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# ESSAYS IN SIKHISM

TEJA SINGH, M. A.  
Khalsa College, Amritsar

1944

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SIKH UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NISBET ROAD, LAHORE

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## ESSAYS IN SIKHISM

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

JAPJI, or Guru Nanak's Meditations.

ASA-DI-VAR, or Guru Nanak's Morning Hymn.

THE PSALM OF PEACE, or Guru Arjun's  
Sukhmani.

SIKHISM: ITS IDEALS & INSTITUTIONS.

THE GROWTH OF RESPONSIBILITY IN  
SIKHISM.

HIGHROADS OF SIKH HISTORY, Books I, II&III

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PRESENTED TO:—

Professor Abdul Majid Khan, Sahib

Giani Darshan Singh Bari  
Secretary 2/6/46.

Harnam Singh  
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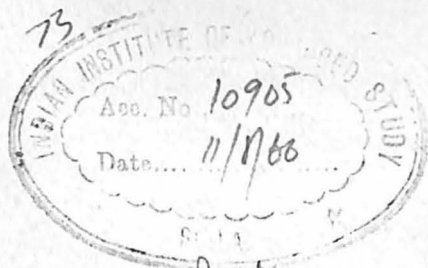


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## *Preface*

SOME of the essays included in this book being about the modern movements among the Sikhs, they must appear very controversial. My only defence is that I have tried to be fair even to those who might differ from me. I have set down nothing in malice or prejudice, and I would expect my readers to exercise their judgment fairly and squarely. After all somebody has to give facts even about recent times, and the present generation should not be allowed to grow up in ignorance about the great upheavals through which our community has passed. We must learn to bear with opinions, even if they happen to be opposed to our own. This is the only way to learn and to judge.

I shall heartily welcome any corrections of fact or opinion which sympathetic readers may have to suggest.

T. S.

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## GURU NANAK

Guru Nanak's sympathetic way of dealing with the existing religions of the world is often misinterpreted by those superficial observers of Sikhism who see in our great Guru nothing more than a reformer, who carried a message of peace for everybody, and who found here nothing to quarrel with. His largeness of view, in holding all men equal before God, is brought forward to witness that he recognised no defects in the prevailing systems of belief. The popular opinion about him is that he was a great *Faqir*, like so many others who from time to time have been appearing in India to enrich its sacred literature and reawaken for a time the love of God in the minds of its people. It is said that if his own work was creative in any way it was only on the social side, *i. e.*, it was only corruptions in society that he attacked, not the doctrines on which that social system was based.

Yet, if he had nothing constructive, his powers—let them have been as transcendent as they would—must have passed away unproductive and blighted, as has happened in so many cases, as Swami Ram Tirath, Tolstoy, etc. If he had brought with him no new truth, no new support for the tottering humanity, we, his followers, would have lived our little day among the ignoble sects of an effete civilisation and would have passed off and been heard of no more. If, then, Sikhism has made a mark among the religions of the world and if it is destined to hold its ground loftily in future, it must have had, in spite of what it appears now, a substantial originality given to it by its founder.

Guru Nanak, upon his advent, found religion a seething mass of moral putrefaction. He detected among its elements a certain superstition, which would make out an end of everything which was first intended only as a means. He saw living spirit dried up into formulæ, and formulæ, whether of mechanical worship, or meritorious readings, or contracts of reward and punishment, were ever so contrived as to escape making any over-high demands upon conscience. He struck at the root of this superstition by demanding truth in faith and spirit in workshop. He cleared away everything that encumbered the relation between God and man. He recognised no incarnation, no direct revelation, no human intercession on behalf of man in the court of heaven. He preached Purity, Justice, Goodness. He held out no promises in this world except those of suffering, as his successors and followers were to suffer, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His sake. He held out no promises even in the next world, of the "Houris of retiring glances," or the "Kama Dhenu," or the "Kalpa Tree," but the meeting of the Loved One Himself. It was to be with God—to lose one's self in Him. The ideal of life, the measure of salvation, he taught, is not happiness or peace of mind. To serve God and be able to love Him is in itself better than happiness, though it be with wounded feet, and bleeding brows, and hearts laden with sorrow.

There were many other ways in which he brought true knowledge to bear upon the problems of life. He separated pedantic Philosophy from Religion, and declared it to be a mere gymnastics of the mind. Religion was thus to be less a matter of intellect than of spirit. The practice of Yoga many do very well for emptying the mind of desires, but it gives

only a negative result. Man remains removed from the love of God as much in this stupid nothingness as when he is troubled by various desires. Therefore, he substituted music, the singing of God's praises, for Yoga as a means of linking the soul of man with God.

He gave another lesson in positive virtue which was a great improvement upon the established rules of conduct. There are always two sorts of duties: what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. The world had very early recognised the latter, and many very beautiful sets of commandments, like the Jewish decalogue, have come down to us. But by concentrating all their attention on one side of the matter the people had contrived to forget that any other side existed at all. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie, thou shalt not do this or that—this was all that was understood by Dharma or Duty. This emphasis on the negative side of virtue led to the adoption in the East of asceticism as the highest ideal of life, which ultimately meant the negation of all manly duty. Guru Nanak preached a more positive truth. He substituted Love for all the intricate doctrines of faith. And this love meant service :

Only service done within this world shall win us a place in heaven.—*Sri Rag.*

His followers soon profited by this teaching. One can see no higher record of service in the annals of nations than that shown by the Sikhs, who were taught to annihilate the thought of self and to utilize all their energies in the service of God and humanity.

Then take the relation of man with God, as preached by Guru Nanak. Man and woman are equal before one another and before God. Woman became more sacred, her dignity even higher than that of man, so much so that our Guru could not adore God



but in her disguise. Christ could not think of a better relation between God and man than of a father and son. With Guru Nanak, however, a wife's constancy to her husband represented more befittingly the relation between a faithful man and God. A son may not be the constant companion of his father after his marriage; but the wife is always wife, always constant, always seeking support of her Lord and Love. During the foreign tyranny the effect of oppression was the worst on Indian females. What was sadder still, they had lost respect even in the eyes of their own kinsmen. But, with the advent of Sikhism, where man became more precious in the sight of man, woman too gained a dignity and respect, which though not amounting to that exaggerated worship so conspicuous in the West, was yet an unprecedented improvement on the relation existing between the sexes in India. The result was a kind of chivalry unlike anything that had appeared in Europe or in Rajasthan. The Sikh became a knight, who had no personal motive, no passion of worldly love, to inspire him in the performance of his duty. The sight of wronged innocence or oppressed weakness was itself sufficient to move him to action. The Arthurian legends and the Carolingian romances may be likened to the adventures of Raja Rasalu and the Amadis romances to the tales of Rajasthan, but for the Sikh chivalry we can find no parallel. The knights of all other chivalries belong to the court of gallant Indra, but the Sikh knights belong to the court of—whom else but Guru Nanak.

Woman also gained her religious rights. She had been denied practically all share in immortality. She had no personal religion, no spiritual responsibility, no claim, no part in the law of God. She was denied all access to holy scriptures. She was to

remain content with the mere performance of domestic, social and individual duties, never to vivify or heighten them by the rays of God's eternal love. Poor Indian woman! Even in her happiest lot there is always left a void in her heart, which an ever-active piety alone can fill; and she whose portion is to suffer, whose lot is lonely, Oh! what misery must be hers, unless she can lean upon her God, and draw from His word the blessed conviction that she is not forgotten, that His love, His tenderness, are hers, far beyond the feeble conceptions of earth. Guru Nanak felt for the suffering of womankind and gave them their full share in the goodness of God. Religious congregations were thrown open to them. They were to partake freely in all the religious and secular observances, and no social custom was to hinder them in doing so. Sikh women are to this day seen attending all occasions of public worship, all conferences, along with members of the other sex; and their conjoint as well as alternate singing, in which they often lead the chorus, must move the heart of any man who wants to see what Guru Nanak did for womankind.

Man, who was told before that the body, being the source of sin, was to be condemned, that his continuing to live in the world was a crime, now was taught by the Guru to believe that his body was the temple of the Supreme Being, and that, as such, instead of being mortified, it deserved to be cherished as a precious gift of God.

Guru Nanak's conception of God was also a great improvement. He avoided the pitfalls into which the people of both East and West had fallen. The Aryans in the East who believed in the immanence of God were not true monotheists. They were either pantheistic or polytheistic. Sometimes, when

their thoughts in their highest flights transcended these sensualizing tendencies, they reached a kind of monism which was too abstract for human nature's daily use. And the Semitic people in the West, who believed in one God, conceived of Him as outside and above Nature. With them God was not an immanent but a transcendental Being: not an abstract idea or a moral force, but a personal Being, capable of being loved and honoured. This belief, when acted upon by the Hellenistic influences which were surcharged with the idea of immanence, came to acquire the same polytheistic tendency as was prevalent among the Aryans in the East. The God of Christians came to figure as a Trinity, including a human being on earth in the person of Jesus Christ. The Semitic instinct, however, restricted the incarnation of the Deity to one occasion only, and saved the Christians from becoming polytheists.

The Sikh Gurus combined the ideas of immanence and transcendence, without taking away anything from the unity and the personal character of God:

O! give me, give me some intelligence of my Beloved.

I am bewildered at the different accounts I hear of Him.

Some say that He is altogether outside the world; others that He is altogether contained in it.

His colour is not seen; His features cannot be made out: O happy wives, tell me truly:—

He lives in everything; He dwells in every heart; yet He is not blended with anything; He is separate.

Guru Nanak's moral laws are written on the tablets of eternity. They are not made up of human ideas and notions about things, which the mere increase of knowledge makes incredible. They are not mixed up with absurd miracles, revelations and

miscalculations about the creation of the world. The world may change its theories of life, it may overhaul the whole relations of science, history and what is received as religion, but Sikhism will not have to undergo any the least change in its creed.

With all this we yet feel that there is something wrong with us who profess to believe in Sikhism. How those high feelings ebbed away and the Sikhs became what we know them to be, we are partially beginning to see. It seems, from our experience, that there is 'no doctrine' in itself so pure, but that the meaner nature which is in us can disarm and distort it, and can adapt it to its own littleness. Our minds take shape from our hearts, and the facts of moral experience do not teach their own meaning but submit to many readings according to the power of understanding which we bring with us. The want of a clear perception of Sikhism has involved many of its followers in strange anomalies in the past, and still we have not done with them. These anomalies can be easily resolved if they are referred constantly to the word of God handed down to us by Guru Nanak.

GURU NANAK'S RELIGION  
IN HIS OWN WORDS  
ONLY ONE WAY FOR ALL

The way of Yogis is the way of philosophy. and that of Brahmins to read the Vedas ;

The way of Kṣhatryas is the way of bravery, and that of Sudras is to serve others ;

But to one who understands the matter, there is one and the same way for all.—*Āsā-di-Vār.*

WHAT IS THAT WAY ?

Religion does not consist in mere words :

He who looks on all men as equals is religious.

Religion does no consist in wandering to tombs or places of cremation, or sitting in different postures of contemplation ;

Religion does not consist in wandering from country to country, or in bathing at sacred places ;

Abide pure amid the impurities of the world ; thus shalt thou find the way of religion.—*Sūhi.*

THE IDEA OF PURITY

The heart gets impure with greed, and the tongue with lying :

The eyes get impure by staring at another's wealth, his wife or her beauty ;

The ears get impure by devouring the slander of others.

Nanak, these impurities lead the soul of man bound to hell.

All other impurity supposed to be contracted from touch is superstitious.

Birth and death are ordained ; we come and go by His will.

All eating and drinking, which God gave as sustenance, is pure.

Nanak, those who have realised this through the Guru do not believe in that impurity.—*Asa-di-Var*.

They are not to be called pure who only wash their bodies:

Rather are they pure, Nanak, who enshrine the Lord in their hearts.—*Asa-di-Var*.

He who worships stones, visits places of pilgrimage, dwells in forests,

Renounces the world, only wanders and wavers.

How can his filthy mind become pure ?

He who meets the True One shall obtain honour.  
—*Dhanasri Ashtpadi*.

#### GOD AND HIS RELATION WITH THE CREATION

The one Supreme Being, of the true Name, the Creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self-existent and the Enlightener; by His grace.—*Japji*.

He created the Avatars by His will.—*Maru Solhe*.

He Himself is the creative agencies, like the Maya, the Word and Brahma ;

He Himself is Truth, Beauty and the eternal yearning of the heart after Goodness.—*Japji*.

God is self-existent ; so is His Name.

Beside Himself He made Nature, wherein He has His seat and looks on with fondness.—*Asa-di-Var*.

He who fashioned the body of the Real is also the creator of the five elements and their master, the Mind.—*Suhi Chhant*.

In the beginning came Air from God ; then from Air, Water ;

From Water was created the Universe, with individualized life inspired by Spirit.—*Sri Rag*.

Real are Thy universes, regions,

Countries and created objects.  
 Real are Thy works and Thy purposes,  
 Thy rule and Thy administration,  
 Thy orders and Thy edicts,  
 Thy mercy and the mark of Thy acceptance.  
 Hundreds of thousands, millions upon millions  
 call upon Thee as the true Reality.  
 All forces and energies are from that Reality.  
 Thy praise and glorification is of real worth.  
 Thy laws of Nature, O true King, are real.  
 Those who worship the true Reality are real :  
 Only those who worship what is born and dies  
 are most unreal.—*Asa-di-Var*.

Whatever is seen or heard is in the order of Nature ; so is the consciousness of fear and comfort.

The nether regions, the heavens, and all the forms in creation came in the course of Nature ;

So did the Vedas, the Puranas, the Western Books, and all the ways of thought,

And all the ways of eating, drinking, dressing, and all the ways of love.

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

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

Nature works in the air, the water, the fire and the dust of the earth.

Thy Nature works everywhere ; Thou art the Master of Nature ; Thou the Creator : Thy Name is the holiest of the holy.

Nanak, God looks to everything with His will, and works most intelligently.—*Asa-di-Var*.

Bless Thee, O Thou indweller of Nature !  
 Thy ways are inscrutable.

In all orders of beings is Thy light, and all orders are in Thy light : Thou fillest all things by an art that is artless.—*Asa-di-Var*.

The body is the palace, the temple, the house of God : into it He puts His Eternal light.—*Malar*.

The body is the earth ; the wind speaks therein. Consider, O wise man, what it is that dies.—  
It is the contentious and proud Understanding :  
The conscious Soul dies not.—*Gauri*.

