of about six reformers was a school teacher who had suffered considerably due to white violent racism in Gravesend. His car tires had been slashed and the windows of his home broken. He also felt that his children were not being treated fairly in the local school system.

The primary goal of this leader and his colleagues in the Society was the revitalization of the Khalsa, the Sikh soldier-saint brotherhood. They were concerned with the fact that their children were forgetting their native tongue. They agonized because their Sikh heritage was not being instilled in Gravesindian youth by the school system. They encouraged men not to shave their hair, even if shaving would make them more marketable. They condemned the president of the Gravesend Sikh temple because he had forsaken his *kesh* or hair for expediency.

The greatest fear of the society was the corruption of their girls, who they felt may start dating English boys and emulate western ideas and beliefs. They were afraid that girls would become independent and disobedient to their parents and husbands. The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., started collecting money and publishing pamphlets promoting Sikhism. They actively participated in Gurdwara politics to

restore a powerful leader who would keep the symbols of their faith, i.e., unshorn hair and turbans.

In examining the pamphlets published by the Society[15] and listening to debates in the Gurdwara,[16] the following themes in their dogma became evident. These themes were : Separateness, Symbols, Superiority, Synthesis and Recruitment. Some of these tenets are common in other revitalization movements in India, especially those that formed during the British Raj.

Separateness takes the form of not only maintaining a social barrier between the Gravesindians and their British hosts, but special emphasis is placed on females not associating with anything having to do with English society. This emphasis on separateness had not been present in the early years of the community's formation. Thus, children were chaperoned closely and activities were planned to keep them apart and busy.

Numerous Indians have generally considered British culture morally inferior to their own. Institutions like dating are interpreted by them as a prelude to sexual intimacy. As one elderly Punjabi village lady stated, "Is it true the English do not marry, they just hop from bed partner to bed partner as suites their fancy ?" The Sikhs of the Society did not want their children, especially their girls, to adopt any part of the British social norms.[17].

There was also the concern that Sikh children would adopt Christian teachings. It was common in English schools to have daily readings from the Bible and Christian oriented prayers. The Sikhs residing in England did not want their children indoctrinated in this western religion. Sikhism, like many other Indian religions, had preached the unity of all faiths and emphasized that "all paths lead to the same God." Assimilation had not been an issue in the 1950s and early 1960s, although it has been an issue in India even during

that time. For the Sikh immigrants in Gravesend, it only became important in the mid-1960s when the Gravesindians awareness was heightened by the Sikh Missionary Society, U.K.

Symbols worn by adherents to the Sikh faith have been stressed since they were instituted by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Sikh Guru. Called the *5Ks*, these symbols included uncut hair *(kes)*, which is usually worn under a turban. The hair and turban are their most distinctive and emphasized symbol, but others include an iron bracelet on the right wrist *(karha)*, sword *(kirpan)*, a comb in hair *(kangha)*, and a uniquely designed undershort, *(kachha)*. Placing primary emphasis on unshorn locks was understandable for it forced men to choose their allegiance. If they chose Sikhism, they were a visible representative of the Khalsa to the world and had to live accordingly. If a person wearing the *5Ks* behaved improperly, he was not only shaming his faith, but defaming others also who adhered to it.

A Sikh who did not maintain his visible distinctiveness was anonymous in a crowd[18]. He could violate the teachings of the group, since outsiders would not realize what sect he belonged to. Thus, in England, beards were shaved under the excuse that "they would be caught in the machinery," so some Sikh men could become lost in the crowd and violate norms when they so desired without anyone knowing they were part of the Sikh brotherhood.

A believer with his 5Ks was conspicuous when he walked down the street. He was an ambassador of his religion, an adherent to a tradition, a member of a community with a righteous heritage - all to be proud of. If he behaved improperly, he brought condemnation of himself, his group, his beliefs and the Khalsa - a price few wanted to bear.

By being outwardly distinctive, because of their symbols, made Sikhs seem more numerous than they actually were.

Three or four turbaned men standing in a line of thirty or more people gave the impression of their comprising over half the group. Thus, by maintaining such symbols, the social strength of all Sikhs in Gravesend seemed much greaher. It also exerted pressure on others to conform to Sikh norms and take a stand for the Khalsa.

In the early years, it was the norm to look and dress like the Englishmen and not stand out in the crowd. However, under the leadership of the Sikh Missionary Society, Sikh men started regrowing their beards and publicly wore their turbans to be distinguished as a separate group. Initially only a few Sikhs had reverted to their distinctive symbols, but by 1988, a large number had regrown their hair and put on their turban.

Superiority is not an uncommon theme among any culture, including the Sikhs, men such as the famous writer and editor Khuswant Singh[19] often set forth the superior accomplishments of Khalsa members. Gurbachan Singh Sidhu[20] of the Sikh Missionary Society summed it up in the following statement about the Sikhs :

> The world knows them as the bravest warriors, most ambitious and industrious in either war or peace. They are also the hardiest agriculturalists of the East. In games also they have won Olympic fame although they are one of the smallest religious minorities in the world.

Speeches in the Gurdwara at that time frequently emphasized the physical and spiritual strength of martyrs. Leaders urged Gravesindians to follow the examples of their forefarthers and live up to Khalsa superiority, which had been displayed in their past history.

Superiority is not limited to making their adherents physically supreme, but also arguing their belief system is predominant. Kirpal Singh[21] effectively argued that Sikhism is a universal religion which "became completely free from

all narrow sectarianism dogma and prejudice." Although the Sikhs in Gravesend, as well as their counterparts in India believe that "all paths lead to the same God," they also maintain that the path of the Sikh is superior. According to the Sikhs, their faith has combined the good points of all religions : Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist, thus making it a universal faith. They further set forth the notion that Sikhism does not have the sectarian boundaries emphasized by Christianity and other narrow religions.

Synthesis emerged in the Sikh immigrant community from the influence of Western or Christian idea. It developed by justifying Sikh beliefs with a threatening system. It combined, modified and interpreted both Sikh, science and Christian ideas to show the validity of the Sikh faith. Both in India and Gravesindia, some Sikhs argued that Christianity was an off-shoot of Sikhism – Sikhism being a return to the original and pure belief of the ancients.[22] These arguments were made by such notables as Khazan Singh[23] who interpreted archeological evidence to reveal how some present religious traditions have become corrupted.

These arguments were like tenets of other reform movements in India. The Arya Samaj and Bhramo Samaj ideologies that developed during British rule also used superiority and synthesis to counter the western and Christian threat to their traditions. Some Sikhs in Gravesend interpreted scientific evidence to show the correctness and superiority of their beliefs. Leaders like Kirpal Singh maintained that the photosynthesis reaction of the sun on a man's hair gave his body extra strength. Therefore, Sikhs maintained a samsonion argument that unshorn hair gave them prowess. In other words, Western science was used to support the ancient practice of the Sikhs in not trimming their beards or cutting hair. Thus they argued that long hair actually made men healthier and stronger.

In justifying the validity of their faith, the members of the Sikhs Missionary Society quoted passages from the Bible, especially Judges XVI : 17 and the life of John, the Baptist, in Matthew X:30 to show how hair maintenance was practised and upheld among early Jews and Christians. In their estimation, Sikhism was cross-culturally universal and above all other religions.

Recruitment was another practice the Sikhs in England began to emphasize. They did not practise recruitment with the missionary zeal of some Christian sects. Following the Guru is different from aligning with a creed or organization. Nevertheless, Sikhs of the Society wanted Englishmen to accept their beliefs. They were very proud of the many white American-Sikh followers of Yogi Bhajan Singh, and some upheld them as examples of Westerners converting to Sikhism.[24]

Thus, a language of cross-cultural communication developed. Guru Nanak became the Jesus Christ of the Sikhs, the Gurdwara the Sikh church and the Guru Granth Sahib the Sikhs' Bible. It was interesting, however, that this bi-cultural language was developed and encouraged more to Gravesindian youngsters than to those of English heritage.

While visiting Jandiali, a sending community, I observed that the concerns set forth by the Gravesindian immigrant community were evident. They recognised their holy days in a traditional manner. Morning and evening prayers were broadcast from Gurdwara loudspeakers for everyone to hear. In this Sikh village, there were some shorn locks, which were of little concern to the elders. Therefore, rejuvenating or revitalization of Sikhism in a Sikh community was of less interest in the home community from where emigration took place than in their new home.

Conclusions

The Sikhs are an international people. They have communities in almost every major city in the world and every

continent. Although survival has always been a major concern, they have a good record of maintaining their faith and culture in alien environments. The above provides a micro-level look at some of the ways Sikh communities have been able to survive in diverse circumstances and even hostile environments. In essence, what was developed by the Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., was the beginning of what Anthony Wallace[25] terms a "Revitalization Movement." He explains that such movements formulate when members of a group attempt to construct a more satisfying culture. Members analyze their cultural materials, especially those that appear dissonant, and attempt to combine or reformulate them into a meaningful system. The goal is to bring organization into what may seem to be a disorderly field. Such movements generally occur when a group perceives themselves in an identity dilemma. Also, such movements come about when there is a lack of faith in established institutions and so an individual or group try to formulate a code, a blueprint for the kind of society they desire. Then they try to communicate that code so as to obtain converts and may be even interpret the code to show the validity of their beliefs in the light of their present situation.

In the case of the Gravesindians, especially the core members of the Sikh Missionary Society U.K., they wanted to communicate that their religion and culture was universal and workable in England. Thus, their tactics : separateness, maintaining symbols, superiority, synthesis and recruitment. Separateness was practices to maintain barriers from English influence so that the faithful and their children would remain pure. Maintaining symbols also helped keep their separateness but it also forced members to take a stand for their faith and live according to its dictates. To believe in their religion, there had to be a pride in it. All cultures must feel their way of life is superior or they will adopt another. Thus, showing the superiority of the Sikh faith was important. However, to do that, they had to deal with the cultural

environment in which they found themselves. Thus, instead of seeing science and Christianity as a threat, they interpreted them to show the validity of Sikh teachings.

The movement in Gravesindia had another feature; they borrowed or modified tenets of the host community to argue the validity of their conclusions and beliefs. In particular, they modified what they had learned in biology, that is, the process of photosynthesis, to conclude that this process also worked on hair. In this way, they exemplified the wisdom of Guru Gobind Singh who dictated that the Khalsa member should not cut his hair. It was more than taking the good points of one culture and instituting them into the immigrants system. They felt they could argue their case in another cultural framework - making their belief system, in their eyes, cross-cultural. Also they used the Bible to support their point of view, as well as using analogies to Western beliefs to communicate their views to their own children, as well as westerners. Last, having recruits from outside the community also was evident of the superiority of the Sikh beliefs.

It is no accident that the first pamphlet published by the Society was geared towards children rather than adults. Their primary concern was for their offspring to maintain their Sikh heritage. In other words, revitalization also took place to prevent the demise of Sikhism in England for subsequent generations. The Sikh elders were not questioning their culture, but feared that their children would.

Revitalization movements will develop in immigrant communities when they perceive their subsequent generations may forsake the religion and culture of the founding fathers. This was certainly the case for the Gravesindians, especially since it was not advantageous for them to maintain separateness. Being visibly different resulted in violent racial attack and difficulty in obtaining suitable employment.

Last, this case study shows how different aspects of the ideology are emphasized to ensure ethnic survival. In the case of the Gravesindians, their sending village was not as concerned with hair, symbols and a return to old ways as the immigrant community was. But, with the threat of Christian principles being instilled into their second generation, the revitalization movement not only espoused conservatism, but it borrowed from the host community to support that their beliefs were valid and applicable in the culture of the host community.

Notes

1. The research for this article was sponsored in part by Fulbright Hays Faculty Research Grant and Western Michigan University Faculty Research Grant and Fellowship.

2. In the paper, the term 'culture' will follow the usage set down by Aired Kroehar, Talcott Parsons and Clyde Kiuckholn (Krosber and Parsons. "The Concepts of Culture and of Social System," *American Sociological Review*, 1958, pp. 582-583; Parsons and Shils, "Some Fundamental Categories of the Theory of Action : A General Statement." in *Toward a General Theory of Action*, 1951, pp. 3-29; Krowber and Kluckhoin, *Culture : Critical Rivew of Concepts and Definitions*, 1952, New York; Vintage Books) where culture is defined as a symbolic system comprising values, meanings and beliefs. The social system is demacrated as the interrelationships of statuses or positions, and the role behaviour associated with those units. Personality, that is, ego structure, is the system of "need-dispositions operating as selective reactions to the alternatives." Three subsystems, that is, culture, society and personality, are subsystems actually interacting on each other within a larger systemic framework.

3. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, New York : The Free Press. 1915.

4. Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, New York : Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967; and *Cultural Materialism : The Struggle for a Science of Culture*, New York : Vintage Books. 1980.