We earn our body from our parents,  
And get it inscribed with the gifts of Spirit and  
the tendency to rise ;  
But by coming in contact with worldliness we  
lose the higher consciousness.—*Maru*.

#### HIGHEST OBJECT OF LIFE IS TO LOVE GOD

He alone lives who enshrines the Lord in his heart.—*Var Majh*.

If a man loves to see God, what cares he for Salvation or Paradise !—*Asa*.

O my soul, how can you be saved without Love ?  
—*Sri Rag*.

Those who are attached to the three qualities, of Peace, Desire and Passion, have to be born and die again and again.

All the four Vedas talk of the phenomenal nature and describe the three conditions,

But the fourth unconditioned state is known from the true Guru alone.

By loving God and serving the Guru man is saved, and does not have again and again to be born and die.



Everybody talks of the four objectives, and the Smrities and the Shastras, together with the Pundits who read them, do the same.

But without the Guru the meaning of the true objective is not found.

The object of salvation is obtained from the love of God.—*Gauri*.

#### HOW TO LOVE GOD ?

What shall we offer to Him that we may behold His council-chamber ?

What shall we utter with our lips, which may move Him to give us His love ?—

In the ambrosial hours of the morn meditate on the grace of the True Name,

For, your good actions may procure for you a better birth, but salvation is from Grace alone.—*Japji*.

We should worship the Name, believe in the Name, which is ever and ever the same and true.—*Sri Rag*.

By praising God we get established a bond with Him.—*Var Majh*.

#### LOVE MEANS SERVICE

Those who love the Lord, love everybody.—*Wadhans*.

There can be no love of God without active service.—*Japji*.

We should do active service within the world, if we want a place in Heaven.—*Sri Rag*.

We cannot get to Heaven by mere talk ; we must practise righteousness, if we want salvation.—*Majh*.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S SERVANT

True service can be rendered only by those who, free of all personal ambition and in perfect contentment, pay homage to truth alone.

They refrain from treading in the path of evil, and doing good practise honesty.

They have broken the bonds of worldliness, and eat and drink moderately.—*Asa-di-Var*.

Nanak, life is most fruitful, when we meet with those who practise humility and gentleness even while they are strong.—*Sri Rag*.

Sweetness and Humility are the essence of all virtue.—*Asa-di-Var*.

Faith and Resignation are the characteristics of the holy; Patience is the virtue of angels.—*Sri Rag*.

By conquering the mind, we conquer the world—*Japji*.

Without the fear of God none shall be saved.

His fear keeps the love for Him in good trim.—*Gauri Guareri*.

All men are liable to err; it is only God or the Guru who is above error.—*Sri Rag*.

## EGO RESPONSIBLE FOR ERROR—ALSO FOR VIRTUE

Governed by his free will man laughs or weeps;  
Of his free will he begrimes or washes himself;  
Of his free will he degrades himself from the human order;

Of his free will he befools himself or becomes wise.

Self-assertion gives man his individuality and leads him to action ;

It also ties him down to the world and sends him on a round of births and deaths.

Wherefrom comes this assertion of self? How shall it leaves us?

It comes to man from the will of God, and determines his conduct according to his antecedents.

It is a great disease, but its remedy also lies within itself.

When God sends grace to man, he begins to obey the call of the Guru.

Nanak says: Hear ye all, this is the way to cure the disease.—*Asa-di-Var*.

#### GIVE UP EGOISM

There are lowest men among the low.

Nanak shall go with them; what has he got to do with the great?

God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly.—*Sri Rag*.

Nonsense is caste, and nonsense the titled fame.—*Var Sri Rag*.

What power has caste? It is work that is tested.—*Majh*.

Nanak, nobody is without some worth.—*Ramkali*.

How can you call woman inferior, when it is she who gives birth to great men?—*Asa-di-Var*.

#### GIVE UP ALL ERROR OF CUSTOM AND THOUGHT

Put away the custom which makes you forget the Loved One.—*Var Wadhans*.

My friend, the enjoyment of that food is evil which gives pain to the body and evil thought to the mind.

My friend, the wearing of that dress is evil which gives pain to the body and evil thoughts to the mind.  
—*Sri Rag*.

#### FOLLOW TRUTH

Truth is the remedy of all; only Truth can wash away our sins.—*Asa-di-Var*.

Falsehood exhausts itself; only Truth prevails in the end.—*Ramkali*.

Truth never gets old.—*Var Ramkali*.

Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is true-living.—*Sri Rag*.

That is being true, when the True One is in the heart;

When the filth of falsehood departs, and life is made clean.

That is being true, when man fixes his love on Truth,

And finds pleasure in hearing of the Name; thus is it that he finds himself liberated.

That is being true, when man knows how to live, And preparing the field of life puts the seed of God into it.

That is being true, when one receives true instruction,

Understands mercy to living things, and performs some acts of charity.

That is being true, when man resides at the sacred font of spirit,

Where, ever consulting the true Guru, he abides in peace.—*Asa-di-Var*.

#### AND HONEST LABOUR

Touch not at all the feet of those

Who call themselves *gurus* and *pirs*, and go about begging.

They who eat the fruit of their own labour and share it with others

Are the people, Nanak, who have found the right way.—*Var Sarang*.

#### DEATH THE PRIVILEGE OF BRAVE MEN

Death is the privilege of brave men, provided they die in an approved cause.—*Wadhans*.

## GURU GOBIND SINGH

'Sikh' (Sanskrit *Shish*) means a disciple ; and his religion is best understood when it is regarded as a life, a discipline, and not as a system of philosophy. Sikh history reveals the gradual making and development of a nation in the hands of ten successive leaders, called *Gurus*. They had much in common with other contemporary reformers who were doing so much to purify religion and enrich vernacular literature ; but these reformers appear to have been so impressed with the nothingness of this life that they deemed it unworthy of a thought to build up a new order of society. In the words of Joseph Cunningham, "they aimed chiefly at emancipation from priestcraft, or from the grossness of idolatry and polytheism.....They perfected forms of dissent rather than planted the germs of nations, and their sects remain to this day as they left them. It was reserved for (Guru) Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those foundations which enabled his successor (Guru) Gobind (Singh) to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes."

The movement began with Guru Nanak (1469—1539), who was born in the Kshatrya clan at Talwandi (now called Nankana Sahib), near Lahore. He found his people in the depths of degradation. The Punjab, which had once been the land of power and wisdom, had through successive raids of the foreigner become utterly helpless and ruined. It lay

like a door-mat at the gate of India. The people had no commerce, no language, no inspiring religion of their own. They had lost all self-respect and fellow-feeling. It has become a maxim now to call the Panjabis brave, social, practical, and so forth ; and we found them recently fighting, thousand of miles away from their homes, for the honour of the men and women of France and Belgium, of Malaya and Burma; but we forget that the same people, before the birth of Sikhism, were content to see their wives and children being led away as so many cattle to Gazni, without daring to do anything in defence of them. During one of the raids of the Mughals, of which Guru Nanak was an eye-witness, thousands of men and women were killed. The Guru in anguish sang a song which is recorded in the Holy Granth of Sikhs. "When," said he, "there was such slaughter, such groaning, O God, didst Thou not feel pain? Creator, Thou belongest to all. If a powerful party beat another powerful party, it is no matter for anger ; but when a ravenous lion falls upon a herd of cows, the master of the herd should show his manliness." Guru Nanak determined that the people should no longer remain a herd of cows, but should be turned into a nation of lions. Sikh history reveals how this miracle was performed. We see its consummation on the Baisakhi day of 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh baptised the Sikhs into *Singhs* or lions, calling each one of them a host in himself, a host of one lakh and a quarter.

Guru Nanak began by proclaiming that God is one ; He has no incarnation ; He loves all peoples as His own : "Those who love the Lord love everybody." "It is mere nonsense to observe caste." All men and women were equal. "How is woman inferior," he says, "when she gives birth to kings and prophets?"

“Put away the custom that makes you forget God.”  
“My friend, the enjoyment of that food is evil which gives pain to the body and evil thoughts to the mind.”  
There was to be no untouchability, no barriers between man and man. By adopting the Vernacular of the country for religious purposes, he roused the national sentiment of the people. It was strengthened by the community of thought and ideal, daily realised in the congregational singing of the same religious hymns. He organised *Sangats* of his followers wherever he went. These sangats linked up the people with themselves and with their Guru as the centre of their organisation. Guru Angad popularised among them a separate script, called *Gurmukhi*, which would make them independent of the priestly class. Guru Amar Das strengthened the *Sangats* by narrowing their frontiers within manageable compass and disallowing every schism. Guru Ram Das further strengthened the system by appointing regular missionaries called *Masands*, and by providing a central rallying place at Amritsar. Guru Arjun built the Golden Temple, and placed in it the Holy Granth, compiled by him, as the only authority for religion. In it he included the writings of himself and his predecessors, along with some chosen hymns from Hindu and Muslim saints of India, most of whom were untouchables.

All this created a stir in the official circles, and the Guru was believed to be creating a state within the state, which could not be tolerated by the rulers. The matters came to a head when it was reported (falsely) to the Emperor that Guru Arjun had helped the rebel prince Khusrau. The Guru was arrested and handed over to an enemy who tortured him to death. This released forces of discontent, and the next Guru, Hargobind, organised the Sikhs as soldiers and fought many successful battles with the Imperial armies.



There was a lull for some time under the next three Gurus; but at the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who had gone to Delhi to represent the cause of the Hindus of Kashmir, the anger of the Sikhs knew no bounds. They rallied under the banner of Guru Gobind Singh, who organised them as a band of warrior-saints, called the Khalsa, to right the wrongs of the people and not to rest until they had made the Punjab safe for Panjabis.

Guru Gobind Singh, born at Patna in 1666, was only nine years old when his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was beheaded in the Chandni Chauk of Delhi. The effect of this blow was very staggering at first. Nobody from among the high-class Sikhs came forward to claim the dismembered body of the Guru for the purpose of cremation. Only Jaita, a Ranghreta Sikh, belonging to the untouchable class, took courage to take up the dis severed head of the Guru and hurried away with it to Anandpur, where he presented it to the Guru's son. Guru Gobind Singh, who was a mere child, was touched with the extreme devotion of the Ranghreta Sikh, and flinging his arms round his neck declared, "Here I embrace through you all the Ranghretas as the Guru's own sons." He was very sorry to learn, however, that at the time of trial very few Sikhs, with the exception of the immediate followers, had shown the courage of their convictions. When questioned by the officials as to whether they were Sikhs they had the weakness to deny their Sikhism. The Guru saw in this the danger of a backsliding among the Sikhs. He vowed, therefore, that he would make it impossible for the Sikhs to hide their creed in future, even if they were among thousands, by giving them some distinguishing marks.

He retired for a while to the hills in the State of Nahan, where on the land offered by the ruler

he built a fort called Paunta. Here sitting on the beautiful banks of the Jamuna he thought of the way to free his countrymen from the bonds of sin and suffering. He applied himself closely to self-education. As a child he had Bengali on his tongue, and had learnt Punjabi from his mother. His father, as he himself says in his autobiography, called *Vichitra Natak*, 'had given him instruction of many kinds'. He had learnt Persian from a Mohammedan teacher, named Pir Mohammed. Now at Paunta he studied the old texts in Sanscrit, and learnt to compose poetry in Hindi and Panjabi. The Guru wanted to free the minds of men from all kinds of bondage, and for this purpose he produced a great volume of literature, of which the key-note is optimism, freedom from superstition, and strong faith in the oneness of God and of all humanity. Here are a few specimens:—

For this purpose was I born,  
 And this let the virtuous understand:  
 To advance righteousness, to emancipate the good,  
 And to destroy all evil-doers, root and branch.—

*Vichitra Natak.*

\* \* \*  
 I am the son of a brave man, not of a Brahmin:  
 How can I perform austerities?  
 How can I turn my attention to Thee, O Lord; and  
 yet forsake domestic duties?—*Kirshna Avtar.*

God is not concerned with celestial appearances or  
 with omens:

He is not appeased by incantations, written or  
 spoken, or by charms.

Hear ye all, I declare this truth:  
 Only those who practise love obtain the Lord.

—*Swayyas.*

\* \* \*

Recognise all human nature as one.

The temple and the mosque are the same; the Hindu and the Muslim forms of worship are the same; all men are the same, although they appear different under different local influences.

The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful, the Hindus and the Muslims have developed themselves according to the fashions of different countries.

All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build,—a compound of the same four elements—*Akal Ustat*.

He translated the old stories of Indian heroes, as found in the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and engaged fifty-two poets to help him in this heavy task\*. His purpose was to produce a national literature which would infuse a new spirit among his followers and steel their hearts against all injustice and tyranny.

This tyranny was not only political but also religious. If some of the rulers subjected the people to certain disabilities and hardships, Pandits and Maulvies, where they were concerned, were no less cruel in keeping thousands of their countrymen in a sort of religious bondage. If the political rulers were treating the subject people like so many vermin, the religious leaders were doing no less in looking down upon thousands of their fellowmen as untouchables. The political tyranny was discriminate and occasional, but the religious tyranny was indiscriminate and continuous, being practised everyday in kitchens, at village wells, in temples and hundreds of

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\*In order to wrest the monopoly of learning from the priestly class, he sent a few chosen Sikhs to Benares to study Sanscrit. When they returned after seven years' hard study, they proved very useful to the Guru in the literary work he had undertaken. They were called *Nirmalas*.

other places of mutual resort. It was more heinous than any other crime. Guru Gobind Singh says:—

“The sins committed in the name of religion are such that even the greatest sins blush before them.”

In order to fit himself for the coming struggle, he practised every form of manly exercise, such as riding, hunting, swimming, archery and sword-play. He also boldly fought with the hill rajas when they gave him trouble. Thus he gained a good knowledge of warfare. His fame for holiness, wisdom and bravery spread far and wide, and the people who saw him said, here was a leader born again.

The Guru, at last, had completed his plans and prepared himself for the task that lay before him. His object was to create a nation that would be pure enough to free itself from the oppression of priests and rulers. At the same time it should be strong enough to maintain this freedom. He came back to Anandpur, and announced his purpose. Crowds of people gathered round him. Even Mohammedans, like Pir Budhu Bhaḥ of Sadaura, who were not satisfied with the existing circumstances, expressed themselves ready to serve him. He built four forts at Anandpur, and began to celebrate the Holi festival in his own way. He called it *Hola Mohalla*. On the day following the Hindu festival he held a military parade of all his Sikhs, who came out in their best and went through a sort of mimic battle.