5. Talcott Parsons' *The Social System*, New York : the Free Press, 1951.

6. The names of Parsons' associates and their views are given at 2 above.

7. Glazer and Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Cambridge and London The MIT Press, 1970.

8. My wife, Usha Helmeg, spent many long hours helping me understand the intricacies of Punjabi life.

9. Fredrik Barth, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries : The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference*, London : Georage Allen & Unwin, 1969.

10. For more detailed treatments of the Sikhs and their religion and history, see Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, Patiala, Punjabi University, 1970, Owen W. Cole and Piara Singh *The Sikhs : Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978; Harbans Singh, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, New Delhi Manohar, 1985; Jagjit Singh, *Perspectives on Sikhs Studies*, New Delhi Guru Nanak Foundation, 1985; and Kushwant Singh, *The Sikhs Today*, Bombay, Orient Longmeans, 1959, *A History of the Sikhs, Vol. 1*, Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1963, *A History of the Sikhs, Vol. II*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1966.

11. Jats are an upper caste group claiming Kashtriya membership, that is, they perceive of themselves as descending from the warrior ruler element of North India. They often feel that in owning land, they have power and authority.

12. This is in contrast to the Bedford Indian community, where about one-half of the 1,000 are untouchables. The villages that provided most of the Bravesend Indian community are Paragpur, Jandiali, Jandiala, Moranwali, Palahi, Shankar, Surai, Dhanowali, Rurka and Thankarki, which are primarily located near and around the cities of Phagwara, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana.

13. Ramgarhias claim their origins from Ramgarh, a village near Amritsar and are carpanters. There is often a competitive attitude between Ramgardiahs and Jats and very seldom would one group admit inferiority to the other. See H.A. Rose. *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province Vol. I*, Patiala, Languages Department, Punjab, 1970, p. 706.

14. Anthur W. Helweg, *Sikhs in England, Second Edition*, Now Delhi Oxford University Press, 1986.

15. Kirpal Singh, *The Sikh Symbols (Kesh-Hair)*, Gravesend; The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., 1971; S.S. Sidhu, *The Apostle of Peace*, The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., 1970 S.S. Sidhu, S.S. Siva and Kirpal Singh, *Guru Nanak (For Children)*. The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., 1969.

16. Helweg, *Sikhs in England*.

17. Arthur W. Helweg, *Sikhs in England, Second Edition*, New Delhi Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 98-115.

18. Some argue that those who do not wear the *5Ks* are not true Sikhs.

19. Khuswant Singh, *The Sikhs Today*,

20. S.S. Sidhu, *Apostle of Peace*, and *Guru Nanak*.

21. Kirpal Singh, *Sikh Symbols*

22. In other words, Sikhism is not a new religion but a most ancient faith. It is only considered modern because of the corrupted practices of the intervening

years make it seem to be a new faith. However, it is considered a return to the ancient pure ways.

23. Khazan Singh, *History of Sikh Religion*, Chandigarh, Department of Languages, Government of Punjab, 1914; and *Philosophy of the Sikh Religion*, Chandigarh : Department of Languages, Government of Punjab, 1914.

24. There was controversy within the community as to how the Yogi Bhajan followers should be accepted into the community however.

25. Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Culture and Personality*, New York, Random House, 1961; and *Religion : An Anthropological View*, New York : Random House, 1966.

Tagore on the Sikhs

Amalendu Bose

Guru Nanak's birth five hundred years ago brought solace, joy, purity, strength to millions of people down the corridors of history. We find deep impact produced by the Guru's astonishing personality and by certain memorable events of Sikh history upon the mind and art of Rabindranath Tagore and, through his poetry, upon the thinking of generations of Bengalees. We cannot contain the waters of the seven seas in the tea-cup, we cannot see all of the rounded sky through a pipe-hole, we cannot limit the universalist meaning of the great Guru to the narrow angles of particular incidents or values. His greatness is trenscendental, all-encompassing, timeless. But it is precisely this all-encompassing and transcendental quality of the Guru's personality that comes home to us when we consider how the creative imagination of a great modern poet blossomed forth in response to the Guru's teachings.

Bengal is about a thousand miles far from Guru Nanak's homeland. But what are a thousand miles to the universalist spirit of one who travelled thousands and thousands of miles, north and south, west and east, the east including Bengal and Assam ? Four hundred years after the Guru's birth, a distinguished Bengalee, a man of deeply religious sensibilities, the poet Tagore's venerable father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, went year after year to the Golden Temple of Amritsar in quest of Joy and Truth. We learn from the poet's autobiography that for some years, the Maharshi's personal attendant was a fine-featured young Sikh named Lenu who accompanied his employer to Calcutta. A boy

of barely ten, the poet became attached to this Sikh youth and entertained him by exhibiting his toy ship that could gently roll, right and left, in tune with a toy organ. Shortly, after his *upanayan*, the shaven-headed boy of eleven accompanied his father to Dalhousie, halting for a month in Amritsar. Let me quote here from the poet's autobiography :

> The Gurdwara of Amritsar I remember as a dream. Many were the mornings when I went to the Sikh temple set within a tank. Bhajan was incessant there. Seated in the midst of the Sikh worshippers there, my father would join them in song and they would greet him with pleased cordiality.

The poet further says that his father would often invite one or another of the Bhajan singers of the Temple to repair to his house and sing songs.

The recollection of this boyhood experience remained with the poet till his last days. Even as a teen-aged person, he rendered into Bengali several songs from the *Japji* and some of these are, I understand from a scholarly Brahmo friend of mine, still sung at the Sunday prayers of the Samaj. It is my belief that the pure monotheism of the *Japji* songs appealed deeply to the monotheistic mind of the youthful Brahmo, the poet Tagore, and, further, the Guru's beautiful exhortations of his followers to abjure all that is false and narrow and fissiparous and to imbibe all that is true and comprehensive and unifying, and especially the constant tone of absolute surrender to the One Deity, are the qualities, among others, of the *Japji* songs that won the poet's heart. I may be permitted here to quote just two of these songs (as rendered into English by my young friend Purshottam Lal) :

> Hundreds of thousands !
> Of earths, of skies,

Of skies upon skies !
Hundreds of thousands !
They cannot be counted !...
This is the one truth of the Vedas.

Ask the Kateba !
Eighteen thousand worlds !
Eighteen thousand, but the source is one !
Count them if you like !
You will die before they end.
He is great, says Nanak.
He knows.
Himself by Himself.

.....Like rivers rushing into seas,
not knowing where they go,
They praise You, O Lord,
without knowing who You are.

O King,
O my King of kings,
all the oceans,
all the mountains,
all treasures, all power
are like nothing, nothing
compared even to an ant
who has You in his heart.

(Ibid.)

What makes these songs great poetry is the white radiance and purity of their emotion, absolutely untramelled by the pettifogging dogmas of conventional theology. Here is palpably a man of God who has felt and known and whose feeling and knowledge well up in spontaneous words. I have found that the impact of such devotional poetry-especially the songs of Nanak, Kabir and the peregrinating *bauls* of Bengal - on Tagore's own

devotional poetry is considerable. Tagore's reverence for Nanak was constant and I find passing references to the Guru in numerous places in his prose. In his middle period, he wrote a series of essays on Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh and the Sikhs in general. These essays are not learned treatises, they were not meant to be so; they are written in a remarkably simple and direct prose style for the edification of Bengalee children. You will remember that eighty years ago, our school texts in history played down, for reasons of obvious political expediency, the meaning of the Sikhs. Tagore therefore sought to redress this imbalance by wirting simple narrative accounts of the Guru and his followers, bringing their significance into luminous focus. And this has been of inestimable service to the growth of interest in Bengal in the Guru and his followers. There have been distinguished scholars among the Bengalees who have made important contributions to the history of the Sikhs but none, I can assure you, has rivalled these simple accounts of Tagore, both in prose and verse, in the matter of imparting a basic knowledge and understanding of the Sikhs to Bengalee children for the last six decades. One of these essays reads like a story though it is scrupulously fact-based. It tells of the strange son of Kalu of Talvandi, the boy Nanak who preferred the wealth of God's name to the gold that his father expected him to earn as trader in salt. It tells of the Guru's disciples, Mardana, Lehna, Balasindhu and Ramdas. It tells of his wide wanderings and that profound reply that he gave to some Muslims in Mecca when they objected to his stretching his legs in the direction of the Kabah that they might be pleased to turn his legs to any direction where God is not. Tagore in the last paragraph of this essay tells his young readers :

> The Sikhs whom you see around you today, men of sturdy build, handsome countenance, tough strength and unflinching courage, are the *sishyas*, disciples of Baba Nanak. There were no Sikhs before Nanak. It was his noble

> personality and sublime spirituality that brought this race into existence. It is through his teachings that their temper is fearless, they keep their heads erect, their character and countenance are brightened with magnanimity.

Tagore expects our children to proceed from the effect to the cause, to some understanding of the Guru's greatness from the admirable qualities, both racial and individual, of the followers who derive their strength from him. In illustration of this belief that it is because of the purity and power of the source that the fruits are valuable too, Tagore wrote a number of poems that rank among his finest compositions and are known to every Bengalee, man and woman, who has had some school education. In 1900 were published two volumes of ballads and narratives which are now combined in a single volume entitled *Katho-O-Kahini* (Tales and Legends). Some of these poems are based on Buddhist legends, some on Tod's Rajasthan, and some on Sikh history, one around Banda, another around Taru Singh, two other concern Guru Gobind Singh. I myself admire most the last two poems for their rare depth of understanding of Guru Gobind's self-exploration and moral strength during two crises of his life, but the poem on Banda, with its stirring metre and diction, is a must for ever school function or social get-together where poems are recited; there are lines in this poem that Bengalee revolutionaries for half a century have uttered while jumping to the fray of life and death. To give my audience here some idea of the quality of the content of the poem, I propose to offer a redndering of some of its portions in my hesitant English prose. the title of the poem is 'The Chained Hero', *Bandi Veer*, 'bandi' meaning a prisoner, but, I hope, my audience here will recognize the subtle sonal affinity between 'bandi' and the hero's name 'Banda'. The poem goes somewhat thus :

> On the banks of the five rivers, inspired by their Guru's *mantra*, hair tied up on head, the Sikhs wake up as a

unified people, fearless and dauntless. All around a thousand voices cry, 'Jai Guruji'. Sikhs turn their gaze towards a new dawn. 'Alakh Niranjan', they cry, and that tremendous cry breaks down all fear, all inhibition, and their glad swords rattle next to their bodies. 'Alakh Niranjan' cries the Punjab on this day.

By the banks of the five reivers, this is a day when million hearts know no fear or care, when life and death are twin slaves at their feet.

By the banks of the five rivers, are the veins of blood now liberated in the bodies of a million *bhakatas* ? And do their souls, like free birds, fly up to their nests ? These heroes put the mark of blood on the forehead of their motherland. Locked in the embrace of a fight to the finish, Sikh and Mogul tighten their grips on each other's throats; the bitten eagle struggles against the serpent. In that deadly battle, the Sikh hero cries in resonant voice, 'Jai Guruji' and the blood-smeared faith-intoxicated Mogul repeats 'Deen, Deen'.

Banda is taken a prisoner in the fort of Gurdaspur and is removed to Delhi.

At the head of the procession, Mogul soldiers march through the dust that they raise, carrying severed heads of Sikhs stuck on the pointed end of their spears; seven hundred Sikhs march behind, their chains tinkle but, heedless of the danger to their lives, they still cry, 'Jai Guruji'.

When in Delhi they are to be beheaded, there is rivalry among these prisoners as to who will precede the others in laying down his life. At the day's end, a hundred brave men cry, 'Jai Guruji' and part with their heads.

When in a week's time, seven hundred men have been beheaded, the kazi placed a small son of Banda in the father's arms, and says the father must kill the son.

> Without a word, Banda hugs his child for a moment, puts his hand on the child's head and kisses his crimson turban. Then he draws out his dagger from the sheath and says, 'Fear not, my son, say "Jai Guruji". 'Jai Guruji, I have no fear,' comes the clear voice of the child. Banda bends his left arm around the child's neck and with the right hand plunges the dagger deep into the small body. 'Jai Guruji' cries the child before his body rolls on the ground.
>
> Stillness descends on the congregation in the court. The executioner begins to tear off flesh from Banda's body with hot pincers. Motionless stands the hero, dying without a single exclamation of pain.

I doubt if there are many comparably stirring poems in many languages and though I regret that it is beyond my capacity to render the tremendous power of the rhythm and imagery of the original, I think the incident itself is powerful enough to enter deep into the reader's sensibility. By contrast, the poem on Taru Singh is a brief piece of only sixteen lines. It goes thus :

> The ground in Shahidganj became red with the blood of Sikhs taken prisoners in war and then slaughtered. Then the Nawab said, "Listen, Taru Singh, I wish to pardon you." "Why should you neglect me ?" asked Taru Singh. Said the Nawab, "You are a brave man, I can't be angry with you. I shall let you off. My only request is that you will cut off your hair plait and leave it with me." Taru Singh replied, "I am so beholden for your kindness that, in return, I had better make a gift of my head along with the plait."