On the Baisakhi day of 1699 he called a big meeting of his Sikhs at Anandpur and told them his mission. At the end of his speech he drew out his sword and cried, “Is there anyone here who would lay down his life for religion?” At this the whole assembly was thrown into consternation; but the Guru went on repeating his demand. At the third

call Daya Ram, a Chhatri of Lahore, rose from his seat and offered himself. The Guru took him into the adjoining enclosure, where a few goats were kept tied, and seating him there cut off a goat's head. He came out with the dripping weapon and flourishing it before the multitude asked again, "Is there any other Sikh here who will offer himself as a sacrifice?" At this Dharam Das of Delhi, a Jat, came forward and was taken into the enclosure, where another goat was killed. In the same way three other men stood up one after another and offered themselves for the sacrifice. One was Mukham Chand, a washerman of Dwarka; another was Himmat a cook of Jagan Nath; and the third was Sahib Chand, a barber of Bedar. The Guru after dressing the five in handsome clothes brought them before the assembly. He baptised them with water stirred with a dagger and called them his Beloved Ones. He took the same baptism from them as a sign that he was one of them. About 80,000 men were baptised in a few days. He also sent orders round that all those who called themselves Sikhs should get themselves baptised in the same way. They were taught to believe in one God and the mission of the Ten Gurus. They were instructed to lead clean lives and to avoid all strong drinks. Particularly they were enjoined to avoid the use of tobacco, which besides being injurious to health makes people lazy. They were made to eat together out of the same vessel, so that they might feel like one. The lowest of them were equal to the highest. There was to be no caste among them, and all were to wear the same signs; that is, long hair, a comb, a pair of shorts, an iron bracelet, and a sword. They were to call themselves *singhs* or lions. Bravery, as much as peace

and purity, was to be their religion. The cows had thus become lions, and there was no longer a danger of their being eaten by devouring beasts.

The greatest lever used by the Guru in uplifting his people was self-respect; for it is there that the true and independent judgement begins. The Sikhs used to be domineered by the *Masands*\* or the local agents of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh freed his followers from the demeaning influence of these unworthy men by abolishing their order. The charity of the new society was to flow in a new channel. Instead of pampering the old hereditary caste with occasional doles, the Sikhs were to set apart one tenth of their income regularly to be used for public good. The needs of the Sikhs themselves were to be met out of this common fund.

To promote the sense of equality it was made clear that the Guru also was human and to pay divine honours to him was the greatest blasphemy. The Guru said :

Whoever says I am the Lord,  
 Shall fall into the pit of hell.  
 Recognise me as God's servant only.  
 Have no doubt whatever about this.  
 I am a servant of the Supreme;  
 A beholder of the wonders of His creation.—  
*Vichitra Natak.*

The ceremony of initiation, as we have seen, was modified to suit the changed circumstances. The water used in baptism, instead of being stirred with the Guru's toe, was to be stirred with a double-edged dagger. The mode of salutation

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\*Originally, religious men who were appointed to preach religion and to collect offerings of the Sikhs for the Guru. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh, however, they had become very corrupt and tyrannical, and the Guru was constrained to abolish their order after making an example of them.

was also changed. Instead of touching one another's feet, as was the custom before, the Sikhs were to fold their hands and hail each other as 'Purified Ones of the Wonderful Lord, who is always victorious.'

The Khalsa was inspired by a sense of divine mission to right the wrongs of the world; and, in the discharge of his duties, no fear of earthly power was to stand in his way. Such was his confidence in the strength of the righteous cause that each Sikh called himself a unit of one lakh and a quarter. Even now one might occasionally meet a Sikh who would announce his arrival as the advent of a host of one lakh and a quarter of the Khalsa.

The Guru himself recognised the worth and dignity of his nation, and would always refer to the assembly of Sikhs with great respect and admiration. It was in these terms he once spoke of his followers: "It is through *them* that I have gained my experience; with *their* help have I subdued my enemies. Through *their* favour am I exalted; otherwise there are millions of ordinary men like myself whose lives are of no account." Though a leader, he nevertheless considered himself a servant of his people: "To serve *them* pleases my heart, no other service is so dear to my soul." "All the substance in my house, nay, my soul and body are at their disposal."

This raising of the Indian spirit from the lowness and servility which had dominated it for centuries, brought about a great change in the tone of the national character. Even those people who had been considered as the dregs of humanity were changed, as if by magic, into something rich and strange, the like of which India had never seen before. The sweepers, barbers and confectioners, who had never so much as touched the sword, and

whose whole generations had lived as grovelling slaves of the so-called higher classes, became, under the stimulating leadership of Guru Gobind Singh, doughty warriors, who never shrank from fear, and who were ever ready to shed their life's blood where the safety of a least creature of God was in danger.

The aim of Guru Gobind Singh in founding the Khalsa was to build up a nation of the Purified Ones who should be free from the evils of religion and society. But the rulers of the time thought that he was organising a force designed to attack and destroy them. Anandpur was in the land of Kahlur, surrounded by other hill states. The Hindu rajahs of these states saw in the activities of the Guru a threat to their own religion and power, and they combined to turn him out.

They had already fought against him, and knew his strength. Therefore they appealed to the Emperor of Delhi to help them. Aurangzeb was at that time in the Deccan. He ordered the Viceroy of Sarhind and Lahore to march against the Guru. They besieged Anandpur in 1701. The Sikhs fought with the strength given by a new faith. They held their ground for three years against the repeated attacks of the enemy, but all supplies being cut off, they were put to great hardships by hunger and thirst. Some of them felt that they could hold out no longer. There were signs of discontent among them. The Guru asked them to declare themselves. Forty of them signed a disclaimer, and were allowed to go away. The remaining chose to share the lot of their leader. The Guru's mind was firm as ever, but the sight of the suffering Khalsa and the solemn promises of the enemy moved him to leave the town, which he did in the winter of 1704.



As soon as he came out he was set upon by a large force on the banks of the Sarsa. There was hard fighting in the darkness and rain; and when the day dawned over the dead and the dying, the Guru was still unperturbed. He held the morning service just as usual, and in the midst of shots and arrows he sang the hymns of praise to God. In the confusion that ensued he was separated from a part of his family, but he was able to make his way to Chamkaur, in the district of Ambala.

His two younger sons, with their grandmother, took shelter with an old servant of theirs. This fellow betrayed them to the nearest official at Morinda, who handed them over to the Viceroy of Sarhind. The Viceroy cruelly put the children to death, in spite of the protests of the Nawab of Malerkotla. The Sikhs have always remembered this protest of the Nawab with gratitude; and throughout their troubled relations with the Mohammedan powers they have never allowed the house of Malerkotla to be harmed. The grandmother of the children could not survive the shock given by their death, and fell down dead as soon as she heard the news.

The Guru was followed to Chamkaur, where he was besieged. The faithful little band of forty, with only a mud wall to protect them, fought against thousands to the last. Both the remaining sons of the Guru and three of the Beloved Ones were slain. Only five Sikhs were left to defend the place. They persuaded the Guru to go away and save himself. He did so in disguise.

The story of his wanderings is a romance of hair-breadth escapes, of days spent in trudging bare-footed in the sandy wilds of Machhiwara, and of cold nights passed staring under the twinkling

stars of heaven. For days he had nothing to eat but the tender leaves of the Akk plant, and had nothing but a clod of earth to rest his head on. He was found lying thus, with torn clothes and blistered feet, by two Mohammedans, Nabbi Khan and Ghani Khan. They knew that the Imperial army was in pursuit, and the Guru and his supporters would not be spared. But they chose to risk their lives for him. They dressed him in the blue garb of a Mohammedan Fakir, and took him in a litter on their shoulders. They informed all enquirers that they were escorting *Uch ka Pir*, or the Holy Man of Uch (a sacred place near Multan). Once they were overtaken by the pursuing party, whose commander closely interrogated the escort about the identity of the Pir. Finding the answers not very satisfactory, the commander sent for Qazi Pir Mohammed, once the Persian tutor of Guru Gobind Singh, and asked him to identify the occupant of the litter. The Qazi gave a helpful reply, and saved the situation. The families of these Mohammedan friends of the Guru still retain the autograph letters granted to them by him, and show them with great respect to those who visit their houses.

The Guru moved on to Jatpura, where he was befriended by another Mohammedan, Rai Kalha, who offered his services to him unreservedly. The Guru asked him to send somebody to Sarhind to get information about the fate of his little sons. The messenger sent by Rai Kalha returned in a few days, and brought the sad news that the children had been done to death. The Guru received the news with perfect composure. Checking his tears, and turning his sorrow into strong resolve, he muttered, "No no, my sons are not dead. They live for ever. It is

Sarhind that shall die." Saying this he knocked out a shrub with his arrow, and added, "The enemy shall be uprooted like this."

The Guru took leave of Rai Kalha and moved forward. The atmosphere was thick with the rumours that the forces of Sarhind were on the move, and were closing in on the Guru. In the district of Ferozepore he once more collected his men and turned on his pursuers. The scene of this last battle is called *Muksar*, or the Pool of Salvation. The fighting was hard as before, but this time the royal forces were defeated. Among his own slain the Guru found those forty men of Majha who had deserted his ranks during the seige of Anandpur, but shamed by their own women who would not let them enter their homes, they had come back to reinforce the Guru's small army and had died fighting for him. When he came to know of it, he was deeply moved. He took out the paper on which they had written their disclaimer, and tore it up, as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. He embraced each one of them, as they lay dead or dying and called them the *Saved Ones*. They are still remembered in the daily prayer of Sikhs.

The Guru managed to reach Talwandi Sabo, now called *Damdama* or resting-place. Here he stayed for nine months, and made it a great seat of learning. It is often described as the Guru's Benares. The Guru while here reproduced the whole *Adi Granth* from memory, and completed it by adding the hymns composed by his father.

On the way, when at Deena, he had sent a letter in Persian verse to Aurangzeb. He called it *Zafar-nama*, or the Epistle of Victory. In this he reminded him of his ill-treatment and told him that, though so many of his Sikhs had been killed, he was still

unconquered. "For what is the use of putting out a few sparks, when you raise a mighty flame instead?" It meant that the work which the Guru had started had become a world-wide movement, and therefore it could not be crushed by defeating or killing a few individuals.

The message seems to have softened the heart of the aged King. He invited the Guru to come and see him. But before the meeting could take place, Aurangzeb died in 1707 and Bahadur Shah became Emperor.

The Guru helped the new Emperor, and accompanied him to the Deccan, until he reached Nander on the banks of the Godavari. Here, while resting alone one evening, he was stabbed by a Pathan and died a few days later, in 1708.

Before his death, he called his disciples about him and told them that the work of the Gurus was completed, and that thenceforth their spirit would live in the Holy Granth and the Khalsa.

## AN OUTLINE OF SIKH DOCTRINES

The aim of life, according to the Sikh Gurus, is not to get salvation or a heavenly abode called Paradise, but to develop the best in us which is God.

"If a man loves to see God, what cares he for Salvation or Paradise?" (Guru Nanak's *Asa*).

"Everybody hankers after Salvation, Paradise or Elysium, setting their hopes on them every day of their lives. But those who live to see God do not ask for Salvation: The sight itself satisfies their minds completely" (Guru Ram Das in *Kalyan*).

How to see God and to love Him? The question is taken up by Guru Nanak in his *Japji* :

"What shall we offer to Him that we may behold His council-chamber ?

What shall we utter with our lips, which may move Him to give us His love ?—

In the ambrosial hours of the morn meditate on the grace of the True Name ;

For, your good actions may procure for you a better birth, but emancipation is from Grace alone."

"We should worship the Name, believe in the Name, which is ever and ever the same and true" (*Sri Rag* of Guru Nanak).

The practice of the Name is prescribed again and again in the Sikh Scriptures, and requires a little explanation.

### THE NATURE OF GOD OR THE NAME

God is described both as *nirgun*, or absolute, and *sargun*, or personal. Before there was any creation God lived absolutely in Himself, but when He thought of making Himself manifest in creation He became related. In the former case, 'when God was Himself self-created, there was none else; He

took counsel and advice with Himself ; what He did came to pass. Then there was no heaven, or hell, or the three-regioned world. There was only the Formless One Himself ; creation was not then' (*Gujri-ki-Var* of Guru Amar Das). There was then no sin, no virtue, no Veda or any other religious book, no caste, no sex (Guru Nanak's *Maru Solhe*, xv, and Guru Arjun's *Sukhmani*, xxi). When God became *sargun* or manifest, He became what is called the *Name*, and in order to realise Himself He made Nature wherein He has His seat and 'is diffused everywhere and in all directions in the form of Love' (Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap*, 80).

In presenting this double phase of the Supreme Being, the Gurus have avoided the pitfalls into which some people have fallen. With them God is not an abstract idea or a moral force, but a personal Being capable of being loved and honoured, and yet He is conceived of as a Being whose presence is diffused all over His creation. He is the common Father of all, fashioning worlds and supporting them from inside, but He does not take birth. He has no incarnations. He Himself stands for the creative agencies, like the *Maya*, the Word and Brahma; He Himself is Truth, Beauty and the eternal yearning of the heart after Goodness (*Japji*). In a word, the Gurus have combined the Aryan idea of immanence with the Semitic idea of transcendence, without taking away anything from the unity and the personal character of God.

" O ! give me, give some intelligence of my Beloved.  
 I am bewildered at the different accounts I have of Him.  
 O happy wives, my companions, say something of Him.  
 Some say that He is altogether outside the world;  
 Others that He is altogether contained in it.  
 His colour is not seen ; His features cannot be made out ;  
 O happy wives, tell me truly—  
 ' He lives in everything ; He dwells in every heart ;

Yet He is not blended with anything; He is separate,"\*

" Why dost thou go to the forest in search of God ?

He lives in all, is yet ever distinct ; He abides with thee too.

As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror,

So does God dwell inside everything ; seek Him therefore in the heart. "†

People who come with preconceived notions to study Sikhism often blunder in offering its interpretation. Those who are conversant with the eastern thought fix upon those passages which refer to the thoughts of immanence and conclude that Sikhism is nothing but an echo of Hinduism, while those who are imbued with the Mohammedan or Christian thought take hold of transcendental passages and identify Sikhism with Islam or Christianity. Others who know both will see here no system, nothing particular, nothing but confusion.

If, however, we were to study Sikhism as a new organic growth evolved from the existing systems of thought to meet the needs of a newly evolving humanity, we would find no difficulty in recognizing Sikhism as a distinct system of thought.