This is the poem, taut and terse in its verbal economy, offering us quick glimpses of the explosive passion that lies underneath the courteous exchange of compliments. And in Taru Singh we behold one who is more than an individual Sikh hero, we behold one who is also a symbol of his race, a symbol of his faith. A

parallel story occurs in one of the poems in *Sesh Saptak* (The Last Gamut) belonging to the final phase of the poet. This is once again the story of the siege of the Gurdaspur fort. The badshah's lieutenants have planned to starve the handful of besieged Sikhs fighting under Banda Singh; all communication between the fort and the world outside has been snapped; the besieged soldiers are reduced to eating powdered barks and branches of trees and raw meat (if any meat be available) this infernal privation comes to an end when after eight months, the fort falls;, soldiers in chains shout, 'Victory to the Guru' and day after day, severed Sikh heads roll on the gound. The poet now turns the focus on to a teen-aged young man, Nihal Singh, one of the chained soliders. His is a fresh, serene countenance lit by an inner light; in his eyes are congealed the morning song of pilgrims; it is as if some divine sculptor has carved out this eighteen year old body; he stands like a young cypress plant straight but lissom and an exuberant vitality almost overlfows his body and mind. His hands bound, he is brought to the court of the victors, the executioner is ready with his sword. At this moment a letter arrives fromt he capital conveying Syed Abdulla Khan's order that the young man is to be set free. When they unloose the chains, Nihal asks why there should be such an order for him. He hears that his widowed mother has informed the authorities that her son is not a Sikh, that he has been forced by the Sikhs to join them. The young man's face is flushed in shame and grief, he cries, "I do not care for my life in exchange of falsehood, in truth is my final liberation, I am a Sikh....." This too is a great poem in which Tagore has abandoned metre and rhyme, as he did in most of his later poetry, as if he challenges the reader to see if the stark prose rhythm cannot adequately convey the character of the incident, its dramatic development, the grim background against which stands Nihal Singh, the sharp contrast between his youthful vitality and its destruction in the offering, and, above all, his

unflickering adherence to Truth which is the cardinal meaning of his faith.

Of the two poems on Guru Govind Singh, *Shesh Siksha* (The Last Lesson) tells the story of how the Guru had once in sudden anger killed a Pathan creditor; how, to atone for this act, he brought up the Pathan's son treating him as a son and how the young Pathan became deeply devoted to the Master; how the Guru tried to arouse the young Man's vengeance but failed once, and how eventually the Pathan was made to fly into a rage and to plunge a dagger into the Master's body; and how the dying Guru righteous said, 'My son, this is my last lesson : you must take righteous revenge for a wrong done.' This too is a great poem bringing out the Guru's complex personality but the other poem entitled *Guru Gobind* is, to my mind, the greatest of this group, great because of the rhythm and imagery, great because of the excruciating psychological self-exploration of the Guru during years of solitude. A man of action and organisation, Guru Gobind has been passing his days in contemplation, in an endeavour to attain to that spiritual fullness which alone should entitle him to the difficult role of leadership of his people. A humanist rather than an ascetic, his heart yearns for life in the midst of multitudes; he wakes up in his sleep dreaming of calls from his people; his sword in the scabbard wriggles like a living thing as he watches the restlessness of his followers. Ah, what a joy it would be to throw himself in the midst of a crowd, breaking and making kingdoms, destroying tyrants, catching hold of fate as if it were disobedient horse, riding through millions leaving behind indelible footprints on flame-crimsoned grounds, always jumping across death on to life. Sometimes it is a dark night and sometimes it is a shiny day, once the sky above is thunder-laden torn asunder by a relentless and insane storm. But heedless the Guru sends his call to his followers, "Come ye all to me as the waters of the five rivers flow into the sea; come ye my *bhakats*

and raise your intoxicated cry across the length and breadth of the Punjab." The Guru's voice penetrates the remotest nooks of jungles lest there should be some timid one hiding there. As he advances, his followers swell in number, Brahmin and Jat abandoning caste consciousness, ready to lay down their lives..... But these are visions of the future that connot be worked out yet. Now he has to control his passionate natural humanistic desires, now he must ponder and thoroughly examine himself until he can say to all : "I have no more doubts and hesitations, I have learnt what truth is, I have found my path and all obstacles including life and death clear off from my course. A voice within tells me to stand up in the effulgence of my truth. I call ye, my followers, to come to me, let in your Guru's life your own lives be enriched." ..... But all this is yet to be, and the Guru hardens himself to more days of strenuous self-examination. He must be like a lamp steadfast amid darkness, emitting its light in a stormy world. And therefore Guru Gobind asks his followers Sahu, Lehari and Ramdas to leave him alone with his unremitting self-preparation..... This is a poem containing over half-a-dozen stanzas that are memorised by every Bengalee young man worth his salt; these offer us the crystallised essence of a resolute and courageous gospel of action.

In his prose and poetry, Tagore birngs out some of the essential features of the Sikh character, especially the militant features. But these militant features acquire an unparallelled purity and nobility by virtue of their never-ending relation to their faith. For though changing times have necessarily brought about some modification or other in the social organisation of the Sikhs, there never has been a deviation from the primal spirit of their faith which they received from that incomparable man of God, Guru Nanak. A remarkably inspiring direction to that primal spirit has been indicated by Rabindranath Tagore

in his poems, prose essays, and in his devotional songs, a direction for which we in the eastern regions of our country are deeply indebted to him.

GURU GOBIND SINGH FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

The Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh (India), is a premier institution that was set up in the year 1966 as a part of the celebration of the 300th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Prophet of Sikh religion. Maharaja Yadvindra Singh of Patiala was its first President and he was succeeded by Governor, Sardar Ujjal Singh. The then Chief Minister of Punjab, Giani Zail Singh (who later became the President of India), was its first General Secreatry. The Foundation has published over two dozen books on Sikhism and other religions in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Sanskrit. The Foundation displayed, in 1966, throughout the country the sacred arms and weapons of Guru Gobind Singh that had arrived from the U.K. The cost of the pillars along the Guru Gobind Singh Marg from Sri Anandpur Sahib to Sri Damdama Sahib was met by this institution. The Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies (Quarterly) is also being published by the Foundation.

The Foundation is headquartered in its own spacious building complex, Guru Gobind Singh Bhawan, at Chandigarh, apart from another building complex, Vidysar, at Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pradesh. The properties of the Foundation vest in the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust.

Inter-Religious Dialogue and Action in the 21st Century

Shamsher Singh

Modern science and technology and means of fast communication are turning the whole world into a global village. The growing materialism, selfishness and lust for power have shifted the focus from God to man. With this narrow-mindedness conflicts are increasing at the level of the individual, communities and nations. It is also due to prejudice and misunderstanding of religion. We are all surrounded by hostility, distrust, fear and suspicion. In the present interdependent world we cannot isolate oursleves from the others. In multifaith and multicultural nations there is need of mutual understanding. The unity among the different nations is possible only through understanding their religions in true sense. Inter-religious dialogue is a hopeful step for world unity and peaceful life.

In the literal sense the word 'dialogue' is exchange of words between two or more than two persons on a common subject. Dialogue is neither debate nor conversation. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, (Vol. 15, p. 634), the word 'dialogue' is most oftenly used in the context of the study of world religions. The meaning of dialogue in the Random House Dictionary of English Language, (p. 398) is given as under :

> "An exchange of ideas or opinion on a particular issue, especially a political or religious issue, with the view to reaching an amicable agreement and settlement."

Dialogue is not quite so free wheeling as conversation. It is oriented to the relevant issue. The basic meaning of

dialogue is to exchange and grow in the perception and understanding of truth. With this process the personal trust and vision deepens and expands to the level of mutual adjustment. We should proceed in the dialogue with the learning attitude

Inter-religious dialogue operation is possible in three areas :

'In Practical' : We collaborate to help humanity
'In Cognitive' : We seek understanding of the truth
'In Spiritual' : We attempt to experience the partner's religion.

John Dunne is of the opinion that passing over into other's religious experience and coming back enlightened broadens and deepens one's sensibility.

Three stages are involved in inter-religious dialogue.

At the first stage we begin to know each other. With this misunderstandings are removed.

In the second stage we begin to discern values in the partner's tradition and then if we are serious and sensitive we together begin to explore new areas of reality. Patiently pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new revelations, a further unveiling of reality. Recognising the values of others' faiths and to create a living relationship with man as well as with God should be the real motive of dialogue.

Religion is more important as it is the base of dialogue. Religion is the base to search the deeper truths of life. All great religions of the world teach mankind love, tolerance and peace on the earth. One of the fundamental roles of religion in any society is to expose the dehumanizing aspect of the society, seek righteousness and correct oppression.

Religon is life in God, love of man, charity for all and service to the humanity. Spiritual truth is the other name of religion. Science can comprehend truth through knowledge/

Philosophy aims at knowledge of goodness and beauty and religion at the attainment of truth.

We enter into dialogue with the purpose to learn, change and grow in the perception and understanding of truth. It is expected from every participant to come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. Without trust in the feelings of men relating to different faiths we cannot have the real dialogue. Trust is essential because it is the base on which the peace and harmony of life can be built successfully. Trust requires patience, persistance, realism, restraint and understanding of human beings.

It is very important to respect the feelings and emotions of men of different faiths. The participants should restrain from any kind of adverse criticism of any religion. One should listen honestly, respond to any clarification sought by the partner and should understand constructively what is being said by the other.

For every partner it is also essential that he should have anthentic faith in the essence and soul of one's own religion. It does not mean that one should stubbornly adhere to notions and ideas which are either misinterpreted to suit one's own interest or supposed to have been taught hundreds of years ago, but which have become out-dated today.

It is also important and necessary to have knowledge about others' religious scriptures, doctrines, rituals, ethics, festivals, customs, beliefs and social attitudes, without any feeling of prejudice. It is imperative to learn the spiritual values of other religions.

To attain true harmony through inter-religious dialogue we must have unconditional love for others. Preconceived misconceptions cause feelings of suspecion and hatred. It is only possible when one is aware of the presence of God's light in all beings. Sikh Gurus advocated this thought with great stress, in the Holy Scripture, as under :

All are created of the same air and the same clay.
Same is the light in all.

(*Guru Granth*, p. 36)

First, God created His light and from its power were all men made
Yea, from God's light came the whole Universe
So, whom shall we call good, whom bad.

(*Guru Granth*, p. 1349)

Dialogue is a dynamic medium. Dynamic attitude in dialogue inspires always its participants with the courage of conception and realization. The partner deepenes, expands and modifies his religion's self-definition. A claim for monopoly of full truth closes the door to welcome any other faith. Absoluteness is against the dynamic nature of living religions. Openness of mind is a way to proceed towards understanding the truth. Any religion that claims itself to be the final and refuses to see beyond its boundaries, becomes static. The fifth Nanak after compiling the Holy Scripture talks about limitless God.

The participants should not come into the dialogue with hard and fast assumptions. Each partner should not only listen with open mind and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the views of others while maintaining integrity of one's own tradition. Openness and integrity both imply the possibilities to understand the others' faiths.

When we talk outwardly we seem different and divided and when see inwardly we unite. Religion is one, religious traditions and rituals are different.

Every participant should come with the purpose to learn and teach. With this method we will be able to go from the known to the unknown. If one partner comes to teach and stresses only his own view-point, the other is listener only; it becomes one way traffic. Dialogue is a mutual reflection,

seeing one's self in the other. It is like two mirrors facing each other. The purpose of dialogue is sharing one's own spiritual experience towards a common discovery. When either of the partners makes an exclusive claim of his own faith, then, dialogue loses its real significance.

In the beginning the difficult and controvertial issue may not be taken up. Issue & providing some common grounds should be tackled first. With this gradual process the personal trust and vision deepens and expands to the level of mutual adjustment.

Four possible models of dialogue are often suggested : theological, scholarly, personal and creative. The final creative attitude means joining of hands on the part of two or more religions to complement each other. Dialogue in action is the most fruitful. Only academic discussions do not always achieve the desired object and aim. Mutual trust and understanding can find positive expression. The dialogue held in true sense never leaves the partners unaffected. It leads to deeper appreciation of another on the one hand, and on the other hand deepens the commitment to one's own religion. It heightens a person's perception of both the differences and similarities among religions. Through a dialogue one tradition not only undergoes re-conception within itself, it also begins to reconceive the other tradition. It leads to a recognition of common ground among various religious traditions.

The aim of dialogue is to bring peace through religion. All religions through different languages and symbols teach the same virtues of love, kindness, fraternity, forgiveness and compassion. Sikhism too teaches the same : Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, and service to the mankind.