Take, for instance, Guru Nanak's *Asa-di-Var*, which in its preliminary stanzas lays down the fundamentals of Sikh belief about God. It is a trenchant clear-cut monotheism. God is called 'the in-dweller of Nature,' and is described as filling all things 'by an art that is artless' (xii. 1—2). He is not an impotent mechanic fashioning pre-existing matter into the universe. He does not exclude matter, but includes and transcends it. The universe too is not an illusion. Being rooted in God who is real, it is a reality ; not a reality final and abiding, but a reality on account of God's presence in it (ii. 1). His Will is above Nature as well as working within it, and in spite of its immanence it acts not as an arbitrary force but as a personal presence working

\* *Jaitsri* of Guru Arjun. † *Dhanasri* of Guru Teg Bahadur.

'most intelligently' (iii. 2). The first thing about God is that He is indivisibly one, above every other being, however highly conceived, such as Vishnu, Brahma, or Shiva (i), or as Rama and Krishna (iv. 2). The second thing is that He is the highest moral being (ii. 2), who has inscribed all men with His Name or moral presence (ii). He is not a God belonging to any particular people, Muslim or Hindu, but is 'the dispenser of life universal' (vi). The ways to realize Him are not many, but only one (xii. 3), and that way is not knowledge, formalism (xiv. 2., xv. 1—4), or what are received as meritorious actions which establish a claim to reward (viii. 2), but love (xiii. 2) and faith (xiv. 2), the aim being to obtain the grace of God (iv. 2., v. 2., viii. 2., xiii. 1). The only way of worshipping Him is to sing His praises (vi. 1., vii., ix., xii. 2., xix. 2., xxii. 3) and to meditate on His Name\* (ii., viii. 1, ix. 2., xvi. 1).

#### UPLIFT OF MAN BASED ON CHARACTER

This life of praise is not to be of idle mysticism, but of active service done in the midst of wordly relations. "There can be no worship without good actions."† These actions, however, are not to be formal deeds of so-called merit, but should be inspired by an intense desire to please God and to serve fellow-men.

\*Without pleasing God all actions are worthless.

Repetition of mantras, austerities, set ways of living, or deeds of merit leave us destitute even before our journey ends.

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\*'Name' is a term, like *logos* in Greek, bearing various meanings. Sometimes it is used for God Himself, as in *Sukhmani*, xvi. 5: "The Name sustains the animal life; the Name supports the parts and the whole of the universe." It is described as being 'immortal,' 'immaculate,' 'in-dweller of all creation,' and is to be sung, uttered, thought upon, served and worshipped. In most cases it means the revelation of God as found in the sacred Word.

† *Jappi*.



You won't get even half a copper for your fasts and special programmes of life.

These things, O brother, won't do there : for, the requirements of that way are quite different.

You won't get a place there for all your bathing and wandering in different places.

These means are useless ; they cannot satisfy the conditions of that world.

Are you a reciter of all the four Vedas? There is no room for you there.

With all your correct reading, if you don't understand one thing that matters, you only bother yourself.

I say, Nanak, if you *exert* yourself in action, you will be saved. Serve your God and remember Him, leaving all your pride of self."\*

The Gurus laid the foundation of man's uplift, not on such short-cuts as mantras, miracles or mysteries, but on man's own humanity, his own character ; as it is character alone,—the character already formed—which helps us in moral crises. Life is like a cavalry march. The officer of a cavalry on march has to decide very quickly when to turn his men to the right or left. He cannot wait until his men are actually on the brink of a *nulla* or *khud*. He must decide long before that. In the same way, when face to face with an evil, we have to decide quickly. Temptations allow us no time to think. They always come suddenly. When offered a bribe or an insult, we have to decide at once what course of action we are going to take. We cannot *then* consult a religious book or a moral guide. We must decide on the impulse. And this can be done only if virtue has so entered into our disposition that we are habitually drawn towards it, and evil has got no attraction for us. Without securing virtue sufficiently in character, even some of the so-called great men have been known to fall an easy prey to temptation. It was for this reason that for the

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\**Gauri Mala* of Guru Arjun.

formation of character the Gurus did not think it sufficient to lay down rules of conduct in a book ; they also thought it necessary to take in hand a whole people for a continuous course of schooling in wisdom and experience, spread over many generations, before they could be sure that the people thus trained had acquired a character of their own. This is the reason why in Sikhism there have been ten founders, instead of only one.

Before the Sikh Gurus, the leaders of thought had fixed certain grades of salvation, according to the different capacities of men, whom they divided into high and low castes. The development of character resulting from this was one-sided. Certain people, belonging to the favoured classes, got developed in them a few good qualities to a very high degree, while others left to themselves got degenerate. It was as if a gardener, neglecting to look after all the different kinds of plants entrusted to him, were to bestow all his care on a few chosen ones, which were in bloom, so that he might be able to supply a few flowers every day for his master's table. The Gurus did not want to have such a lop-sided growth. They wanted to give opportunities of highest development to all the classes of people.

"There are lowest men among the low castes. Nanak, I shall go with them. What have I got to do with the great ?

God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly."

"It is mere nonsense to observe caste and to feel proud over grand names."\*

Some work had already been done in this line. The Bhagats or reformers in the Middle Ages had

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\**Sri Rag* of Guru Nanak. See also Guru Arjun's *Jaitsri-ki-Var*, vii., and Guru Amar Das's *Bhairo*.

tried to abolish the distinction between the high-class Hindus and the so-called untouchables, by taking into their fold such men as barbers, weavers, shoemakers, etc. But the snake of untouchability still remained unscotched; because the privilege of equality was not extended to men as men, but to those individuals only who had washed off their untouchability with the love of God. Kabir, a weaver, and Ravidas, a shoemaker, were honoured by kings and high-caste men, but the same privilege was not extended to other weavers and shoemakers, who were still held as untouchables. Ravidas took pride in the fact that the love of God had so lifted him out of his caste that even "the superior sort of Brahmins came to bow before him," while the other members of his caste, who were working as shoemakers in the suburbs of Benares, were not so honoured.\*

The Sikh Gurus made this improvement on the previous idea that they declared the whole humanity to be one and that a man was to be honoured, not because he belonged to this or that caste or creed, but because he was a man, an emanation from God, who had given him the same senses and the same soul as to other men :—

"Recognize all human nature as one."

"All men are the same, although they appear different under different influences.

The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful, the Hindus and the Muslims, have developed themselves according to the fashions of different countries.

All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build—a compound of the same four elements." †

Such a teaching could not tolerate any ideas of caste or untouchability. Man rose in the estimation of man. Even those who had been considering themselves as the dregs of society and whose whole

\*Ravidas in *Rag Malar*.

† *Akal Ustat* of Guru Gobind Singh.

generations had lived as grovelling slaves of the so-called higher classes, came to be fired with a new hope and courage to lift themselves as equals of the best of humanity.

Women too received their due. "How can they be called inferior," says Guru Nanak, "when they give birth of kings and prophets?"† Women as well as men share in the grace of God and are equally responsible for their actions to Him.† Guru Hargobind called woman "the conscience of man." Sati was condemned by the Sikh Gurus long before any notice was taken of it by Akbar.‡

The spirit of man was raised with a belief that he was not a helpless creature in the hands of a Being of an arbitrary will, but was a responsible being endowed with a will of his own, with which he could do much to mould his destiny. Man does not start his life with a blank character. He has already existed before he is born here. He inherits his own past as well as that of his family and race. All this goes to the making of his being and has a share in the moulding of his nature. But this is not all. He is given a will with which he can modify the inherited and acquired tendencies of his past and determine his coming conduct. If this were not so, he would not be responsible for his actions. This will, again, is not left helpless or isolated; but if through the Guru's Word it be attuned to the Supreme Will, it acquires a force with which he can transcend all his past and acquire a new character.

This question of human will as related to the Divine Will is an intricate one and requires a little elucidation.

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† *Asa-di-Var*, xix.

‡ See Guru Amar Das's *Var Sukhi*, vi.

According to Sikhism, the ultimate source of all that is in us is God alone. Without Him there is no strength in us. Nobody, not even the evil man, can say that he can do anything independent of God. Everything moves within the Providential domain.

Thou art a river in which all beings move :  
There is none but Thee around them.  
All living things are playing within Thee.\*

The fish may run against the current of the river or along with it, just as it likes, but it cannot escape the river itself. Similarly man may run counter to what is received as good or moral, but he can never escape from the pale of God's Will.†

Then who is responsible for his actions? Man himself. We learn from the first *shlok* of *Asa-di-Var's* 7th *pauri* that man is given free will, which leads him to do good or evil actions, to think good or evil thoughts and to go in consequence to Heaven or Hell:

"Governed by his free will he laughs or weeps :  
Of his free will he begrimes or washes himself;  
Of his free will he degrades himself from the order of human  
beings ;  
Of his free will he befools himself or becomes wise. "

In the next *shlok* we read:

"Self-assertion gives man his individuality and leads him to  
action :  
It also ties him down to the world and sends him on a round  
of births and deaths.  
Wherefrom comes this assertion of self? How shall it leave us?  
It comes to man from the Will of God and determines his  
conduct according to his antecedents.  
It is a great disease ; but its remedy also lies within itself.  
When God sends grace to man, he begins to obey the call of  
the Guru.  
Nanak says ; Hear ye all, this is the way to cure the disease. "

The source of evil is not Satan or Ahrman, or any other external agency. It is our own sense of

\*Guru Ram Das in *Asa*. † *Jappi*, ii.

Ego placed by God in us. It may prove a boon or a curse to us, according as we subject ourselves to God's Will or not. It is the overweening sense of self that grows as a barrier between God and man and keeps him wandering from sin to sin—

"The bride and the bridegroom live together, with a partition of Ego between them."\*

The infinite is within us, 'engraved in our being,' like a cypher which is gradually unfolding its meaning as we listen to the voice of the Teacher. It is like the light of the sun ever present, but shut out of our sight by the cloud of ignorance and selfishness. We sin as long as this light remains unmanifested and we believe in our own self as everything to us.

Regeneration comes when, at the call of Grace, we begin to subject our tiny self to the highest Self, that is God, and our own will is gradually attuned to His Supreme Will, until we feel and move just as He wishes us to feel and move.

Really the problem of good and evil is the problem of Union and Disunion† with God. All things are strung on God's Will, and man among them. As long as man is conscious of this, he lives and moves in union with Him. But gradually led away by the overweening sense of self he cuts himself away from that unity and begins to wander in moral isolation. It is, however, so designed in the case of man that whenever he wishes he can come back to the bosom of his Father and God and resume his position there. Guru Nanak says in *Maru* :

"By the force of Union we meet God and enjoy Him even with this body ;  
And by the force of Disunion we break away from Him :  
But, Nanak, it is possible to be united again."

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\*Guru Ram Das in *Malar*. †*Jappi*, xxix.

When we come into this world, we begin our life with a certain capital. We inherit our body from our parents, and there are divine things in us, as 'the spirit and progressive tendencies,' which serve as forces of Union and keep us united with God. But there are also evil tendencies in us inherited from our past lives which serve as forces of Disunion and draw us away from Him towards moral death. Cf. Guru Nanak in *Maru* :

"Man earns his body from the union of his mother and father ;  
And the Creator inscribes his being with the gifts of the spirit  
and progressive tendencies.  
But led away by Delusion he forgets himself."

This teaching about the freedom of will and 'progressive tendencies' raises the spirit of man and gives him a new hope and courage. But that is not enough to enable him to resist evil and to persist in positive virtue. The temptation of evil is so strong and the human powers for resisting it,—in spite of the inherent progressive tendencies,—are so weak that it is practically impossible for him to fulfil that standard of virtue which is expected of him. It was this consciousness of human weakness which made Farid say :

"The Bride is so weak in herself, the Master so stern in His commands."

That is, man is endowed with such weak faculties that he stumbles at each step, and yet it is expected of him that—

"He should always speak the truth, and never tell lies."\*

"He should beware even of an unconscious sin."†

"He should not step on the bed of another's wife even in dream."‡

These commands cannot be fulfilled simply with the strength of knowledge and inherited tendencies.

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\*Farid. †Guru Teg Bahadur. ‡Guru Gobind Singh.

They will not go far even in resisting evil. The higher ideal of leading a life of positive virtue and sacrifice is absolutely impossible with such a weak equipment. Then what is to be done?

The prophets of the world have given many solutions of this problem. Some get round the difficulty by supposing that there is no evil. It is only a whim or a false scare produced by our ignorance. They believe in the efficacy of Knowledge. Others believe in the efficacy of Austerities; still others in Alms given in profusion to overwhelm the enormity of sin. There are, again, a higher sort of teachers who inculcate the love of some great man as a saviour. What was the solution offered by the Sikh Gurus?

They saw that, although it was difficult for a man to resist evil and to do good with his own powers, yet if he were primed with another personality possessing dynamic powers, he could acquire a transcendental capacity for the purpose. This personality was to be the Guru's.

#### THE GURU IN SIKHISM

The way of religion, as shown by Sikhism, is not a set of views or doctrines, but a way of life lived according to a definite *model*. It is based, not on rules or laws, but upon discipleship. In the career of the disciple the personality of the Guru is all along operative, commanding his whole being and shaping his life to its diviner issues. Without such a personality there would be no cohesion, no direction in the moral forces of society, and in spite of a thousand kinds of knowledge 'there would still be utter darkness.\*' There would be no force to connect men with men and them with God. Everybody would

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\**Asa-di-Var*, i.



exist for himself in moral isolation, 'like spurious sesames left desolate in the field' 'with a hundred masters to own them.\* It is the Guru who removes the barriers of caste and position set up by men among themselves and gathering them all unto himself unites them with God.† In this way foundations are laid of a society of the purified who as an organized force strive for the good of the whole mankind.

Such a creative personality must be perfect, because 'men take after whom they serve.‡ If the ideal person is imperfect, the society and its individuals following him will also get imperfect development. But 'those who serve the saved ones will be saved.§

The Sikh Gurus were perfect, and are described as such in the Sikh Scriptures. Guru Nanak himself says in *Sri Rag*: "Everybody else is subject to error, only the Guru and God are without error." And Guru Arjun says in *Bhairon*: "Whoever is seen is defective; without any defect is my true Guru, the Yogi." The state of perfection attained by the Gurus is lucidly described in the eighth and the eighteenth octaves of Guru Arjun's *Sukhmani*. The same Guru says in *Asa*:

God does not die, nor do I fear death.  
 He does not perish, nor do I grieve.  
 He is not poor, nor do I have hunger.  
 He has no pain, nor have I any trouble.  
 There is no destroyer but God,  
 Who is my life and who gives me life.  
 He has no bond, nor have I got any.  
 He has no entanglement, nor have I any care.  
 As He is stainless, so am I free from stain.  
 As He is happy, so am I always rejoicing.  
 He has no anxiety, nor have I any concern.

\* *Asa-di-Var*, i

† "Nanak, the true Guru must be such as to unite all men."—  
*Sri Rag*, I.

‡ Guru Amar Das in *Var Bihagra*. § *Majh*. III.

As He is not defiled, so am I not polluted.  
As He has no craving, so do I covet nothing.  
He is pure and I too suit Him in this.  
I am nothing : He alone is everything.  
All around is the same He.  
Nanak, the Guru has destroyed all my superstition and defects,  
And I have become uniformly one with Him.

The Guru is sinless. In order, however, to be really effective in saving man, he must not be above man's capacity to imitate, as he would be if he were a supernatural being. His humanity must be real and not feigned. He should have a nature subject to the same laws as operate in the ordinary human nature, and should have attained his perfection through the same Grace as is available to all men and through perfect obedience to God's Will. The Sikh Gurus had fought with sin and had overcome it. Some of them had lived for a long time in error, until Grace touched them and they were perfected through a constant discipline of knowledge, love and experience in the association of their Gurus. When they had been completely attuned to the Will divine and were sanctified as Gurus, there remained no defect in them and they became perfect and holy. Thereafter sins did come to tempt them, but they never gave way and were always able to overcome them. It is only thus that they became perfect exemplars of men and transformed those who came under their influence to veritable angelic beings.

#### THE GURU IN THE SIKH

This transformation comes not only through close association with the Guru, which is found in many other religions, but through the belief that the Sikh incorporates the Guru. He fills himself with the Guru and then feels himself linked up with an inexhaustible source of power. A Sikh, a pure-

hearted Sikh, who follows the teachings of his Guru is a great power in himself; but when such a Sikh gets into himself the dynamic personality of such a perfect exemplar as Guru Gobind Singh, his powers acquire an infinite reach and he becomes a super-man. He is called "Khalsa," the personification of the Guru himself. "The Khalsa," says the Guru, "is my other self; in him I live and have my being." A single Sikh, a mere believer, is only one; but the equation changes when he takes Guru Gobind Singh into his embrace. He becomes equal to 'one lakh and a quarter,' in the Sikh parlance. This change occurs not only in his physical fitness, but also in his mental and spiritual outlook. His nature is so reinforced in every way that although hundreds may fall round him, he will resist to the last and never give way. Wherever he stands, he will stand as 'a garrison of the Lord of Hosts,' a host in himself—a host of one lakh and a quarter. He will keep the Guru's flag always flying. Whenever tempted, he will ask himself, "Can I lower the flag of Guru Gobind Singh? Can I desert it? I, as Budh Singh or Kahan Singh, can fall; but can Guru Gobind Singh in me fall? No, never." This feeling of incorporation with the Guru makes the Sikh strong beyond his ordinary powers and in times of emergency comes to his rescue long before he can remember anything relevant to the occasion recorded in history or scripture. Bhai Joga Singh's case is just in point. He was a devoted Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, and had received baptism from the hands of the Guru himself. He was so loyal that when he received an urgent call from the Guru to proceed to Anandpur, he hastened from Peshawar without a moment's delay, not waiting even to see his own marriage through. And yet in a moment of

weakness, this paragon of Sikh purity was going to fall, fall at the door of a public woman of Hoshiarpur. Who saved him in that emergency? It was the vision of Guru Gobind Singh, re-establishing the personal contact by pointing out the signs of personation worn on his body, and reminding him that he was carven in the Guru's own image.

#### THE GURU IN THE PANTH

So far we have considered what the Guru does for the Sikhs as individuals. We have seen how he intensifies their character and increases their power thousandfold by filling their personalities with his own. In order to increase this power immensely more, the Guru made another arrangement. He organized them into *Sangats* or Holy Assemblies, and put his personality again into them. This led to a very remarkable development in the institution of Guruship, and no description of Guruship will be complete without an account of this development.

The Sikh idea of religion, as we have seen, was something more practical than merely mystic. It was to consist of the practice of *Nam* and *Sewa*. To practise *Nam* means to practise the presence of God by keeping Him ever in our minds by singing His praises or dwelling on His excellences. This is to be done not only when alone in solitude, but also in public, where worship of the Name is made more impressive by being organized in the form of congregational recitations or singing. The other element is *Sewa* or Service. The idea of service is that it should be not only liberal, but also efficient and economical; that is, it should do the greatest good with the least possible means. It should not be wasteful. We do not set up a sledge-hammer to crack a nut, or send a whole army to collect

revenue. We have to be economical in our efforts, however charitable they may be. For this purpose we have to organize our means. In every work of practical nature, in which more than one person is engaged, it is necessary to resort to organization. As religion too—especially a religion like Sikhism whose aim is to serve mankind—belongs to the same category, it requires organization of its followers as an essential condition of its success. It may not be necessary in the case of an individualistic religion, wherein the highest aim is to vacate the mind of all desires, or to dream away the whole life in jungles or mountains; but where religion consists in realizing God mainly through service done within the world, where men have constantly to deal with men to promote each other's good, it is impossible to do without organization.

Guru Nanak had therefore begun with two things in his religious work: the holy Word and the organized Fellowship.\* This organized fellowship is called *Sangat*. The idea of *Sangat* or holy Fellowship led to the establishment of local assemblies led by authorised leaders, called *Masands*. Every Sikh was supposed to be a member of one or other of such organizations. The Guru was the central unifying personality and, in spite of changes in succession, was held to be one and the same as his predecessors.† The love existing

\*Bhai Gurdas, *Var* i. 42-43.

†In the Coronation Ode of Satta and Balwand the following verses occur:—

"Guru Nanak proclaimed the accession of Lehna as a reward for service. He had the same light, the same method; the Master merely changed his body."

"The wise being. Guru Nanak, descended in the form of Amar Das." "Thou, Ram Das, art Nanak, thou art Lehna, thou

[See Note Page, 57]

between the Guru and the Sikhs was more intense than has ever existed between the most romantic lovers of the world. But the homage paid to the Guru was made impersonal by creating a mystic unity between the Sikh and the Guru on the one hand and the Guru and the Word on the other.\* Greatest respect began to be paid to the incorporated Word, even the Guru choosing for himself a seat lower than that of the Scripture. The only form of worship was the meditation on and the singing of the Word.† The Sikh assemblies also acquired great sanctity, owing to the belief that the spirit of the Guru lived and moved among them. They began to assume higher and higher authority, until collectively the whole body, called the *Panth*, came to be regarded as an embodiment of the Guru.

[See Note Page 56]

art Amar Das." "The human race comes and goes, but thou, O Arjun, art ever new and whole."

Mohsin Fani, who wrote in the time of the Sixth Guru, says about the Sikhs in the *Dabistan*: "Their belief is that all the Gurus are identical with Nanak."

Guru Gobind Singh in his *Vichitra Natak* says about the Gurus: "All take them as different from one another; very few recognize them as one in spirit. But only those realize perfection who do recognize them as one."

See also the *Sadd of Sundar*, the *Swayyas* at the end of Guru Granth Sahib, and Bhai Gurdas's *Vars* i. 45-48., iii. 12., xx.1., xxiv. 5-25., xxvi. 41 and 34.

The Gurus always signed themselves as *Nanak*.

\*"The Guru lives within his Sikhs, and is pleased with whatever they like."—*Gauri-ki-Var*, IV. "The Guru is Sikh and the Sikh who practises the Guru's word is at one with the Guru."—*Asa Chhant*, IV. See also Bhai Gurdas, *Vars* iii. 11, and ix.16. "The Guru is the Word, and the Word is Guru."—*Kanara*, IV.

†*Asa-di-Var*, vi. i. "In this world the best practice is of the Word."—*Parbhati*, I. "My yoga is practised by singing Thy hymns."—*Asa*, V. Surjan Rai of Batala writing about Sikhs in 1697 says in his *Khulasatul-Twarikh*: "The only way of worship with them is that they read hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments." In the Golden Temple, Amritsar, up to this time, nothing but continuous singing of hymns day and night by relays of singers is allowed.

Guru Gobind Singh himself received baptism from the Sikhs initiated by himself. After him the Sikhs ceased to have any personal Guru. If we read the Sikh history aright, the Sikh community would appear as an organized unit to have undergone a course of discipline in the hands of ten Gurus, until its character was fully developed and the Guru merged his personality in the body of the nation thus reared. The Guru, as mentioned above, worked with two things: the personal association and the Word. Now after the death of Guru Gobind Singh the personality and the Word were separated. The Panth was invested with the personality of the Guru, and the incorporated Word became the *Gyan* Guru. That is, in simple words, the Khalsa Panth was to be the Guru in future, not in super-session of the previous Gurus, but as authorised to work in their name; and it was invariably to guide itself by the teachings of the Gurus as found in the Holy Granth. So that the Sikhs came to name Guru Nanak and the Guru Panth in the same breath.

*Amrit* or baptism was made an affair of this organization. There was no room left for any wavering on the broder-line. All who wanted to serve humanity through Sikhism must join it seriously as regular members, and receive its baptism as the initial step. All must have the same creed, which should be well-defined and should not be confused with the belief and practices of the neighbouring religions. The Guru ordered that—

The Khalsa should be distinct from the Hindu and the Muslim.”\*

“He who keeps alight the unquenchable torch of truth, and never swerves from the thought of one God; He who has full faith in God, and does not put

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\**Rahatnama* of Chaupa Singh.

his faith, even by mistake, in fasting or the graves of Muslim saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Jogis' places of sepulchre; He who only recognizes the one God and no pilgrimages, non-destruction of life, penances, or austerities; And in whose heart the light of the Perfect One shines.—he is to be recognized as a pure member of the Khalsa.”\*

Such a Khalsa was to embody in himself the highest ideal of manhood, as described by Guru Gobind Singh in his unpublished book, called *Sarb Loh*. Although the Khalsa was designed by the Guru himself, yet the Guru was so charmed by the look of his own creation that he saluted it, in the book, as his own ideal and master. The Khalsa was thought fit enough to administer baptism of the new order to the Guru, and was consecrated as the Guru incarnate. As a sign that the Guru had placed himself eternally in his Sikhs, it was declared by him that—

“If anybody wishes to see me, let him go to an assembly of Sikhs, and approach them with faith and reverence; he will surely see me amongst them.” †

In the ranks of the Khalsa, all were equal, the lowest with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes. Women were to be baptized in the same way as men and were to enjoy the same rights. The “Sarbāt Khalsa,” or the whole people, met once at the Akal Takht, Amritsar the highest seat of Panthic authority, on the occasion of Dewali or Baisakhi, and felt that they were one. All questions affecting the welfare of the community were referred to the *Sangats*, which would decide them in the form of resolutions called *Gurmattas*. A *Gurmatta* duly passed was supposed to have received the sanction of the Guru, and any attempt made afterwards to contravene it was taken as a sacrilegious act

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\**Swayyas* of Guru Gobind Singh.

†*Prem Sumarag*.



## FORMS AND CEREMONIES

This institution of the Khalsa entails a certain additional disciplinary outfit in the shape of baptismal forms and vows, which are often misunderstood. It is true that if religion were only a matter of individual concern, there would be no need of forms and ceremonies. But religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennobles individuals but also binds them together to work for nobility in the world. Organization is a means of enlarging the possibility, scope and effectiveness of this work. In order that an organization itself may work effectively, it is necessary that the individuals concerned in it should be able to keep up their attachment to the cause and a sufficient amount of enthusiasm for it. It is, however, a patent fact that men by their nature are so constituted that they cannot keep their feelings equally high-strung for a long time at a stretch. Reaction is inevitable, unless some means are devised to ensure the continuity of exertion. This is where discipline comes in, which keeps up the spirit of individuals against relaxation in times of trial and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in moments of ebb. This discipline, or what is called *esprit de corps*, is secured by such devices as flags and drills and uniforms in armies, and certain forms and ceremonies in religion. Uniformity is an essential part of them. They create the necessary enthusiasm by appealing to imagination and sentiment, and work for it in moments of depression. They are a real aid to religion, which is essentially a thing of sentiment. Man would not need them if he were only a bundle of intellectual and moral senses; but as he has also got sentiment and imagination, without which the former qualities would be inoperative, he cannot do without articulating his ideas and beliefs in some forms appropriate

to sentiment. These forms must not be dead but a living index of his ideal, waking up in him vivid intimations of the personality that governs his religion. They should be related to his inner belief as words are to their meaning, tears to grief, smiles to happiness and a tune to a song. It is true that sometimes words become meaningless, when we no longer heed their sense, or the language to which they belong becomes dead. It is true that sometimes tears and smiles are only cloaks for hypocrisy, and a tune mere meaningless jingle. But there is no denying the fact that, when their inner meaning is real and we are sincere about it, they do serve as very helpful interpreters. Forms are the art of religion. Like Art in relation to Nature, these forms impose certain limitations on the ideal, but at the same time they make the ideal more real and workable for general use.

Sometimes, however, when the forms are determined, not by the necessity of uniformity which is so essential for discipline, but by local or racial causes, they narrow the applicability of the ideal and create division and exclusiveness where they should have helped men to unite. When the spirit in which they had been originally conceived dies out, they become mere handicaps to religion, and the people who use them would be well-advised to abandon them. It was such forms that Guru Nanak asked people to leave. "Destroy that custom," he said, "which makes you forget dear God."\* But the Sikh forms were not conceived in a spirit of exclusiveness, or as essential to the advancement of individual souls. They were simply appointed to serve as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community, and any man who likes to

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\**Vadhans-ki-Var.*

serve humanity through the Sikh Panth can wear them. It is possible for a man to love God and cultivate his individual soul without adopting these forms; but if he wants to work in a systematic manner, not only for his own advancement but for the good of others as well in the company of Sikhs, he must adopt these disciplinary forms of their organization. The Sikhs, who are the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh and whose religion is surcharged with his personality, find the uniform worn and ordained by him as a real help in playing their part as units of the Panthic organization. This help comes from the appeal made to sentiment by the process of association and not through any inherent efficacy of the forms themselves. This association is not with places or things, but with an ever-living personality that is itself a symbol of the Highest Personality. As is God, so is the Guru; and as is the Guru, so must be the follower. Wearing a **Knicker** ensuring briskness of movement at times of action and serving as an easy underwear at times of rest, an iron **ring** on his right arm as a sign of sternness and constraint and a **sword** by his side as an instrument of offence and defence and as an emblem of power and dignity,\* the Guru presented an impressive picture of a simple but disciplined soldier. He, however, combined in him the saintliness of the old Rishies with the sternness and strength of a knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept **long hair**, which all the world over have always been associated with saintliness. A **comb** was a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These are the forms with which the Sikhs are invested at the time of their baptism, in order to

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\*"Charity and Kirpan are the symbols of self-respect."—*Pakhiano Charitra*, 322.

look exactly like their master, as they are to behave exactly like him.