Thou art our only Father
We are only thy children.

(*Guru Granth*, p. 611)

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of Sikhism, was imbued with the spirit of Divine power, strong will and firm faith in *Almighty God*. He was the saviour of the down-trodden and a spiritual and political liberator of Indian people. He says :

> Recognize all mankind as one
> The same Lord is the Creator and Nourisher of all
> Recognize no distinction among them –
> The temple and the mosque are the same
> So are the Hindu worship and Muslim prayer –
> Men are all one.

True religious person never worries and never hates any faith. Tolerance of all religious multiplicities leads us to unite.

When spiritual truth becomes the subject – matter of dialogue it inspires all men to unite at equal level. Truth in its practical way is distinct and indispensable for human survival. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, says :

> Truth is high
> Higher still is truthful living.

All conflicts, differences, wars and strifes are due to mental diequilibrium. Peace through religous dialogue is possible if it stands for spiritual reawakening of man. He is like a raw material. Inner evolution is possible through true religion. Andre Malraux remarks : "Our distressed generation is obscurely aware that the present crisis is a spiritual one and what we need is a healing of the discord between outward resources of power which are assuming frightful proportions and inward resources of spirit which seem to be steadly declining. If the humanity is to settle down in peace and enjoy prosperity the lost paradise of religion must be regained."

At present the biggest necessity for world peace and unity demands reconciliation of religious differences at the root level. At the level of branches we seem scattered, different and divided. Religion begins with a simple rite and ends with

and divided. Religion begins with a simple rite and ends with sublime realization. The materialistic civilization has lost sight of moral values and considers that the principal of human survival lies merely in attainment of victory in competition.

Through inter-religious dialogue man can rise above the sense of I-am-ness and my-ness and the sense of conflict, hate and exploitation is eliminated Sikh Gurus prayed to God to save the whole makind :

O God, be merciful and keep everyone in Thy Care.
O Lord, Bless us abundantly with our sustenance
and ridding us of our poverty, ferry us
across (the sea of material existence)
Lo, my God hath heard my prayer and the whole
creation is in cool comfort
O God, take me unto Thy embrace and
dispel all my woes.

(*Guru Granth*, p. 1251)

SIKH ETHOS AND MODERN HUMANISM

Dharmendra Goel

It is very enlightening to evaluate the relevance of Sikh ethos in the context of multi-dimensional crisis of 'modern man'. It is agreed on all hands that the 'modern man' has lost faith in all gods; and yet he yearns for a rational faith. Humanism without mystification and mediation of the sacred has a tendency to fall an easy prey to very gross materialism and banal platitudes. Existential disillusionment seeks for a heroic commitment to man's fate and his ability to uphold supremacy of values like compassion and love of beauty in an ecology of the Absurd. Heroic scientific humanism has not been able to liberate itself from the hubris of anthropocentricity generally.

Here I would start by a discussion of the salient attributes of the Sikh ethos with a special stress on its activistic, historic commitment to the eternal *Hukam* of the *Akal Purukh* alongwith the recognition of 'the here and now' of a man and his specific role in his age. The discussion may also be made on the salutary character of positive approach to life, service of all and struggling for justice as the hall-mark of Warrior Saint *(Khalsa).* Views on Sikh polity as participatory cooperative community may also be underlined. Afterwards, I shall take note of the global world-order and its more specific reverberations on the features of post-colonial Indian society, its problems of diverse ethnicities, inequlalities and injustices.

In my final conclusion, I would attempt to examine the question : can the spiritual activism of the Khalsa be reconditioned for a Pan-Indian role as humanism for providing a frame-work of spiritual ideology for creating an

egalitarian political economoy with a human and moral face ? My answer is yes. We need to sift what is to be revived and what is to be discarded from the Sikh traditions also to let these come to embody the very best of the spiritual heritage of the entire five thousand years of the sub-continental civilization. If this is done Sikh humanism with its positive, secular and catholic spirit could act as the flagship of a new response to the crisis of contemporary Indian society, as a whole; may even lead the contemporary age, world-wide, to a happy and safe heaven.

Sikhism, on one level, was a cultural response of Indian civilization to the aggression and turmoil from Central Asian conquerors and the shameful effeminacy of the indigenous feudal lords to withstand these external forces. In Sikhism, right from the soul-stirring sensitivity of the poetic muse of Guru Nanak Dev, this historical failure of Indian ruling classes is castigated and a divine polemical line is raised with the Supreme Being itself, *a la* Dostoevesky's Ivan Karmazov's atheism who wonders how the Supreme Almighty manages to look aside when small babes are tossed on the bayonets of the blood-thirsty Turks. God is dead. He can only be positively reborn in the resolute resistance to oppression (See Guru Gobind Singh's *Zafarnama* and the hymn *Shubh Karman te .....)* The Sikh quest for the inner truth does not end up in *Tantra Mantra* and *Yantra,* or life-negating *sanyas* as was the wont of Guru Nanak's predecessors and contemporary Siddhas. His fervent earthiness is noticeable in the brushes with Brahmin priests, Mullas, and Siddhas to whom he, with utmost politennes, reminds that their rituals and withdrawal from the life of the ordinary householder brings them no closer to the Sacred or the Divine. In the poetic and spiritual quest, Guru Nanak shows rarest catholicity of accommodation and constantly seeks communion and consensus in the solidarity of the Scared. Consequently, this streak of spiritual fraternity is well the hall-mark of the Sikh ethos in as much as the heritage

gathers its blossoms in Guru Granth Sahib in which the hymns of non-Sikh Bhagats are eloquently placed with the sacred *Mulmantra* and hymns of Guru Nanak Dev and other heirs of his spiritual epiphany. It is remarkable in its modernity and its realism inasmuch as it gives full recognition to the multifaceted character of spiritual quest. Once again, when Guru Arjan Dev gets the foundation laid of the Harmandir (The Golden Temple) in Amritsar by Sain Mian Mir, it reinforces that in spiritual striving there is no sense in tying oneself to the parochial kinships. It is in this catholicity of spirit and recognition of appreciation of the equi-validity of different sects and faiths that the medievel bard calls *Nanak Shah faqir, Hindu ka Guru Musalman ka Pir.* Having underlined the spirit of rational catholicity, tolerance and fraternity of the spiritual quest, we should see its surprising realism and concern for the furtherance of life and perpetual constitution of necessary conditions of man's freedom and creativity : The spiritual glory of labouring with one's thought rooted in one's Divine origin *(Nam-Simran)* and essential necessity of *Kirat* (bread-labour, as also prescribed later by Tolstoy, Ruskin and Gandhi) as well as the need to live life of complete sharing *(Wand-chhakna)* of all of one's earthly goods (Marx to Mao). These speak of the ever-fresh anticipations of modernity of this great visionary who wished mankind to be saved from the snares of *haume* (ago) and other evils arising out of egoity. Sikh ethos notes that nothing purges our sense of false importance more than the work that we undertake as simple collective chores of the *Sangat* in the public notice where the realized saint rubs his own divinity into the simple folks while joining to labour together for the good of the community. This point seems to have striking resemblance in the practices of St. Augustine, Gandhiji, Baba Amte and Mother Teresa who fratenrnise with the lowliest (lepers and the ourcastes) and the most despised to reinforce common conviction of the high dignity of the worker and underline the value of their strivings. The work is the

expression of man's free will as well as intelligence. It is a fetish only that some particular tasks, such as writing philosophy or poetry, lend dignity or are noble while scavenging or cobbling are seen ordinarily in some sense demeaning. Not at all. One great virtue of the Sikh ethos lies in this genuine equal regard and dignity for *Kirat* that it accords to all labourers.

Another great tenet that the Sikh ethos, evolved after the fifth Sikh Master, Guru Arjan Dev, was martyred by the tyrants, is the sixth Master, Guru Hargobind's introduction of the idea that the spiritual enlightenment must also act as the guarantor of the Rule of Dharma in insurance against injustice. That is polity : to ever act in the light of the wisdom of the saint who has to seek his constant direction. This ideal of *Miri* corresponds to Janak-Videh the Sthithi Prajna or Maryada Purshottam Ram, the Great Khalifa Harun-al-Rashid of the first epoch of messianic Islam or the notion of the Philosopher King as first introduced by Plato's *Republic* in antiquity and realized by the stoic philosopher, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Who can better represent this great ideal than the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, who baptises his daring *Panch Pyaras* as his first Gur-Sikhs and then humbly seeks baptism from them for himself ? A model of liberation from all egoism (Manmukh state) when he writes, after having lost all his four sons, that if the *Prabhu* has taken his four gifts, he has also given him thousands besides those. A total submergence of the self of the Khalsa in the *Sangat* for the instant Good of the *Sarbat.* A saint-soldier (Sant-Sipahi) has no ill-will and no fears *(Nirvair* and *Nirbhau)* towards anyone.

The ideals of *Degh-Tegh-Fateh* and *Pangat* and *Langar* are the devices to purge the narrow grooves of caste and varna from *Sangat* (community) that had dogged medieval Indian society. It also enjoined the ordinary householder to come and join the fraternity of arms to overcome the guiles of the power-brokers and tyrants' minions. It was an innovative

response to forge every meek peasant to be ready to wage perpetual resistance to the tyrants of the world. Sikh ethos as such was thus the blue-print of a collective social reconstruction. It was not a passion for domination or seeking hegemony over others, but a solemn resolve for the accomplishment of the most sacred element of the historical obligation, the ultimate aspiration of the 'Gurumukh' when he would say *chirian ton baz turaon.* A true Sikh can never be on the side of evil. That would be a blasphemy to the teachings of *Guru Granth* which exhorts one to fight to the finish for a righteous cause :

Sura so pehchaniai,
jo lare din ke het;
Purja purja kat marai,
kabhu nah chhadey khet.

What a striking resemblance to a famous Vaishnav saint, Narsimha Mehta's song :

Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye,
Jo jane pir parai re.

In my humble opinion, Gandhi was also a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, facing the challenges of the modern evil perpetrated by the capitalist exploitation of the Third World by the Machine.

Finally, like Aristotle's famous Theoria, Praxis and Poiesis, Sikh ethos also seeks constant fusion of *Gyan, Sharama* and *Karma* of the human condition : an integration of the spiritual, mental and physical aspects of man.

SIKHISM AND MODERN VALUE-PATTERN

Giani Lal Singh

As is well known, Guru Nanak Dev was the first spriritual teacher who sang the glory of God in the blessed company of a Hindu and a Muslim follower called *Bhai Bala* and *Bhai Mardana* respectively; this was, in fact, the first Sikh *Sangat,* holy association, which began to preach the Oneness of God and Brotherhood of Man in 1499 A.D. at Sultanpur Lodhi in the Land of Five Rivers.

Guru Nanak conveyed his message of peace and harmony through the media of poetry and music. He sang his gospal in the *Sangat* (company) of all and sundry who gathered around him, without any distinciton of caste, creed, colour, class and country. This gave rise to an ideal *Satsangat* (holy congregation) wherein the three paths of *Karamyoga, Gyanyoga* and *Bhagtiyoga* merged into *Namyoga* which is considered the essence of Sikhism.

The fifth Sikh Master, Guru Arjan Dev, compiled Gurbani (the revealed Word) of the Sikh Gurus together with the hymns of various Saints, Sufis and Bards in a Volume, called *Sri Granth Sahib,* which was installed in 1604 A.D. in Harimandir Sahib, generally known as Darbar Sahib (or Golden Temple), at Amritsar, during the reign of the Mughal Empror Akbar. This great and unique compendium, consisting of the sacred writings of 36 devotees of God, was enshrined as *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* in 1708 A.D. at Naded (revered as Hazoor Sahib by the Sikhs) in Maharashtra by the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

As is also known here and elsewhere, the first five disciples who offered their heads at the call of Guru Gobind Singh

on the Baisakhi day in 1699 A.D. at Anandpur Sahib, were baptised and proclaimed by him as his *Panj Piaras*. Those Five Beloveds represented the northern, easthern, western, central and southern zones of the Indian subcontinent. The Guru then offered himself to be baptised likewise by the said 'Chosen Five.' He, thereby, created the institution of the Khalsa, a distinct Fellowship of Faith in his own image and declared publicily. 'I offer my body, mind, wealth and whatsoever else is mine to my people."(1) He also announced before passing away in 1708, that *Sri Granth Sahib* shall thereafter be the only visible and perpetual Guru of the Sikhs, to be called and revered as *Sri Guru Granth Sahib.*

Guru Nanak, the founder, himself laid the life-pattern of an ideal Sikh, the God-oriented man, as under :

Just as the lotus remains detached in water,
And the duck floats carefree on the stream;
So can one cross the ocean of existence,
By keeping one's mind tuned to the holy Word
And by comtemplating the Name of the Lord.(2)

The Guru envisaged global fraternity assuring self-respect and dignity of every human being on a pattern of International Brotherhood based on justice, libterty and equality which automatically issue forth from the human mind through the practice of *"Nam, Dan, Ishnan"*, that is, by practising contemplation of the Name for merging one's self into the Universal Self; by serving the fellow-beings and maintaining the purity of body, mind and environment.

I assume this to be the model value-pattern which can be the source of peace and solace for the whole mankind for whose welfare the Sikhs conclude their daily prayer as under :

May the whole world,
Be blessed with peace and prosperity !

---

1 Guru Gobind Singh, *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib* compiled by Bhai Mani Singh, Amritsar, 1734, p. 717.

2 *Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 938.*

Discovering the Spirit within

Baba Virsa Singh

We wear certain outer symbols; some people prefer other outer clothing. As Guru Gobind Singh says, *"Niare niare desan ke bhes ko parbhao hai* - Different countries have different dresses, with different customs." (1) But our real symbol is our inner dress : to speak truth, recite God's Name, offer service, help the poor from our earnings, and avoid hurting anyone's feelings. Religion has always insisted on our inner dress.

Unless we do inner spiritual practice, we will gain nothing. Worldly wealth is of no help in this programme. Someone requested Jesus, "Master, may I stay with you ?" Jesus replied, "Even the animals have their homes. Some live in holes in the ground; the birds have their nests in trees. If you want to stay with me, I have no home. My home is the whole earth, with God as my roof. Inside this home, I will never want for anything." Now Jesus is known throughout the world. He never held any meetings or seminars. But because of the light of his inner wisdom, people flocked around him of their own accord. Whomever he met along the way he would bless, and move on.

Unless the inner spirit is at work, your work will not be fulfilled. God first chooses a person to come into the world and preach. God chose Guru Nanak Dev Ji; God chose Guru Gobind Singh Ji. They came to the world and spoke of God, and the world began to change. When Moinuddin Chishti came to Delhi on his way to Ajmer Sharif, 7,50,000 people converted to Islam. Why ? Because he spoke from inner wisdom, inner light. Everyone who came into contact with him was transformed.

Consider this : Has God chosen you to speak about Him ? If you have no vision, if you never meditate, how can you speak for God ? Those who wrote the holy books had the clear vision of *gian*, of enlightenment. They saw the Light and then they spoke.

If we want inner transformation, we must turn within. As Guru Teg Bahadur says, "*Kahe re ban khojan jaee. Sarab niwasi sada alepa tohi sang samaee* - Why are you going to the forests searching for God ? He is pervading everywhere, always undefiled, and He lives in you." (2) When we go within, we will experience God everywhere, even in the smallest of particles, as Guru Tegh Bahadur says : *Ghat ghat mai Har joo basai santan kaheo pukar.*" (3) We will see God in the water, in the earth, in the heart, in the forests, in the mountains, in the cave, as Guru Gobind Singh did when he said "*Jale Hari, thale Hari, ure Hari, bane Hari, gire Hari, gufe Hari.....*" (4) Gurbani was written from this state of enlightenment. In it there is only love.

When you become immersed in meditation, everything will become light. If you carefully study Guru Gobind Singh, you will see that he had no separate existence. He never proclaimed himself great. He spoke of himself as a servant.

However you serve your Master, do it silently. Do not make a noisy outer show. If you boast that you rise early in the morning for your devotions, He will think that you have revealed your intimate meeting to others.

What are we to do for our Master ? "*Tan man dhan sabh saup Gur ko, hukam maneai paeeai* - Surrender mind, body and wealth to Him and then ask for His orders." (5) He has given us body, mind, and wealth, and we should feel fortunate that He has also given us time to do this work.

The Master for whom we are to work knows everything without our asking, without our praying before Him. "*Vi bolea, sabh kichh janda kis, agai keechai ardas.*" (6) He i

the Maker of our life, our brain, our goal, our sustenance. our every breath.

What does our Guru say to us at the end of the scripture ? *"Tirath, barat, ar dan kar, Man mai dharai guman* - After undertaking pilgrimages and fasts and giving alms, you have (still) ego in your mind." (7) Guru Teg Bahadur says, "You have done very good service : You have been removing the garbage and cleaning the floor. You have recited the scripture very well and offered very good food. But if on completion of this service, you say, 'I have done this,' it is as fruitless as bathing an elephant - *Nanak nihfal jat tih jio kunchar isnan."* (8) You may wash an elephant all day but when you finish, he will throw dust all over himself. Jesus once said, "If you are giving alms with one hand, even the other hand should not know."

Our Guru's instruction is to work with your hands and feet, and keep your mind attuned to God : *"Hath pao kar kam sabh cheet niranjan nal."* (9) Whey is there quarreling in the shrines ? Because the money spent on them is not earned by honest means. Langar also should be run from money earned by honest means. And you should use honestly earned money to bring up your children. Then there will be peace in your home, your children will be competent, and a flood of blessings will come from Guru Gobind Singh. If you use money earned by corrupt means, there will be a break in whatever you are doing. Whenever you hold congregations, Guru Nanak should be fully felt to be present. If people feel this presence again and again, they will follow his teachings in their homes as well.

Do not take money from the people for spiritual services. Instead, try to forget yourself as you serve. Remove from your thoughts the idea that you have done something. Whether it takes one year or a hundred years, this realization will have to come : Nothing belongs to us. We are just travellers. If God takes some service from us, it is His kindness, His

blessing, His mercy. Think, "I was incompetent to do this; I don't know why I was selected." As Guru Ram Das, such a great personality, very humbly says, *"Latri madhari thakur bhaee* - I am dimwitted and homely, but my Lord has liked me. Perhaps He saw my love and thought it good. But I have no qualifications. (10)

People are clashing even at interfaith conferences, for they are enmeshed in their religious prejudices. True inner vision, from which the scriptures were written, does not come from the human mind. This enlightened wisdom overcomes everything. We will only be able to sit together without anger when we see the spirit of God, the love of God, the light of God within ourselves. Then we will be sitting in the house of Guru Nanak. We will feel, as Guru Arjun Dev says, "*Na ko bairee, nahee bigana, Sagal sang ham kao banaee* - No one is an enemy, no one is a stranger; we all get along well." (11)

It is not at all difficult. It is only a question of doing a little spiritual practice. Without practice the mind cannot become clear and steady. Without meditation, your thoughts will be running astray. But if you meditate, you will achieve both worldly and spiritual success. You will have a glowing face here, and you will be hailed in heaven as well.

God gives us so much, and the greatest gift He gives is *gian.* (The Word) This clear inner wisdom of enlightenment is priceless.

It is worth more than all the wealth of the world. The Guru says, *"Man bas awai Nanaka je puran kirpa hoe* - If you have full blessing, then the mind can come under control." (12) When you are under the protection, the command of your Master, there will be a flood of spiritual light inside you. Your mind and heart will be filled with love. You will not recognize any distinctions of caste or race. You will say, *"Sabh Gobind hai, sabh Gobind hai* - Everything is God, everything is God."

(13) And after uttering the Name of God, you will merge with God.

Endnotes

1. Guru Gobind Singh, *Dasam Granth,* p. 19
2. Guru Teg Bahadur, *Guru Granth Sahib,* p. 684
3. Guru Teg Bahadur, *GGS* p. 1426
4. Guru Gobind Singh, *Dasam Granth,* p. 16
5. Guru Amar Das, *GGS* p. 918
6. Guru Amar Das, *GGS* p. 1420
7. Guru Teg Bahadur, *GGS* p. 1428
8. *ibid.*
9. Bhagat Nam Dev, *GGS* p. 1376
10. Guru Ram Das, *GGS* p. 527
11. Guru Arjun Dev, *GGS* P. 1299
12. Guru Arjun Dev, *GGS* p. 298
13. Bhagat Nam Dev, *GGS* p. 485

Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition

Harjot Oberai

This book* has endeavoured to rethink the whole concept of religious communities as applied to Indian society, particularly during the nineteenth century. In the study of religion it is common to employ the categories 'Sikh' 'Hindu', and 'Muslim' as if these were self-explanatory classifications. Among the fundamental conclusions of this book is that there is nothing natural or self-evident about such categories; rather, they are specific constructions rooted in particular historical epochs. Religion had never been reified in Indian society, as it had in Europe. It was a crucial part of life, but not something that could be disembodied and then objectified. The way people experienced reality, their modes of imagination and the vehicles through which knowledge was represented did not consist of references to an all-India community of believers. From the 'peculiar' nature of religion in Indian society there flowed an importatnt consequence : religious categorieis such as 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and 'Sikh', were ambiguous and fluid, they did not possess a pure form. Historically, it is more precise to speak in terms of a simultaneity of religious identities rather than distinct, universal, religious collectivities.

In nineteenth-century Punjabi social and ritual practices were largely governed by rules which applied to households *(ghar*, literally house, here household), villlage *(pind)*, maximal lineage *(biradari)*, clans *(got)*, and castes *(zat)*. What an individual did with his life, the values that guided him in this universe, the culture equipment through which he interpreted daily experiences, the control over land, labour and patronage,

and the distribution of power were determined not so much by the framework of a single religious community but by what *biradari* or *zat* a person belonged to. Moreover, from the domestic to the politico-jural domain, access to material and ideological resources depended on a person's ability to establish genealogical rank or to influence those who had it. Such a mode of existence is reflected not only in ethnographic and historical texts, but also in the myths, legends and folklore of Punjab. The popular folk-songs of Hir-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiban and Sassi-Punnun, recited by minstrels all over the province, illustrate both the existence of clan rules and how conflict, retribution and bloodshed followed when these rules were violated. Often, questions of honour and shame within the lineage were of far greater importance than religious loyalties. For the greater part of the last century, interpersonal transactions among people in Punjab were not therefore simply an extension of their religious traditions, but embedded in a complex idiom of kinship, patron/client relationships and asymmetrical reciprocity. Universal religious communities, as has often been assumed, are *not* a key to understanding pre-British society.

Within a particular religion, people belonged to disparate sacred traditions *(sampradaya)* headed by an individual or a distinct history, a set of rituals, a certain number of sacred shrines, a social code and, occasionally, bodily signs of distinction. Religious instruction, initiation and the distribution of boons were the key responsibilities of people who commanded a tradition. A large body of followers hailing from a broad spectrum of social backgrounds would attach themselves to the head (or heads) of a tradition, who was often known by an honorific : guru, pir, sajjada-nashin, bhai or baba. In the current state of research it is hard to specify what exactly were the self-perceptions of the members of a sacred tradition, and how they viewed those outside it. Nevertheless, one major

conclusion is possible. Asking an individual in mid-century Punjab if he was a Sikh, a Hindu or a Muslim was, at an epistemological level, quite absurd. The more relevant question would have been what sacred tradition he belonged to.

The pluralist framework of the Sikh faith in the nineteenth century allowed its adherents to belong to any one of the following traditions : Udasi, Nirmala, Khalsa, Nanak-panthi, Ram Raia, Baba Gurditta, Baba Jawahir Singh, Gur Bhag Singh, Nihang, Kalu Panthi, Ram Dasi, Nirankari, Kuka and Sarvaria. Many of these Sikhs shaved their heads, some smoked tobacco, others were not particular about maintaining the five external symbols of the faith. In the absence of a centralized church and an attendant religious hierarchy, heterogeneity in religious beliefs, plurality of rituals, and diversity of lifestyles were freely acknowledged. A pilgrimage to the Golden Temple could be supplemented with similar expeditions to the Ganges at Hardwar or the shrine of a Muslim saint. Attending seasonal festivals at Benares or Hardwar was in no way considered a transgression of prevailing Sikh doctrines, whatever teleological studies may assert today. Contemporary vehicles of knowledge-myths, texts, narratives, folklore and plays producued by non-Sikh authors-were accorded a firm place within Sikh cosmology. Most Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as residents of this village, at another as members of that cult; at one moment as part of this lineage, at another as part of that caste; and at yet another moment as belonging to a sacred tradition. The boundaries between the centre and periphery of Sikh tradition were extremely blurred. There was no single source of authority within the tradition; there were several competing definitions of a Sikh.

In the late nineteenth-century a growing body of Sikhs took part in a systematic compaign to purge their faith of religious

diversity, as well as what they saw as Hindu accretions and as a Brahmanical stranglehold over their rituals. The result was a fundamental change in the nature of the Sikh tradition. From an amorphous entity it rapidly turned into a homogeneous community. And of all the competing entities, symbols and norms that went into constituting the long history of the Sikh movement, it was the *Khalsa* sampradaya that succeded in imprinting its image of the 'new' community, or what, following Foucault, I have termed an episteme. The Udasis, Nirmalas-a motley complex of traditions referred to here as Sahajdharis-came to be seen as deviants. With the active displacement or subordination of many of the Sikh sub-traditions, a single Sikh identity began to crystallize in the first decade of this century.