From the history of Sikhs in the past as well as in the present, it is quite evident how effectively these baptismal forms, with the accompanying vows of purity, love and service, have aided them in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of the greatest trial. While keeping the Sikhs associated with their Guru and maintaining his spirit amongst them, they have not produced any narrowing effect on their beliefs or modes of worship. All worship and ceremony, whether in temple or home, whether on birth, marriage or death, consists of nothing else but praying and chanting hymns. Could anything be simpler ?

## WOMAN IN SIKHISM

The civilization of a people can be judged from the position they give to their women. For the most part, our civilization being man-made, woman is assigned a lower position than man, who is supposed to be her lord and master. The Bible says, 'the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man;' 'he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman but the woman of man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.' This is the burthen of the teaching in almost all religions. Woman's touch is supposed somehow to defile the purity of man. St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians is at great pains to emphasise the necessity of keeping celibate, and allows marriage only on sufferance. He believed that a man or a woman marrying would not care so much for God as one who remained unmarried. That has been the belief all over India too, where so much is made of celibacy, and nobody can claim to lead a pure and saintly life if he lives with a wife and children. There is supposed to be something inherently wrong with woman's make-up. That is why she has been excluded from the domain of religion. Manu would not allow her—along with Sudras—even to listen to the Vedas, although some of the Vedic hymns were composed by women themselves. St. Paul too would not extend the right of preaching to women. In his first Epistle to Timothy he expressly says that he would not suffer a

woman 'to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing.' That is, for her salvation the best thing for her to do was to bear children, and to make them religious. Even up to this day it is not possible for a woman among Christians to be ordained as a preacher. At the Kikiyuyu Conference, held some years ago, the leaders of Christian thought tried to improve the position of woman in this respect, but the words of St. Paul stood in their way, and they could not succeed. Among Mohammadens too the position of woman is the same. She cannot utter the call to prayer, or become an Imam in a mosque; *i. e.*, she cannot lead a congregation in prayer. Among Hindus, except in the case of Budhists, woman suffers the same disabilities. She cannot have a personal religion or spiritual responsibility as apart from her man (father, husband, or son). Hence it is considered incumbent on a man to get a male child, who should look after his spiritual interests in this or the next world. How much evil has resulted from this prenicious doctrine!

What is the position of woman in Sikhism?

Guru Nanak restored to woman the fullest rights belonging to her in society. He says in his *Asa-di-Var*:

It is by woman, the condemed one, that we are conceived,  
and from her that we are born; it is with her that we are  
betrothed and married.

It is woman we befriend, and she who keeps the race going.

When one woman dies, another is sought for; it is with her  
that we get established in society.

Why should we call her inferior who gives birth to great men?

Woman was given back her personal share in religion. She was to have the same responsibility in spiritual matters as man, and was in every way his equal in the sight of God:

All (women as well as men) acknowledge the same God as their own; point out any who does not.

Each person is responsible himself for his actions, and shall have to settle his account himself.

Religious congregations were thrown open to women. They were to participate freely in all religious and secular observances, and no social custom was to hinder them from doing so. Sikh women are to this day seen attending all occasions of public worship, all conferences, along with the members of the other sex; and their conjoint as well as alternate singing, in which they often lead the chorus, must move the heart of anyone who wants to see what Guru Nanak did for womankind.

The third Guru (Guru Amar Das) forbade *Satees* in these words :

" They are not *Satees* who burn themselves with their dead husbands.

Rather are they *Satees*, Nanak, who die with the mere shock of separation from their husbands.

And they too are to be considered as *Satees*, who abide in modesty and contentment ;

Who wait upon their Lord and rising in the morn ever remember Him. "

Again :

" Women are burnt in the fire with their husbands :

If they appreciate their husbands, they undergo sufficient pain by their death ;

And if they appreciate not their husbands, Nanak, why should they be burnt at all? " (*Suhi-ki-Var*)

Guru Amar Das\* held women equal with men. Perhaps he remembered what he owed to a woman,

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\*Guru Amar Das, upto the sixtieth year of his life, had not yet become a Sikh. He was living when Guru Nanak was preaching his gospel, but he did not know him. Even when Guru Angad, the second Guru, came and carried on the mission of Guru Nanak he did not know it. It was reserved for Bibi Amro to bring him into the Sikh fold. She was the daughter of Guru Angad, and was married to the nephew of Guru Amar Das who lived in an adjoining house. One early morning she was churning milk and as usual singing the hymns of the Guru. Amar Das, thirsty for spiritual satisfaction, lay awake restlessly in bed. The words touched him and he requested her to take him to her father, Guru Angad, and she did so.

Bibi Amro, who had brought him to his Saviour. This is his ideal of married life:—

"They are not husband and wife who only have a physical contact ;  
Rather are they wife and husband who have one spirit in two bodies."

This ideal was amply realized in the time of the next Guru. There is a beautiful story, in Sikh history, of the conscientious and brave daughter of the magistrate of Patti (District Amritsar). She did her duty by her leper husband even under most trying circumstances. She carried him about in a basket on her head for many years till he was cured by the grace of God. Bhai Gurdas,\* a Sikh missionary of the time, says: "From temporal as well as spiritual point of view woman is man's other half and assists him to salvation. She assuredly brings happiness to the virtuous." Guru Amar Das was also against the custom of Purda, as may be seen from his exhortation to the Rani of Haripur who had come to the *Sangat* (religious assembly) with a veil on.

The effect of all this was that the men with whom it had been usual in troublous times to leave their females to the mercy of the invader, now came forward as defenders of the honour of their homes. Women, too, came to realize their position, and after this we often hear of their making a bold stand for their own defence. Women came to be recognized, in one sense, as even the spiritual support of men. Somebody expressed his surprise to Guru Hagovind, the sixth Guru, on his living a married life. The Guru answered, "Woman is the conscience of man." There is a good example of Sikh women helping their men to keep themselves on the right

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\*He lived from the time of the 3rd to the 6th Guru. Next to the Guru's words the Sikhs prize his works which are a sort of exposition and are called the key to their Scriptures.



path when the latter showed a tendency to go astray. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, once came to Amritsar to visit the Golden Temple. The people of the place closed the doors of the temple and would not allow him to enter. The Guru went away saying, "O people of Amritsar, how gloomy are your hearts!" From that moment the people of the city were filled with a mysterious gloom. The Guru took up his abode in Kotha Sahib—a place in Walla about three miles from the city of Amritsar. The women of the city felt sorry that their men had so disgraced themselves and came to the Guru in a body supplicating his forgiveness. It was then that the Guru forgave the people and said, 'The women of Amritsar know how to love the will of God.' Thus had women saved their men from the irreverence into which they had fallen.

The following stories are other instances of the same spirit.

During the long siege of Anandpur, lasting for several months, some of the Sikhs became restive, believing that it was futile to hold out any longer. They showed signs of disaffection, and Guru Gobind Singh asked them to declare themselves. Forty of them signed a disclaimer renouncing their allegiance to the Guru and went away to their homes. Their women, however, shut their doors in their faces, and would not let them enter, for they had shamed their profession of arms. Their women taunted them as more fit for wearing women's gowns than for wielding the warrior's sword. They said, "You sit at home and mind the children. We shall go and fight for you with the sword." The men were struck with remorse, but did not know how to be reconciled to the Guru. Then Mai Bhago, a brave Sikh lady, came forward to help them out of this difficulty. She put on male dress, and taking a sword and mounting a horse she told them to follow her. They came with her to the field of

Muktsar, where fighting against odds they laid down their lives and won the title of 'the Saved Ones.' They are remembered in the daily prayer of Sikhs.

*Hayat-i-Afghani*, a history of the North-West Frontier by an ancestor of Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, records a story about a Sikh woman who not only saved her honour from a Pathan but taught him a lesson. She was found by him walking alone in a deserted place. He was tempted to lay hands on her. She knocked him down single-handed, and siezing his sword dismissed him contemptuously. He went away with bowed head, but soon came back to her and said, "Please give me back my sword, or cut off my head with it. I can't face my people after surrendering my sword to a woman." She replied, "Yes, you may have your sword, if you promise that you will never again attempt to dishonour a woman." He gave the promise, and learnt the lesson of his life.

The Sikh Temple of Nander, called Hazur Sahib, is sacred to the momory of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who passed away at this spot in 1708. This temple was the victim of constant inroads of Moham-medans from the Deccan, and the Sikhs felt helpless. They began to desert the place. These news reached Malwa in the Punjab. About two hundred Sikh women volunteered themselves to go and rescue the temple. They formed themselves into a battalion and marched to the South on horseback. On reaching there they engaged the enemy in a sharp skirmish lasting for many hours and drove out the Moham-medan usurpers. In this battle they captured a drum and a banner of the enemy, both of which are said to be still lying in Nander.

On the Baisakhi day of 1699 A. D., Guru Gobind Singh convoked a big assembly of his people from far and near to lay the foundation of the Khalsa. The

five Sikhs—or the Beloved Ones of the Guru, as the Sikhs call them,—had been tried and stood ready to be initiated. The Guru was preparing *Amrit*, the water of baptism, when his wife, Mata Sahib Kaur, appeared on the scene with an offering of *patashas* (cakes of sugar). The Guru took the sugar and throwing it into the *Amrit* welcomed her, saying, “Your coming is opportune. Woman sweetens the *Amrit* of life.” And to this day when Sikhs are baptised, it is announced to them that Guru Gobind Singh is the father and Mata Sahib Kaur the mother of the Khalsa.

In Sikh history there are examples of women who not only fought in the battle but ruled over states, and assisted men in all the spheres of social and political activity. Quite recently they got the right of vote, along with men, to elect representatives to the Central Board of Management for the Sikh Temples, called the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. In the book of ritual, prepared by this body, women along with men have been given the right to join the *Panj Pearas* or the Five Beloved Ones, who are commissioned to administer baptism and perform other functions as the Guru incorporate.

Thus are abolished all the invidious distinctions between men and women.

## HUMOUR IN SIKHISM

Humour is commonly taken to mean the sense of ridicule or mockery. But on observing the finer developments of human character, it would appear to have also a deeper significance. It is really an extreme sensitiveness to the true proportion of things, a sense that at once discovers for us whatever is out of joint in any thought or action. It is not merely a make-shift quality for leisure hours, but has a substantial value for our moral development. It bespeaks a full and strong sense of personal identity, and is not incompatible with religion. Nay, explain it how we will, true humour always goes with ripeness of wisdom, and long-faced seriousness, as much as frivolity, is a sign of immaturity. Without the sense of humour virtue itself becomes self-forgetful and loses its balance. It is humour alone that can keep our sympathies well-regulated and in good trim. It is a fine corrective force in our character, and works like an instinct against all excess. Without it, a man's character is always underdone or done on one side only.

It was with this sense of humour that one quiet morning at Hardwar, Guru Nanak had begun to throw water towards his fields in Kartarpur. His purpose was to disillusion the Hindus who believed that the water thrown to the east would reach their dead ancestors in the world beyond. It was the same humour he displayed at Mecca, when he lay down at night with his feet purposely turned towards the Kaaba and said to the priests who protested that they could turn his feet in any direction where God was not. He often announced his coming in a very strange manner.

While coming back to India from Mecca, he halted at Baghdad. It was yet early dawn, and the people had not yet begun stirring for the morning prayers. Guru Nanak wanted to have a congregation of his own. He took himself to a high place, and in a loud stentorian voice began to imitate the famous Mohammedan call to prayer. Hearing this new kind of Azan, the people flocked round him, and listened to his preaching with more than usual eagerness. On another occasion, during his wanderings, he came upon a knot of happy children playing in the street. The sight was too alluring for him. He at once put off his gravity and began to leap and bound and shout just as the little urchins did. It must have been a sight for gods to see the grey-haired prophet jumping and singing in the company of children ! And then look at the quaint dress he wore on occasions : a leather apron round his waist, a string of bones round his neck, a *tilak* on his forehead and a prayer-carpet under his arm.

Guru Arjun who compiled the Holy Granth, knew the value of humour, and when incorporating the compositions of different Bhagats did not discard the passages which were humorous or lively. One of the most effective and sincere addresses to God is the prayer of Dhanna the Jat, wherein he asks for his simple daily bread in this way :

“O God, I, Thine afflicted servant, come to Thee. Thou arrangest the affairs of those who perform Thy service. I beg of Thee to give me flour, ghee, and pulse, so that my heart may rejoice for ever. I want shoes and fine clothes, and corn grown on a field ploughed seven times over. I want a milch cow and a buffalo, and a good Turkustani mare, and a good wife. These things Thy servant Dhanna begs of Thee.”—*Dhanasri*.

There is also a similar passage in Kabir, wherein he throws up the beads to God, saying that he can offer no prayers as long as He keeps him hungry. He lays down a regular bill of fare, which he declares to be "none too covetous" (*Sorath*).

As Sikhism is particular in discarding asceticism and encouraging secular life lived religiously, it has provided a free scope for developing a bright and vigorous spirit among the Sikhs. Bhai Bidhi Chand, who was the right-hand man of Guru Hargovind, was one of the most adventurous youths of the time, noted as much for his humour as for his devotion. His "larking" campaigns were so humorously conceived and romantically executed that for him even the prosaic Mr. Macauliffe is constrained to pause for diversion.

But the most striking example of Humour playing a prominent part in Sikhism is the fact that there exists a regular order of Humorists, called *Suthras*, who have carried on religious propaganda in the name of Guru Nanak mainly through Humour.

Guru Gobind Singh also realized the value of humour and made full use of it in his religious work. Once he dressed up a donkey like a lion and set it roaming about the fields. The Sikhs began to laugh when they heard it braying, in spite of the lion's coat, and asked their leader what it meant. The Guru told them that they too would look as foolish as the donkey, if, with the *Singh's* (lion's) name and uniform, they still remained as ignorant and cowardly as before. The same love of the dramatic is exhibited by the way he exposed the futility of the belief in Durga, the goddess of power. When all the ghee and incense had been burnt, and Pundit Kesho had tired himself out by mumbling mantras by the million without being able to produce the goddess, the Guru came forward with a naked sword and flashing it before the

assembly declared, "This is the goddess of power." The same grim humour was shown by him, when one spring morning, in the midst of hymns and recitations, he appeared before his Sikhs and demanded a man who would sacrifice himself then and there for his faith. He wanted to see whether the people dared to do anything beyond mere singing of hymns and reading of texts.