In contemporary literature this new identity was given the name of Tat Khalsa, and those within the Sikh tradition who were opposed to its vision of the world came to be known as Sanatan Sikhs. One of the conclusions of my book is that differences between the Tat Khalsa and Sanatan Sikhs did not simply have to do with class, as has often been assumed, but were rooted in radically opposed views of the world. Doctrinally, Sanatan Sikh tradition was inherently ambiguous, contaminated and plural. It presented its adherents with a wide variety of choices to determine what they did with their rites festivals, body management, language and social organization. The Tat Khalsa disowned this pluralist tradition and enunciated an orderly, pure, singular form of Sikhism. Sikh dealings with miracle saints, goddesses, sorcerers, village sacred spots and clan rites came to be viewed with great hostility and, in the end, were censured. The faithful were compelled to direct their religious sentiments exclusively towards Sikh scared sources : for instance, the Adi Granth, the gurdwaras and the Gurmukhi script.

The point is that while formerly there was no standard Sikh identity, under the Tat Khalsa's aegis such an identity came to be forged for the first time. Blurred boudaries became distinct : the Tat Khalsa had 'framed' the community. By purging and adding to the evolving Rahit-nama texts, Tat Khalsa praxis formulated an authoritative definition. The new rituals, definitions and texts made it possible for the Sikh public to think, imagine and speak in terms of a universal community of believers united by uniform practices. The rules of household, lineage, clan and caste that had governed many interpersonal transactions were gradually breached, and there arose a vision of an undifferentiated community.

The Tat Khalsa's conscious drive to negate other traditions and monopolize the history, imagination and experience of the Sikh people becomes understandable in the light of four major developments. First, in the pre-British period the powerful Khalsa tradition had once been engaged in a contest to dislodge other traditions and impose its own vision of the world on them. This is most clearly reflected in the Rahit-nama and Guru-bilas literature. Despite the problems in dating these texts exactly, and the considerable variation in their doctrinal content, collectively they do express a fundamental urge among Khalsa Sikhs to creat a separate Sikh identity. In the *Gurbilas Chevin Patsahi* a text written sometime in the early nineteenth-century, the author instructs Sikhs to visit only Sikh shrines and read Sikh scriptures to overcome the exigencies of life. This advice can be read as an effort to stop Sikhs from undertaking highly popular pilgrimages to the shrines of pirs like Sakhi Sarvar, and to stop the incantation of mantras from non-Sikh sacred sources. The Rahit-nama works, more than any others texts, devote themselves to enunciating uniform rites, symbols and doctrines for the Sikh people. Therefore neither the journey towards nor the message of a separate Sikh identity under the Tat Khalsa was totally new; what was novel was the rejection of

the religious diversity that had come to be accepted under Sanatan Sikh tradition, and cultural modes, like the printing press, through which Sikh groups that did not fall under the rubric Khalsa were denied legitimacy. Thus was the past disaggregated, recombined and rearticulated into a new episteme in the late nineteenth century.

Second, the colonial state and its institutions played a significant role in the emergence of a homogeneous Sikh religion. In order to govern an alien society British administrators were compelled to invent a series of categories to index the indigenous population. In order to extract revenues, recruit men to staff the civil service, and strengthen the state's power of coercion, colonial rulers needed to devise means of representing the Indian population. Out of these needs flowed not only a series of well-known taxonomies like the 'martial race', 'criminal tribe' and 'agrarian caste', but also administrative categories : 'Hindu', 'Muslim', 'Sikh'. Overlooking the immense variation and complexity of Indian religious experince, colonial rulers indiscriminately lumped the disparate sacred traditions into single generic terms. As regards Sikhs the British administration, supported by Orientalist scholarship, went one step further, deciding that of all Sikh traditions only the Khalsa was authentic, the rest either spurious or Hindu accretions. This interpretation was turned into a yardstick for state patronage. All Sikhs who sought recruitment to the British army had to undergo Khalsa baptism and uphold the five symbols of the Khalsa. By rigidly upholding these traditions, regimental officers greatly boosted the fortunes of the Khalsa tradition, and census officers, by forcing people to identify themselves as Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, further supported the efforts of those who were keen on establishing clear cut religious boundaries.

Third, the drive for a standard Sikh identity can be traced back to the need of the new elites for a sub-culture that would

befit thier changed surroundings. The political, economic, but most importanlty cultural changes fostered by the Raj impelled Sikh elites to rewrite the social grammar of their society. By engaging in a Bakhtinian 'dialogic' process they fashioned a cultural code that combined new readings of the Adi Granth, Janam-sakhis and Gur-bilas with indigenous exegesses on the writings of Comte, John Stuart Mill and Descartes. The subculture of the new elites did not mesh well with existing Sikh sacred traditions, which were polytheistic and covered a wide spectrum of beliefs and ritual practices. These elites favoured a more uniform and homogeneous Sikh religion. To achieve this goal and impose their definitions of the Sikh faith, they established a string of cultural associations, opened educational institutionss and gained a virtual monopoly over channels of communication. The creation of a separate and new cultural identity can be an important step in the fight for leadership and authority. In the 1880s, with the start of an intense intra-elite rivalry for jobs in the administration and urban profession, religious ideology provided a useful means of elbowing out those who were perceived as adversaries.

Fourth, the emergence of a corporate Sikh identity was a sort of dialectical process. Just as the Sikhs had begun to conceive of themselves as an undifferentiated ethnic gorup, Hindus and Muslims were also undergoing similar transformations in imagination, experience and cultural organization. Movements like the Arya Samaj among the Punjabi Hindus and the Aligarh Movement among the Muslims in the United Provinces reflected aspirations similar to those of the Singh Sabhas. The foundation of a Muslim college in one part of the country encouraged a similar development among the Hindus in another, and ultimately the Sikhs did not wish to lag behind what Muslim and Hindus were doing.

In sum, a separate Sikh identity cannot be explained simply by referring to the British policy of divide and rule, or the

compulsions of elite politics. It resulted from a complex evolution. In many respects it pre-dates both separate electorates and intra-elite competition. This important fact has often been ignored by scholars who want to lay blame for the formation of communal identities exclusively at the doors of the Raj, or hold elite groups guilty of generating communalism for the purpose of socio-economic domination. If we are interested in locating the basis of communalism in India, we have to look as much at the domain of religion as explore political and economic spheres. It is mistake to treat religion as a reflection of powerful social forces. How the sacred came to be reconstituted in nineteenth-century India is a key to unravelling the complex relationships between politics and religion in the history of modern India.

The study of religious changes and the formation of a new paradigm of Sikhism also suggest certain general conclusions concerning the social construction of meaning and the transformation of religious and cultural ideologies. It seems appropriate to address the issue of why a certain configuration of religious thinking stays stable for given period of time and then under-goes radical change. I have addressed this issue by making use of the theoretical formulations proposed by Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdiew and Sherry Ortner. Particularly valuable are Foucault's writings on the nature of epistemes, Bourdieu's reflections on human practice, and Ortner's ideas on the transformative force of praxis. This study of religion has also benefited, I believe, by combining the insight of history and anthropology. While historians have generally been concerned with issues of power and the way religion serves as an ideology for the advancement of particular class interests, anthropologists have studied how human societies communicate some of their most cherihsed values, for instance the distinctions between nature and culture, through sacred myths, rituals and space. Where history provides a pragmatic

dimension in the study of religion, anthropology helps unravel the semantic aspects of religion, particularly in the area of ideology.

If has often been thought that ideologies are transmitted through institutions such as the family, schools, churches, newspapers and literature. If the ethnohistorical approach adopted here is correct, then the study of the formation and distribution of ideologies also requires that we look at several other domains, particularly corporeality, rites of passage, festive cycles, sacred space and architecture. The fact that a couple getting married circumambulates a fire or a sacred scripture makes an immense difference to what kinds of messages are being transmitted by a key ritual. Similarly, arrangements of sacred space or the conventions of body management are significant pointers both to the values a group holds for itself and which it seeks to communicate to those it sees as outsiders. In the present case, indices like corporeality, sacred space and rituals assume an even greater importance because the Sikhs are an unusually symbolic people. Without looking at their symbolic tropes it is not possible to explain how or why Sikhs came to see themselves as a uniform community of believers at the turn of the century, making it a major goal of the community to contest and eradicate all forms of religious diversity.

---

* We are reproducing here the 'Conclusions' of Harjot Oberoi's controversial book, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, in juxtaposition with its review, in the following pages, to enable the readers to have a better overview of the author's formulations as well as their critical evaluation - Cheif Editor.

PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE SIKH TRADITION

JASBIR SINGH AHLUWALIA

The Construction of Religious Boundaries by Harjot Oberoi is a profound, scholarly work, and a welcome addition to the corpus of modern Sikh studies. Most of the Sikh studies - both old and modern - are unfortunately characterized by methodological eclecticism and thus are not free from logical inconsistencies manifesting themselves in self-contradictory formulations and observations. In this context, Harjot Oberoi's methodological approach is both fresh and self-consistent. He has subjected to a critical scrutiny the Sikh tradition and the varying structures of its constituents emerging in the course of its growth down to what the author calls the 'construction' (in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century) of the present - day Khalsa identity that "framed" the Sikh community in its specific boundaries demarcable from Hinduism and Hindu community.

Harjot Oberoi's thesis is that Indian religious traditions over the centuries have been of the nature of intermingling currents, marked by overlapping boundaries with negligible contra-distinguishable specifics or self-identities. The categories 'Hindu', 'Muslim', 'Sikh', etc., have arisen only recently out of the amorphous religious milieu and these are just "specific constructions rooted in particular historical epochs" (P.418). For him, these categories are not self-referential and have no intrinsic, innate essence, or content. In other words, these empirically given categories are not of *a priori* nature becoming determinate in their evolutionary course. He maintains that in India

religion became "reified in history" in the nineteenth century and only when this phenomenon took place, there occurred crystallization of separate, distinct and concrete entities now called Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism (P.17)

In this context, Harjot Oberoi studies the growth pattern of 'Sikh identity' though the methodological concept of 'episteme' (derived from Michel Foucault) in the sense of a unifying conception of doctrine, ritual and history reflected in a distinguishable world-view, a specific paradigm, a differentiable ideological orientation. From this angle the author finds that the early Guru period brought about a somewhat nebulous Sikh episteme which did not aim at establishing "an independent Sikh identity" (P.51), as "early Sikh tradition did not seek to fully disengage its constituents from the society in which they lived" (P.89)

Within the methodological postulates of Harjot Oberoi, transition from one episteme to another is marked by "ruptures", discontinuities or occasional rapproachements when two epistemes, notwithstanding their different ideological orientations, happen to be hyphenated owing to contingent external factors. The author argues that after the period of early Sikh tradition as envisioned by Guru Nanak, there occurred a "rupture" in its growth and a new Sikh episteme started appearing on the horizon thanks to the Jat influx during the ministry of Guru Arjan and the confrontation with Islamic State after the martyrdom of the fifth Prophet. This marked the origination of the first 'Khalsa episteme', characterized by a distinct self-identity institutionalized by Guru Gobind Singh through the investiture of five symbols (five Ks). Writes Oberoi : "By the early eighteenth century social forces, coupled with the religious initiatives of Gobind Singh had endowed Sikhs with a distincitve Sikh identity in the form of the Khalsa. Unlike the Nanak-panthis the Khalsa Sikhs wished to be viewed as a separate religious entity" (P.89).

The author continues that the Khalsa episteme, the Khalsa identity, forged by Guru Gobind Singh got displaced by a new episteme, a new structure of religious relations, in early 19th century that saw a "conceptual and strategic" rapproachment of the Khalsa tradition with the Sahajdhari tradition resulting in what he calls the 'Sanatan Sikh tradition' (P.92). This tradition, under the influence of the Singh Sabha Movement in particular and the Sikh reformation in general, emerging towards the last decades of the 19th century, though another "rupture", gave way to the *second* Khalsa epsiteme, in the form of the twentieth century Sikh identity. This *second* Khalsa episteme is in some respects different from the earlier Khalsa episteme in that the latter, "did not seek to abolish other modes of identity within Sikh tradition" (P.90). On the other hand, the twentieth century Khalsa episteme is inherently tilted towards two-fold differentiation : differentiation externally from other religious traditions, such as Hinduism; and differentiation internally from other sub-traditions - such as the Nirmalas, Udasis, Kukas etc. - earlier subsisting within the once plural Sikh tradition. The Sikh tradition in its present Khalsa form, becoming unitary and monolithic, sought to establish its hegemonic position by its "conscious drive to negate other traditions and monopolize the history, imagination and experience of the Sikh people" (P.422). This is how propelled by the inner logic of his methodology - no methodology is free from ideological proclivity - Harjot Oberoi predicates the communitarian identity of the Sikhs as a "communal" category (P.425) and refers to Sikh self-awareness in terms of "Sikh separatism", though not in political sense (P.342).