As was the Guru, so became the Sikhs. In the face of desperate circumstances, they often put on a fine brag—that Hannibal or Sir Walter Raleigh might have envied—and literally shouted over a difficulty. Once a small straggling detachment of Sikhs was hemmed in by a numerous force of the enemy. Their friends were far off, and there was no hope of their coming in time to save them. Yet they did not lose heart. They took off their broad white *Chaddars* (sheets) and spread them over the neighbouring bushes to make them look like tents from the distance. All the while they kept on shouting every fifteen minutes the famous national cry of *Sat Sri Akal*. The enemy thought that the Sikhs were receiving so many instalments of help, and did not dare to come forward.

As a result of this brave spirit, there grew up among the Sikhs a peculiar slang, which was called the Vocabulary of Heroes. In it the things connected with the difficulties of life were expressed in terms of such cheerfulness and bravado, as if for the Sikhs pain and suffering had lost all meaning. Death was familiarly called an expedition of the Khalsa into the next world. A man with an empty stomach would call himself mad with prosperity. Grams were almonds, and onions were silver pieces, while rupees were nothing but empty crusts. A blind man was called a wide-awake hero, and a half-blind man an argus-eyed lion. A deaf man was said to be a man in the upper storey. A baptised Sikh was called a

brother of the Golden Cup, which, by the way, was only an iron vessel. To be fined by the community for some fault was called getting one's salary. The big stick was called a lawyer or the store of wisdom ; and to speak was to roar.

There is a superb humour in all this, which breathes a full and healthy spirit. It shows that our ancestors knew, how much better than we do at present, that religion is not incompatible with brightness and vigour.



## SIKHS AND NON-VIOLENCE

### I

The chief aim of a Sikh's life is to serve mankind. Guru Nanak says : "The service of mankind is a passport to heaven" (*Sri Rag*). The highest form of service is 'sacrifice,' which may be of many kinds. It may be the feeding and clothing of the poor, which involves offering of money or parting with a part of one's property. This is easy to understand, although much of the merit is lost by the donor's expectation of fame or name in this world or in the next. One may have, therefore, to surrender one's mind in order to complete one's sacrifice. This makes the matter more complex, as it requires complete self-abnegation, humility and self-surrender. But the most difficult sacrifice to make and to understand is that which involves the service of the body. It used to be a simple thing. Whenever a country was in trouble, whether as a result of a foreign invasion or an internal upheaval, its leaders found no difficulty in knowing what their duty was in the crisis. They would use all their means to resist evil and to protect what was dear and precious in the country. They would have no hesitation in using all the physical force at their disposal. Resisting the enemy meant organising the country's resources and marching out with armies to kill or be killed.

But Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi have made the problem very intricate. Their teaching has revived the old Buddhist conception of the body being inferior to the spirit, and therefore according to them the use

of physical force is not so good as the use of spiritual force. I call it a revival and a going back, because the advancement of humanity has brought forward the idea that Matter and Mind are not antagonistic or exclusive of each other, but that Matter contains Mind, and both according to Sikhism are derived from God ; that the human body which is envied by angels\* is earned by spiritual labours of many generations and is the most precious gift of God. As such the human body is as essential in the make-up of man as his soul. It is not mere clay, or dead matter, but a living organism which renders as much service to the soul as the soul renders service to it. In fact the body is the visible part of the soul, which cannot function or realize itself without the body, nor the body without the soul. From this point of view, the proper use of the body, or its physical energy, can have as much spiritual value as that of the soul proper. But Mahatma Gandhi looks askance at the doings of the body, which is a sort of Shudra as compared with the high-born soul. Whenever he gets angry, or has any other outburst of human nature, he holds his body responsible for it, and punishes the poor thing with fasts and dieting. He prescribes no dieting for his soul, or what may be called his inner nature. As for instance, when he misreads the case of Sikhs, and causes untold suffering to them by misinterpreting their history or scriptures, he does not purge his soul by keeping silent about them until he has studied their authentic history or the writings of Guru Gobind Singh and other Gurus. If instead of torturing his body he would take a course in Sikh scriptures for three months, he would shed off much of his intolerance towards Sikhs and perhaps towards other victims of his ire, too, and that would do him lot of spiritual good.

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\*See *Ray Bhairo*.

But taking his cue from Tolstoy and other obscurantists he goes on preaching the doctrine that the use of physical force is evil, and that non-violence is the only remedy for our ills. We should not resist evil. If an enemy attacks us, we should appeal to his soul, or should pray for the softening of his heart, but should in no case oppose him by the use of hand or foot, a stick or a sword. Even if a man mad with anger is found killing an innocent child, or a man intoxicated with lust is trying to violate the honour of a woman, we should not raise a hand against him to prevent him from committing the crime. We should rather pray to him (as if prayer could have any effect on him in that mood !), or should suffer death at his hands. (What if he succeeds in doing the nefarious act without touching us or paying any attention to us ?) Mahatma Gandhi thinks that if we sacrifice our lives before the tyrant, his heart would melt, his conscience would awake, and he would give up his evil practice. By repeatedly presenting to him the sight of suffering as a result of his misdeeds we should be able to change the evil tendencies of his nature. But if, on the other hand, to prevent him from doing evil we use violence, we would be brutalising him and he would get no chance to recover the true level of his nature, which is to show mildness and gentility. By using non-violent methods we would be promoting sweetness and light among men, and would be bringing about that moral sensitiveness which is the true sign of civilisation.

From the same point of view it is considered ill-advised to use armies in repelling the attack of an enemy. Mahatmaji would, therefore, appeal to Britons not to fight against Germans, but to lay down arms before them and to let them occupy England, only contenting themselves with non-co-operation

with the invader. Now that the Japanese are at the gates of India, it would be interesting to see what advice he would give to his fellow-countrymen, and how far would his advice be acceptable.

Before considering these strange views of Mahatma Gandhi, it is necessary to point out that he has not always held these extreme views. His non-violence, like his political beliefs, has passed through many phases. There was a time when he could contemplate killing as a part of *ahimsa*. In the *Young India* of 21st October, 1926, he said :

“At times we may be faced with the unavoidable duty of killing a man who is found in the act of killing people.”

In the *Nav Jivan* of October, 1928, he wrote :

“To kill an animal which is past all hopes of recovery is, in my opinion, religious.”

Once he recommended the same procedure in the case of a calf, which was reported to have no chance of living and for which life meant nothing but continuous torture. He has also recommended this way of giving relief to a mad dog. In one place he says :

“To believe that mere killing is *hinsa* is ignorance.”

In another place he says :

“When killing is effected by speedier and less torturing means it is *ahimsa*.” (That's what Sikhs mean by *jhatka*.)

These were his thoughts some time ago. Now he has perfected his technique of non-violence. He cannot allow any exceptions. Force is not to be used in any form or shape on any occasion. Even when *swaraj* is attained, he cannot contemplate any occasion when the use of army or police would be permissible.

Mahatma Gandhi's love of peace is admirable, and he has done much to spread the cult of peace in the world ; but peace at all costs is not worth having. There are many things more precious than peace;

such as freedom, honour, national integrity, etc., and no cost is too great to pay for any of these. It is impossible, therefore, for this doctrine of Mahatma Gandhi to find a permanent place in our hearts. The glamour of his personality and the sacrifices he has made for his doctrines will for some time hold the imagination of the world; nay, the essentially good points of his mission—such as humility and humanity in dealing with those with whom we differ, general love of peace and respect for life—will remain for ever as great lessons taught by a superior personality. But his theory of non-violence will go the way of all such well-meant but unpractical fads as that of Akbar's *Din-i-Ilahi*.

Even now this doctrine is losing lustre with the people. In fact, there are very few even among the immediate followers of the Mahatma who will go the whole way with him. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad declared not long ago that if India were invaded he would be the first man to lift the sword. In July 1942, in the course of a press interview, he said, "The Congress position was that India's defence could only be with the armed forces." Pandit Jawahir Lal Nehru, Mahatmji's political heir, does not believe in his non-violence at all costs. He disassociated himself from the Mahatma when the latter issued his advice to the British people that they should lay down their arms before Hitler and fight only with non-violent means. He said to Sir Stafford Cripps that one of the first steps that National Government in India would take was to raise a huge citizen army of tens of millions. Even the leading members of the Congress are not with him. He wrote in the *Harijan* of 14th October, 1939:

"In the course of conversations with members of the Working Committee I discovered that their non-violence had never gone beyond fighting the British Government with that weapon."

In July 1940 the All India Congress Committee, meeting at Poona and led by Mr. Rajagopalachariar and Sardar Patel, rejected Mahatma Gandhi's plea for non-violence in the matter of national defence, and under certain conditions offered to throw its full weight into the efforts for an effective organisation of the defence of the country. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the Congress President, while praising Mahatma Gandhi's idealism, said that the Congress was a political organisation, with a political objective, and not a body for organising world peace. It is true that a few months later the Congress gave up this position, which was its own, and pledged itself to Mahatma Gandhi's principle of pure non-violence, but it was an act of expediency resorted to for the sake of securing the active leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in the new struggle set afoot on the rejection of the Viceroy's offer of 8th August. It was not a genuine move, and it astonished many who knew the Congress and the Mahatma's love of truth and genuineness. Dr. B. S. Moonje, the acting President of the Hindu Mahasabha, declared: "The Congress resolution is an enigma." It was an enigma to many others, to Sikhs in particular, who are not given to such intellectual somersaults.

## II

It appears from his correspondence with Sikh leaders that Mahatma Gandhi himself is labouring under a serious misunderstanding about the Sikhs' position in regard to non-violence. He believes that the Sikhs wearing Kirpans have no place in Satyagraha or in the Congress. In August 1940 he wrote to Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader, that as he believed in the sword, he had nothing in common with the Congress nor the Congress with him. "Your civil disobedience," he told the Sikh

leader, "is purely a branch of violence." His belief is that the Sikhs, because they do not shed off their sword, are not qualified to offer satyagraha or to take part in any campaign of non-violence. If he had studied Sikh history, or taken the trouble of knowing the ordinary Sikh tenets, he would have come to know—what even a tyro knows—that the Sikhs cannot shed their Kirpan or Sword, because, like the sacred thread of Hindus, it is a sacred symbol of Sikhism, and no Sikh can remain a Sikh if he repudiates the wearing of it. To ask him to give it up is to ask him to renounce his faith. How can a Sikh do it? Then is a true Sikh to be permanently debarred from taking part in the activities of the greatest national body of India?

The fact is that Mahatma Gandhi is proceeding in this matter with the Sikhs in a purely theoretical manner. Otherwise he knows—at least his friend Mr. C. F. Andrews knew—how well the Sikhs have acquitted themselves in showing the true spirit of non-violence. When Mr. C. F. Andrews went to witness the satyagraha of *Guru ka Bagh* in 1922, he was so struck with the perfect example of non-violence presented before him that he recorded his impressions in a series of letters he wrote to the press. In one of them he says that what he saw reminded him of the shadow of the Cross—the same passive suffering and the same calm holiness of the atmosphere! "A new heroism," he said, "learnt through suffering, has arisen in the land. A new lesson in moral warfare has been taught to the world." Further on he paid a beautiful compliment to the heroic but perfectly passive suffering of the Sikhs: "One thing I have not mentioned which was significant of all that I have written concerning the spirit of the suffering endured. It was very rarely that I witnessed any Akali Sikh, who went forward to suffer, flinch from a blow

when it was struck. Apart from the instinctive and the involuntary reaction of the muscles that has the appearance of a slight shrinking back, there was nothing, so far as I can remember, that could be called a deliberate avoidance of the blow struck. The blows were received one by one without resistance and without a sign of fear."

There are many other examples of the true satyagraha shown by Sikhs. Only strong people, who know how to use physical force, can set an effective example of non-violence by suppressing their strength. The non-violence of weaklings is a thing of necessity, an urgency forced on them by circumstances, and not a voluntary act of a lion behaving like a lamb. Guru Nanak says : "Life is fruitful in the company of those who are strong and yet suppress their strength and are humble." From this point of view, the Sikhs are best fitted to use the weapon of non-violence, because they are enjoined by their religion to keep themselves strong and fit, to wear arms and yet not to use them on a least provocation, but to use their well-preserved strength only in aid of righteousness. And that too if it has been decided after due deliberation that all non-violent measures have failed.

Mahatma Gandhi not only dubs the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh as unfit to take part in Satyagraha, or to remain in the Congress, he also takes upon himself to interpret their religion for them. In a letter to Gyani Gurmukh Singh 'Musafir,' written in December, 1940, he says that the Gurus' teachings enjoin non-violence as a duty, and that they tolerate violence only when the choice before the votary is between cowardly surrender and the use of the sword. This is a complete misunderstanding of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.



## III

The Gurus were in favour of peace and order in society. They loved mankind, and did not wish to give trouble to anybody. Their teaching for general use was pacific. Between man and man there is often no use of employing force for the redress of personal wrongs. Rather our scripture enjoins humility and forbearance in such cases. Guru Amar Das has said: "Ap marai, avra nah marai"—a man should rather die himself than kill others. This was the policy of the Sikhs under the first five Gurus. They were perfectly non-violent as long as they believed that by suffering passively they could soften the callousness of their oppressors and shame them into reason. The sufferings borne by the earlier Gurus did stir up conscience in their opponents, and the rulers often tried to befriend them. But when a saint like Guru Arjun was roasted alive on heated plates, the Sikhs came to reconsider their policy in the face of brute force run amok. It is perfectly reasonable to expect a hard-hearted man to get his soul awakened by witnessing the enormities produced by his brutal nature. But when by the constant practice of cruelty his nature is completely brutalised and the human element in him is dead, it is quite futile to present to him a sight of suffering for any moral purpose. We do not willingly offer ourselves to be gored by a horned beast. This is a question of general experience. Is it not a fact that a man sometimes becomes so degraded in mind and spirit that—barring his human shape—nothing of humanity is left in him? As long as human nature is subject to the attacks of pride, lust, anger, greed and other blinding passions, so long it will be always possible for a man to fall from humanity and behave like a perfect brute. It is true that human nature is improving, and will go on improving in sensitiveness—physical and moral—and with this

improvement the use of non-violence will go on increasing in effectiveness. But with all this we shall never have a time when human nature will be completely exorcised of its evil tendencies, and there will be no need of using force. At least that time has not come yet. It is still possible to find individuals falling upon individuals and nations upon nations in the attempt to crush them out of existence. If the questions involved were merely economic or political, there would be some ground for solving the difficulty by reasoning or discussion. But when mere lust for power inspires the aggressor, his condition is like that of a mad man or a beast, and there is no chance for reason to succeed. In such a case even Guru Nanak, the prince of peace, recommends force. He says. "The fool will listen only to a slap."