Harjot Oberoi's formulations are logically valid, though ontologically not true, – valid only within the methodological framework adopted by the author. These are valid in the sense in which, for instance, the Newtonian proposition that in the absence of a counteracting force,

a moving body would continue moving endlessly is 'correct' on the basis of the hypothesis of the universe being infinite or infinitely expanding. In other words, his methodology is open to criticism, as being not germane to the subject matter of his approach; his cognitive categories remain foreign to the "contents" on which they are super-imposed. This, of course, does not mean that his methodology gives no new insights about the identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition. The author is right in pointing out that the Sikh tradition did not follow the pattern of a uni-directional, linear growth; he is also on sustainable ground in pinpointing the heteregeneity in the developing Sikh tradition, though its conceptualization by him, thanks to the inherent limitations of his methodology, is not free from epistemologic inadequacies. True, the Sikh tradition did not "descend" as a pre-given single unitary whole; rather the abstract universality of the Sikh concepts and categories got 'determinate' in the form of concrete universality through concrete particularities - pluralities, fluid multiplicities, highlighted by Oberoi - in an internally determined evolutionary process. The evolution of the Sikh tradition from Guru Nanak down to the present times has been of endogenous, and not exogenous nature. Harjot Oberoi's methodology is oriented toward treating this development as an exogenous phenomenon, determined by external factors and contingent circumstances, say, like the Jat influx or confrontation with the Mughal State, or the exigent requirements of the colonial British power that, according to him, encouraged a particular kind of Khalsa identity. The thesis that the evolution of Sikhism has proceeded exogenously and not endogenously has been propounded in a variety of ways by many scholars, including Gokul Chand Narang (*Transformation of Sikhism*), W.H. Mcleod (*The Evolution of the Sikh Community*); Joyce Pettigrew (*Robber Noblemen*) and E.K. Marenco (*The Transformation of the Sikh Society*). The common refrain

of such exogenous treatments is the "contrasting" of the mystical, quietist "spirituality" of Guru Nanak with the subsequent intstitutionalized dynamic "sociality" of Guru Gobind Singh manifesting itself in the militarization and politicization of Sikh movement, supposedly, unintended by its founder. Such methodological approaches, latent with ideological propensities, fail to cognize the internal dialectic, *elan vital,* of Sikhism, the institutional evolution and development of which is essentially a manifestation, a historical 'determination' of the inner spirit. (Whether the inner spirit of Sikh religion has exhausted itself in and through just one 'historical determination' in the form of *the* Sikhism-immersed in Punjabi ethnicity - in its present frame-up, or whether its inner spirit would have other historical determinations in different social and cultural milieu is a serious question that has so far attracted little attention of scholars of Sikh studies. I have raised this issue in my book *Sikhism Today : The Crisis Within and Without).*

Coming back to the methodology of Harjot Oberoi, the term 'episteme', as employed by the author, is a positivistically oriented concept the metaphysical matrix of which is the philosophy of radical empiricism for which 'experience' (in the social sense, also, in the form of beliefs, practices, behaviours, rites, etc.) gives rise to not only the disparate data but also the sets of relations that configurate the atomistic discrete data. Experience (the object) as prehended by the subject presents itself as a configuration of discursive elements, that is, as 'formed' content. Such a configuration (of social practices) exhibitis certain identifiable specifics characteristic of its historical context - this being the essence of the concept of episteme. As quoted by Harjot Oberoi, Michel Foucault defines episteme as "the set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences and possibly formalized systems". This conception

of episteme, on epistemologic level, admits of no active role of the subject (*a la* Kantian *a priori* categories or in any other way) in the subject-object relation of experience. Consequently episteme turns out to be an inertially static concept characterized by self-preserving quality, without any self-evolving dynamism. So, transition from one episteme to another requires some external transformative force for which Oberoi invokes the concept of praxis as conceived of by Sheery Ortner. By joining together the concept of episteme and praxis to explain the transition from one episteme to another the author argues that it is due to praxis that the episteme of one epoch is displaced by another episteme of the changed epoch. Writes Oberoi, "But changed social, cultural and economic contexts can lead to a situation of praxis, potentially carrying the possibility of a historical rupture. This is what would account for the dissolution of an episteme and the eventual rise of another'. (P.30). This formulation is tautological : Potentiality of praxis for transforming existing relationship is realized when historical context changes and the context changes when new praxis arises ! At best, praxis in the above sense as the transformative principle is just an external motor force. (Marxian conception of praxis makes it a dynamic process). That is how in explaining the emergence of the second Khalsa episteme in the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century epoch, Harjot Oberoi brings in three external factors, apart from the urge for a separate Sikh identity as a spill-over from the earlier "contest to dislodge other traditions." (P.422).The first of these three external developments relates to the role of the colonial State and its requirement "to invent a series of categories to index the indigenous population" (P.423). Hence the creation of administrative categories : Hindu, Muslim, Silkh" (P. 423). The second external factor was the "need of the new elites for a sub-culture that would befit their changed surroundings"

(P. 423). And the third external factor was the reaction and response to the surrounding Hindu and Muslim (denominational) movements like the Arya Samaj among the Hindus and the Aligarh movement among the Muslims (P. 424). In brief, Harjot Oberoi seems to say that the differentiated boundaries of Sikhism zigzagging through differently oriented Sikh identities, with corresponding epistemes, came to be solidified in the modern times mostly owing to external factors and contignent circumstances.

2

The thesis of Harjot Oberoi, though propounded in a scholarly way, is not epistemologically tenable; his formulations about the Sikh identities - each exhibiting a diffirent episteme - cannot be termed as having ontological correspondence with reality.

The categories 'Sikh', 'Sikhism' are essentially not of *a posteriori*, but of *a priori* nature becoming determinate in an endogenous evolutionary course through the two-fold process of nomization and institutionalization. Sikhism is a "revealed" religion. Nomization of social reality in terms of the Sikh categories and institutionalization of the Sikh nomos, the nomized reality, were implicit in the Sikh 'revelation' which I have described as sovereign in my book *The Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine*. Whatever be intended to be connoted by the terms 'militarization' and 'politicization' of the Sikh movement is inherent in the Sikh spirit itself. Sikhism contained intimations of a new civilization qualitatively different from the earlier Indic and Hindu civilizations in Indian sub-continent. The Sikh doctrine introduced in the realm of speculative thought of mankind a new conception of reality, of God, man and society and of their interrelationship; this new conception brought about a new problematic, a new world-view being the *zeitgeist* of the modern chapter of world history. On philosophical level the most revolutionary idea brought in

by Sikh metaphysic is the anisotropic conception of time, of historicity of time, as against the isotropic conception that underlies Vedanta as well as other metaphysical systems of India. Vedantic time is eternity - without beginning, without end - in which a thing continues to be in its aboriginal self-same state of being eternally. This provided the Vedantic definition of *Sat* (reality) in the sense of *Being* which in one form or the other informs other philosophical systems of India as well, except Buddhism which involved an atomistic conception of time. The conception of historical time, of historicity of time, in Sikh metaphysics marked the quantum jump from reality as *Being* to reality as *Becoming*. This was a perspectival change of far reaching consequences. The transcendental (supra-temporal) is real and permanent but the phenomenal (temporal) also is real, though not permanent. The phenomenal world of man - being the creation of Timeless God (Akal) in time - is real and not an illusion, *mithya or maya*. Religion comes to be seen in a new role.: as a dynamic force for transformation of man, society and State, encompassing not only spiritual concerns of man but also societal concerns in their totality. This new world view invests Sikhism with a distinctive, unique self-identity right from the very beginning; the essence becomes determinate in the evolutionary process determined by the inner logos, the innate spirit, of the new revelation. In this process the Sikh identity *becomes* determinate in the Khalsa form institutionalized by Guru Gobind Singh. The community of faith-followers, as such, came to have not only individual identity of form (five symbols known as *Kakkars*) but also a distinct corporate identity in terms of peoplehood. The build-up of the institutional form of Sikh religion was started by Guru Nanak himself who set up *Sangats* (congregational units) during the course of his long arduous journeys, both in and outside Indian sub-continent. This institutionalizing process was carried

forward by the nine successors of Guru Nanak - compilation of the *Adi Granth;* building up of Harimandir Saheb; erection of Sri Akal Takht being some of the most significant aspects of the intrinsic development of institutional Sikhism. The correlative process of nomization in the form of Sikh rites, ceremonies, ethical codes of conduct, modes of worship, conception of the sacred and the profane, distinct commensality, etc., also continued side by side. This was not intended to be *competitively* parallel or alternative to the Hindu or the Muslim cosomos. Guru Nanak exhorts a Hindu to be a *true* Hindu, and a Muslim to be a *true* Muslim. Guru Gobind Singh describes Hindu temple and Muslim mosque to be both contextually valid modes of worship. An institutionally oriented "revealed" religion necessarily seeks to nomize social reality in terms of its own vision and perspective, thereby creating a new 'nomos'. This new nomos - universalisitic in nature - can be called 'Sikh' in the denominational sense only for the reason that the community of the faith followers saw itself as divinely ordained (*ageya bhaey Akal ki*) to 'realize' this new nomos on earth. A point is often made that the stress on spiritual communion and moral values constitutes the essence of the Sikh category during the period of the first five Gurus, while accent on statal concerns and communitarian codes of conduct marks the later Sikh identity in its Khalsa form. This distinction does not remain valid when we take a holistic view of the spiritual-moral values and social ethics of Sikhism. In Sikhism, a Sikh's covenant with God, his obligation *vis-a-vis* the Divine expresses itself out in the category of *sachiar* ('realizing' Truth in truthfulness) as stressed by Guru Nanak. His simultaneous obligation towards society manifests itself through the category of *jujhar* (righteous crusader), as accentuated by Guru Gobind Singh. A Sikh's obligation *qua* a member of his community is given under the general category of *rahit* (code of conduct and appearance).

The obligation toward God, in a sense, reflects back in the form of the obligation towards humanity, towards society, as a whole. As such, the societal concerns of Sikhism are universalistic in character and are daily remembered in the Sikh prayer : *Sarbat da bhala.* The communitarian obligations of a Sikh have their significance in that these are *imperatives* of cohesiveness and solidarity of the community; these are subject to change and modification in their categoreal form, while the obligations towards God and society are of the nature of Kantian *categorical imperatives.* But these three sets of obligations *together* constitute the connotation of the term Sikh. Thus the distinction between the earlier Sikh identity informed by spiritual-moral concerns - meditation *(nam);* sharing worldly goods with others *(dan),* and self-purification *(ishnan)* - on the one hand and the subsequent Sikh (Khalsa) identity oriented toward social and statal concerns is only an artificial construction of boundaries between the two categoriess. Of course, the relationship between these three sets of obligations is of the nature of a 'structure-in-dominance' somewhat in the sense in which Louis Althusser has used this expression. Here various autonomous elements of the structure are asymmetrically related to each other - one element being dominant in the totality now and another element gaining ascendency in a changed context. When self-differentiation of the Sikh community, in reaction to the Brahminical inroads (to which Harjot Oberoi gives legitimacy as Sanatan Sikh Tradition) started in the last quarter of the 19th century, it was but inevitable that the formal elements of the Sikh identity would come to be stressed *more* than the other elements in the given structure-in-dominance. Unfortunately, Harjot Oberoi sees in this variance of accent on one or the other element of the integral structure a rupture, a 'break' and hence the passage from one Sikh episteme to a *different* Sikh episteme.

In fact *identity* (differentiation) and *relatedness* are the two aspects of the paradigm of Sikhism as envisaged by Guru Nanak himself. When on the outskirts of Multan, then a religious centre of various denominations, Guru Nanak is confronted with a cup of milk filled to the brim, the message was that India was already so full of faiths that there was no "space" for another religious dispensation. The Guru softly placed a petal of flower on the milk-filled cup symbolically conveying back the message that his new 'faith' while maintaining its petal-like identity would, *in consonance,* give fragrance to the milk.

Doctrinally, this metaphor of self-identity and relatedness (as distinct from *rootedness*) with other religious traditions and spiritual heritage flows from the Nanakian conception of historical time in which the past inheres in the present without robbing the latter of its originality, novelty and identity. This also accounts for the multivalent nature of the Sikh tradition and its consequent affinities with other religious traditions. This characteristic, while making the Sikh identity a self-expanding category, also at the same time, makes it vulnerable to inroads into its vitals. It is pertinent to point out here that in the post - Banda Bahadur period, the feudalization of the Sikh praxis resulted in Brahminization of the Sikh society and Vedanticization of the Sikh doctrine, thus destroying its 'sovereignty' which had to be re-discovered afresh in the modern period.

In other words, the evolutionary process of Sikhism has not been free from aberrations; nor has it taken place in vacuum or in isolation from external factors and circumstances. These external factors and contingent circumstances have to be taken into reckoning but the 'evolution', 'transformation', or 'development' of Sikhism cannot be exogenously attributed to such external contingencies and exigencies of circumstances, The point

is that some of these histroical variables - for instance Punjabi language - entering into the mediational process in and through which the universal in Sikh religion has evolved into a particular historical determination have become integral parts of the Sikh tradition and constituent aspects of the Sikh identity the evolution of which has been of the nature of continuity-in-change. In brief, the terms 'Sikh', 'Sikhism' being of the nature of *a priori* categories becoming determinate in internally conditioned evolutionary process are not unitary *static* concepts.

Today Sikhism is at a crucial juncture of its history when for the first time in its history - after the Guru period - it is becoming self-conscious. This self-consciousness naturally entails self-differentiaion. But it has to be ensured that this self-differentiation does not become contra-differentiation from other religious traditions in a way that could make contemporary Sikh praxis both sectarian and self-limiting.

The Sikh praxis abroad is tendentiously tilted towards contra-differentiation owing, among other things, to the imperatives of maintaining, *assertively*, the ethno-religious identity of the Sikhs, *as a fall-back mechanism*, in the midst of 'foreign' environs.

Harjot Oberoi's thesis, though on the other extreme, has pragmatic significance also in the sense that it could well serve as a "corrective" to the lopsided contra-differentiation of the Sikh tradition from other religious traditions.

Problems of Sikh Identity

Dr. Gopal Singh

Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, an eminent Sikh thinker and writer, has done me a signal honour by inviting me to do an overview of his well-argued, though controversial, thesis in his book : *The Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine.*

In the first place, I must congratulate the perceptive author on his high scholarship, in-depth study of the Sikh ethos and the comparative study not only of religions, both ancient and modern, but also of secular thought-patterns which have, from time to time, and more sō recently in the present century, moved and shaken to the roots vast multitudes in both Europe and Asia.

Religion as a denomination, politico-social group, and even as a ritualistic behaviour-pattern, is under attack at the hands of not only the non-believers, but also the discerning believers themselves, who want to extract some kind of inner fulfilment and illumination, non-verbal experience and spiritual elan from the religious idea, rather than an affirmation of their socio-political identity. The Sikhs, even more than the others, are called upon by history, time and again, to justify their existence in view of their limited appeal and numbers as well as their sovereign self-assertions both in appearance and socio-spiritual peculiarities. The Sikhs themselves, for historical or some other inexcusable reasons, have, by and large, refused to accept this challenge, and have so far either interpreted their ethos in the accepted idiom of the ancients which is unacceptable to the modern mind, or abandoned the search for identity, and unquestioningly accepted the dialectical materialistic interpretation of history as the true manifestation of their own ethos. It, thus,needed a man of very

high scholarship, deep commitment to the basics of the Sikh faith and to history, who could make out a case for locating the genesis of the Sikh identity. In my opinion, Dr. Ahluwalia has redeemed Sikh scholarship which hitherto has remained reduced to delineating only the obvious, the customary, the usual, and hence the least controversial. Dr. Jasbir Singh is, thus, both a pioneer and a challenger in this field.

I would be the last person to admit that I endorse or approve of every word of what is enunciated in this thesis with such brilliance of presentation and marshalling of facts and ideas. I would most certainly point to some other, and in my mind equally valid and authoritative basis, for determining the Sikh identity-for instance, the creation of a common spiritual denominator for men of every denomination to gather around; a universal platform for fighting aggression, both spiritual and social; a minority of God-directed but earth-aware people who fight and suffer on behalf of the listless and dehumanised majority torn by the factors of caste, creed, colour, sex or nationality; Sikhism is an idealistic adventure of the spirit rather than of statecraft, etc. It must not be forgotten that while history has oftentimes condoned the successes of the sword, the inner man has registered within his soul the moral defeat of mankind at the hands of history. The Sikh Gurus and Preceptors were not unmindful of this age-old dilemma, and hence tried their best to sift, carefully and with deliberate thought, the temporary ebb and tide of history, and its needs and compulsions, from the perennial spiritual sources which sustain mankind in all vicissitudes of history. This is not a plea for quietism, or refusing to accept the socio-economic challenges that man is confronted with at every step in his day-to-day living. This is only a plea for placing the Sikh ethos in the proper modern perspective of disillusionment both with the victories of science and the imperial conquest of territories.

However, this book will throw a challenge to all those who have anything better and more comprehensive to offer in defining the Sikh identity.

World University of Sikhism

The idea of WORLD UNIVERSITY OF SIKHISM has been stirring in the minds of the Sikh people over the last few decades and has been deliberated upon at different levels from time to time. It got enthusiastic response from eminent scholars from India and abroad who participated in the International Seminar on Sikhism and Inter Religious Dialogue organised from January 4-6, 1992 at New Delhi by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation (India).

The move envisages the establishment of a centre of higher learning of research with inter-disciplinary approach — an aspect that has so far remained neglected by traditional interpretations of Sikhism at the existing centres of Sikh studies both in India and abroad.

There will be a number of areas of research. The first relates to the unprecedented challenges before the Sikh society arising out of its self-consciousness about its distinct identity; the existential situation of the Sikh people has brought them face to face with new realities of life – a situation which requires new intellectual cognition. Secondly, the challenges of modern civilization have to be taken into reckoning in any futuristic perspective on Sikh religion and society. In this connection, the role of Sikh religion, in particular, in shaping the 21st century society and civilization would receive special attention of the University. Thirdly, the Sikhs, who are fast becoming an international community with significant presence in different parts of the globe, are, today, encountering as district groups, challenges of the surrounding faiths and cultures; this inter-action also requires continual ideational input to enable the Sikhs in different countries to have creative interface with other communities and to adjust with them while preserving their own cultural moorings. The phenomenon of Sikh diaspora would be a significant area of attention. Fourthly, the role and

significance of Sikh religion in the ongoing inter-religious dialogue on global level would be another field of research that will be taken up by the University.

The Sikh community is, today, at the cross-roads of its history, its destiny, faced with external and internal challenges of unprecedented nature and magnitude. What is needed is a new ideological perspective, through intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue, for the future of Sikhism and the Sikh society as well as for the future role of Sikh religion in shaping the 21st century society.

With the collapse of the classical communist world-view, a new world-view is emerging in which the spirit would be playing a vital role. Sikhism, being essentially a religion of spirit, is destined to make its historic contribution in evolving the new world-view.

The proposed University would address itself to such basic issues on ideational level; this is how this University would, it is hoped, be not just another centre of higher learning.

As regards the pattern of the University, it would be closer to the concept of a residential University. There will be a number of departments for research and interpretation by whole-time Faculty members and scholars, besides fixed-tenure fellowships, in the domains of Sikh philosophy; Sikh ethics and values; Sikh music; Sikh history and traditions; Sikh art and literature, and Sikh praxis. Visiting Professorships will also be arranged by the University. The Sikh Scripture and other sacred writings will be got translated into major languages of the world.

The project, under the auspices of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust, has been taken in hand as a part of the celebrations, in 1999, of the 300th anniversary of the creation of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh.

Jagdev Singh Jassowal
President

Joginder Singh Sawhney
Vice-President
Guru Gobind Singh Foundation

Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia
Chairman
Guru Gobind Singh Foundation
Properties Trust

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Kapur Singh : Eminent Sikh thinker and ideologist ; served Indian Parliament as one of its most distinguished members.

DR. Arthur W. Helweg : World-renowned scholar; Western Michigan University.

Amalendu Bose : Eminent Bengali scholar and writer.

Shamsher Singh : Leading Sikh scholar associated with Punjabi University, Patiala (India)

Dr. Dharmendra Goel : An authority on Indian philosophy and a senior Faculty member of Panjab University, Chandigarh (India).

Giani Lal Singh : Highly respected Sikh theologian, former Chairman of Punjab Public Service Commission, Patiala (India).

Baba Virsa Singh : Highly revered saint; Gobind Sadan, near Mehrauli, New Delhi.

Dr. Harjot Oberoi: Associate Professor at the Deptt. of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, and a member of Editorial Board of the *Pacific Studies.*

Dr. Gopal Singh : Eminent Sikh scholar, historian and translator of the Sikh Scripture, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib,* into English; served India in various capacities including Indian Ambassador and Governor of Goa.

Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia : Chief Editor, *The Guru Gobind Singh Journal of Religious Studies* , and Chairman of Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust, Chandigarh (India).

PUBLICATIONS OF GURU GOBIND SINGH FOUNDATION

ENGLISH

Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia
Sikhism Today : The Crisis Within and Without

Dr. R.S. Ahluwalia
Founder of the Khalsa

S/Shri Gurcharn Singh and V.S. Suri
Pir Budhu Shah

Sh. Kulwant Singh Grewal
A Bibliography of References in Bengali of Guru Gobind Singh

Prof. Harbans Singh
Guru Gobind Singh

Dr. Balbir Singh
Message of Guru Gobind Singh

Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia
Sikhism (Essence & Significance)

PUNJABI

Dr. Harbans Singh
Guru Gobind Singh

Dr. R.S. Ahluwalia
Dasmesh Pita Guru Gobind Singh

S. Inderjit Singh Tulsi
Badshah Darvesh
Guru Gobind Singh

Giani Lal Singh
Chonween Bani Dasam Granth

S/Shri Gurcharan Singh and V.S. Suri
Pir Budhu Shah

Dr. Kartar Singh
Jiwan Manorth
Te Prapti De Sadhan

Dr. Dalip Singh Deep
Guru Gobind Singh :
Jiwan Te Chintan

Principal S.S. Amol
Sikh Dharam Di Jaan Pachhan

Prof. Harbans Singh
Guru Gobind Singh

Dr. Taran Singh
Sikh Dharam Te
Bharat Di Qaumi Ekta

Ed. Giani Lal Singh And
Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia
Miri Piri Da Sidhant

HINDI

Prof. Harbans Singh
Guru Gobind Singh

Dr. R.S. Ahluwalia
Dashmesh Pita Guru Gobind Singh

SANSKRIT

Prof. Harbans Singh
Sri Guru Gobind Singh-
Bhagwat Pada

Dr. Satya Vrat
Guru Gobind Singh Charitram

URDU

S/Shri Gurcharan Singh and V.S. Suri
Pir Budhu Shah

Children Books (Illustrated)

Smt. Jaya Thadani
When Sparrows
Killed Hawks (English)

Sh. Shamsher Singh
Guru Gobind Singh (Punjabi)

Sh. Gurdial Singh Phul
Dharam Da Rakha (Punjabi)

Sh. Narinder Singh
Guru Gobind Singh (Hindi)

Published under the auspices of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation Properties Trust, Chandigarh, for the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, by Diljang Singh Jauhar, Joint Secretary, and Phototypeset, Designed and Printed at : Azad Hind Stores (P) Ltd., 34/17-E, Chandigarh. Ph. : 704511 to 704514.

GURU GOBIND SINGH FOUNDATION (INDIA) GIVES A CALL FOR CELEBRATING 1999 AS THE YEAR OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

(The following Memorandum was personally delivered at the U.N.O. Office in New York in September, 1992 by a delegation of the Foundation led by Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia. We call upon religious organisations and institutions the world over for endorsing this Call through resolutions, copies of which may be sent to the Foundation for the follow-up action).

A unique event of great world historical significance occurred at Sri Anandpur Sahib in India in the year 1699 when the tenth and last Prophet of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh, created the Order of the Khalsa, through the sacrament of baptismal 'Amrit'. The Guru thereby institutionalized the universal, humanistic teachings of Guru Nanak who in the medieval age had envisioned a new civilization characterized by a new value pattern based on the primacy of the human spirit.

Here was a unique prophetic message : the humanity of God and the divinity of man - a concept from which emanate, in a sense, the ideals enshrined in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter, which, *inter alia*, reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations, large and small".

We are approaching in 1999 the 300th anniversary of that divine moment in the flux of time that changed the very course of history, particularly in the Indian sub-continent.

This would be a historic occasion for the Sikh community all over the world not only for introspection and retrospection but also for foreseeing and forethinking.

More than that this would be an occasion for the peoples of the world to renew their commitment, on the threshold of the coming century, to the unfettered and uninhibited self-expression of the human spirit realizable in a new pluralistic world order.

Therefore, we call upon the peoples of the world to celebrate 1999 as the Year of the Human Spirit.

We call upon the United Nations to take a lead in declaring 1999 as the Year of the Human Spirit, so as to highlight the oneness of the manifold of social, cultural, religious, economic and

Printed at : AZAD HIND STORES PVT. LTD. 34, Sector 17-E, Chandigarh, Phones : 704511 to 704514