The first five Gurus did not find it necessary to use force, as they suffered not from a nation but from individuals. In the beginning it happened that the Mughal Emperors were not so persecuting as they became later on. It also happened that Sikhism began with the establishment of the Mughal rule. Both being in their infancy the Emperors, on the one hand, had not that command over the Empire which they got with Akbar and his successors; and, on the other hand, Sikhism in the eyes of the public had not yet assumed any great importance. Many causes like these conspired to make the progress of Sikhism a little smoother in the beginning. After Akbar's laxity of principles it was thought better, in the interest of Islam, to change the policy towards non-Muslims. And, therefore, we hear more of persecutions after him. A new religion, which has active followers, is always felt to be a source of anxiety to the ruling community. For great religions do not bring with them only new doctrines, they

also give a newer and stronger life to the nation, which it feels in every part of its existence. Hence there is no religion worth the name which has not received the baptism of fire in its early days. When the Sikhs looked at the tyrannies and short-sighted policies of the earthly kings they comforted themselves by styling their Guru as the spiritual king (*sachcha padshah*)—as really he was. This attitude was misunderstood by the governing body as if it were sedition—just as in the case of early Christians, their recognition of the true king in Christ, instead of joining in the Caesar-worship, was construed into disloyalty.

With the help of a very active intelligence department Jahangir began a campaign against all recognised religious leaders, Hindu as well as Mohammedan, who differed from the orthodox church and were forming separate centres of free thought. Many liberal-minded saints, like Ibrahim Baba Afghani and Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi, suffered imprisonment for establishing separate congregations. Guru Arjun also came into the hands of the Emperor's familiars. He had developed Sikhism by giving it an organisation and unity. There was to be one Book as the scripture and one place—the Golden Temple—to be the rendezvous for the organised religion.

There is nothing wrong in these things to excite the anger of a government. It, however, excited the jealousy of the Hindu and Mohammedan priests, who saw that with the growth of this new religion their own propaganda was in danger. From here we begin to find an increasing mass of complaints in the court against the Guru and the Sikhs. The troubles had begun even earlier than the time of the Fifth Guru. We find the Sikhs suffering at the hands of mobs in the ordinary performance of their daily work. Many a time they could not draw water from

wells without being pelted and getting their pitchers broken. But the Gurus would do nothing to oppose the lawful authority, because the wrong came from the subject people, Hindu or Mohammedan; because the established authority could still be approached and appealed to, often with much success. But now towards the end of Guru Arjun's life the policy of the new Emperor changed. Just after his accession, when he came to the Punjab, he summoned the Guru to bring with him the Sikh Scripture, which he had lately compiled and about which complaints had been made that there was something dangerous in it. But the Guru could not be punished, as on perusal nothing was found against any religion. However, a year later, the Guru was again caught on a trumped-up charge that he had helped the rebellious son of the Emperor. The real cause of the persecution would appear from Jahangir's own words quoted from his Memoirs:

"So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by his ways and teachings. He was noised about as a great religious and worldly leader. They called him *Guru* and from all directions crowds of people would come to him and express great devotion to him. This busy traffic had been carried on for three or four generations. *For many years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic, or that he should be brought into the fold of Islam.*"

The Guru was cruelly tortured to death, and his property confiscated. The Sikhs, on the death of their leader, saw the great danger that threatened Sikhism. They had to overcome opposition not from the Hindus and Mohammedans alone, but from the Government as well. They had no means with them to defend themselves except to organise force, because they had to meet an organised force. There was no power on earth to take up their cause but themselves, and themselves they did take it up, with what success the world knows.

The words of the martyr Guru were still ringing in their ears :

"Now the order of the Merciful has gone forth  
That no one shall molest another."

The Sikhs knew what that new order meant for them. Under the Sixth Guru they fought against the Mughals and did not allow the rulers to crush them. After some time they again put by the sword, and gave a chance to the rulers to recover their lost soul. The Seventh Guru kept with him armies and wore arms, but he had resolved never to use them. He, however, ceased to co-operate with the Government, and refused even to see the face of the Emperor. His son, who succeeded him, did likewise. The Ninth Guru suffered passively, as did so many of his Sikhs, like Bhai Mati Das who allowed himself to be sawn alive without uttering even a sigh of bitterness. Under Guru Gobind Singh the policy of passive suffering was again reconsidered. The Guru organised his Sikhs for self-defence, and fought battles against the Mughal Government. That these battles, as those of Guru Hargovind, were purely for self-protection is evident from the fact that the Guru, even after successes, did not occupy any territory of the enemy. Before he took up the sword he took care to see whether the same objective could not be secured by peaceful means. His own words about resorting to force are : "Drawing of the sword is permissible only when all other measures have failed."

The Sikhs of the present day in dealing with the British Government have decided to remain non-violent under all circumstances. It is a compliment to the British Government that it is believed to possess a soul, or to have the fear of public opinion, which the Sikhs, along with their other fellow countrymen have been trying to awaken. The advancement of

of the times and the fear of the world opinion has made it practically impossible for modern governments to indulge in those barbarities which were possible in the dark ages. Still it is not inconceivable that, in future, circumstances may arise when a government is communal and not national and the communal majority in the government, intoxicated by the unalterable strength of its rule, might try to put our existence into danger by trampling over our religious or cultural rights. To meet that danger we should always have a substantial share in the military strength of the country, which will act as a check on the aggressive tendencies of the ruling class. Besides our people have not equally developed the saving sense of patriotism or cultural refinement. There are always present among us unruly elements, and on the frontier are fierce Pathans, who might take advantage of unsettled conditions in the country and spread havoc among us. When at such times our life or honour is at stake, it would be futile to meet the danger with appeals to the conscience of the marauder. If there is war in the country, as we see nowadays, armies are not enough to provide defence. Every citizen has to bear a part in the work. There is such a thing as home-front as well as battle-front, and the war is the people's war, not the government's alone.

To fight shy of arming the people, under such conditions, is ridiculous, especially when we remember that even the followers of non-violence make use of their hands and feet to repel the attacks of animals and men. Where is the harm if the same hands are better organised, by being provided with sticks or swords?

The real trouble with us Indians is that, by constant use and practice, those things which are originally taken up as means come to be regarded as ends in themselves. Service is the aim of life.

Intellectual, moral or physical forces are only means. But led by our old tendencies we set up means as ends. It is true, our means must be as good as our ends, but how can the mental forces be pure, and the physical forces impure? How can the use of a fist or a stick be evil, if with one stroke I can save the honour of a woman or the life of a child? In this way, even the use of eye-lids against the approach of dust-particles would be evil, as also of lips to prevent the entrance of a fly into the mouth.

The Sikhs can safely follow the example of their Gurus, who made no fetish of a particular method in dealing with life's difficulties. They used non-violence when this method served the purpose of their mission, but when this failed, they had no hesitation in using the other method, which was employed with an equal sense of human values. In each case they never departed from truth and love.

## MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

When people try to govern others in the name of religion there is always trouble. The history of the world is full of examples where religious zeal has led even well-meaning people to interfere with the lives of others who differed from them in religion. The Punjab too was the scene of such troubles in the eighteenth century, when the Muslims and the Sikhs fought some of the bloodiest battles in the name of religion. No quarter was given or sought on either side. Peace came only when a true Punjabi rose among them, and laid the foundation of a state in which religion was not allowed to interfere, and in which Muslims as well as Sikhs had an equal share.

This great man was Ranjit Singh. He was born at Gujranwala on 13th November, 1780. In his early years he had had a severe attack of small-pox, which disfigured his face and deprived him of his left eye. But he soon recovered his health, and grew up to be a very strong and manly youth.

His father, Sardar Mahan Singh, who was a warrior chief, often took his son to the battle-field. The boy had therefore seen great deal of war while he was yet a child. But he had no other sort of education, and was even unable to sign his name. His father died in 1790, when Ranjit Singh was only ten years old.

The estate was a large one, and was managed, for some time, by his mother. But she was a weak woman, and the management of the affairs fell into disorder. When Ranjit Singh reached the age of



seventeen, he took the reins of government into his own hands, and became an independent chief.

The Punjab, at that time, was split up into many states, ruled by Sikh, Rajput, Pathan and Muslim chiefs. The hilly tracts in the north were under Dogra Rajputs. Kashmir was governed by independent Afghan rulers. The northwest of the Panjab and the western districts, called the Derajat, under their Pathan governors, were attached to the Durrani empire. Bahawalpur and Multan, in the south, were under powerful Muslim rulers. There were other Muslim states scattered here and there, such as those of Kasur, Jhang, Attock and Mankera.

In between these Muslim and Hindu states lay the dominion of the Khalsa. It was divided into twelve powers of equal rank, called the *Misals*. Each Misal was under a chief, called Sardar, who was generally elected by his own followers. He was quite independent of outside control; but when a common enemy came to invade the Khalsa lands, these Sardars acted together. They met at the Akal Takht, in Amritsar, and decided upon joint action. Unfortunately, when there was no danger from their enemies, they quarrelled among themselves.

There were six Misals in the Majha and six in the Malwa tract. In Majha, the greatest Misals were those of the Bhangis, the Kanhaiyas, the Ramgarhias, and the Sukarchakias. Ranjit Singh belonged to the Sukarchakias.

The Kanhaiya Misal was already in alliance with him. This Misal was ruled over by an able lady, named Sada Kaur, who was Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law. She had seen the rising power of the Sukarchakias and, in order to prevent trouble from her strong neighbour, she had married her daughter to the young prince, Ranjit Singh. From that time onwards both these Misals acted together as one, until in 1821

Ranjit Singh fell out with his mother-in-law and seized her territory.

On getting full control of his father's estate, his first and foremost desire was to possess Lahore. This was the chief city of the Province, and it was necessary for anyone who wished to become master of the Panjab to take possession of it. The Afghan power being utterly weak, the city was in the hands of three Sikh chiefs of the Bhangi Misal. These men so misgoverned Lahore that the inhabitants were tired of their rule. In 1799 the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh leaders sent a signed petition to Ranjit Singh requesting him to come and take possession of Lahore.

He came with a large force, and the people welcomed him as a saviour. He occupied Lahore on July 7, 1799, and made it his capital. He appointed Imam Bakhsh as the highest police officer in charge of peace and order in the city. Soon after this he took the title of *Maharaja*, and established a mint of his own.

The Bhangis, who had been driven out of Lahore, allied themselves with the Ramgarhias and decided to crush the growing power of Ranjit Singh, but he was too quick for them. He fell upon them with a strong force and seized their chief possessions. At last in 1802 he took Amritsar from them, and with it the *Bhangian-wali-Top*, a big gun which now stands near the Museum of Lahore. This was a crushing blow from which the Bhangis never recovered.

The Ramgarhias were similarly disposed of a few years later. The Ahluwalias were saved only by doing loyal service to Ranjit Singh.

After dealing with the Majha Misals, he turned his attention to those in Malwa. But they checkmated him by placing themselves under the protection of the East India Company. At first he strongly

resented this interference on the part of the British, but in the end he gave way, and by a treaty signed in 1809 he accepted the Sutlej as the eastern boundary of his kingdom.

Some people blame him for weakness in thus yielding before the British. But really it shows his wisdom. He knew his strength, but he also knew its limitations which would not encourage him to invite a clash with the British. This ability to call a halt, when needed, was one of the strongest points of his character. It distinguished him from other great men, like Napoleon, who often acted rashly, and going beyond their limits came to grief.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh about that time abolished the use of *Gurmatta* in dealing with political matters. *Gurmatta* was the name given to the decisions arrived at by the general vote of a Sikh assembly. The whole Sikh people, called the *Sarbat Khalsa*, used to gather at the Akal Takht once or twice during the year, and decided matters affecting the whole community. When, in the eighteenth century, the Sikhs were outlawed and could not meet together for the purpose of a *Gurmatta*, the whole power of passing such resolutions came to be vested in the Akal Takht. Orders were issued from this sacred place to the whole community, which obeyed them loyally. When better days came, and the Sikhs could meet freely to pass such resolutions, the Akal Takht still retained this power. It was there that relations with foreign powers were discussed and treaties signed on behalf of the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh made this change in the custom that the *Gurmatta* could be used only in deciding for Sikhs the questions of religion, but it would have nothing to do with the affairs of government.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh is often blamed for making this change. But really he was only following

the Sikh traditions. The Gurus had from the beginning laid stress on the duty of serving all, not only Sikhs but non-Sikhs as well. When opening the Guru-ka-Bazaar, or the Guru's Market, in Amritsar, they had invited non-Sikhs as well as Sikhs to open shops with the money provided by the Gurus. When founding cities they had built temples and mosques at their own expense. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was only following in their footsteps when he tried to rule, not as a Sikh monarch, but as a common ruler of Hindus and Muslims as well as of Sikhs. There was a time when Muslims had regarded themselves as foreigners and Hindus were downtrodden and looked upon as nobodies in the political sphere. In those days the Sikhs alone were the effective part of the nation, and were right in acclaiming that 'the Khalsa shall rule.' But now when Ranjit Singh came to the throne, he wanted to make Hindus and Muslims feel that they were as much the people of this land as Sikhs, and had the same right to be consulted as the people of his own community. He did not want that any community should rule over any other community. He, therefore, abolished the rule of the Akal Takht so far as political affairs were concerned and began to take the advice of ministers drawn from the ranks of all the communities. He was thus the founder of the first secular state in India. The Gurmatta of the Akal Takht had no place in such a secular scheme. It would have put a great strain on the loyalty of his Hindu and Muslim subjects, if he had still tried to rule over them by the religious edicts issued from the Mecca of the Sikhs.

His abolition of the Sikh Misals can also be explained from the same point of view. The Misals were Sikh powers, their leaders always being Sikhs and their decisions always taken by religious Gurmattas. Such a system was necessary as long as Hindus

were politically dead and Muslims were aliens, but now that the right of citizenship was extended to them and they were to form a respectable part of the Punjab nation. the rule of a communal federation over them had grown out of date, and was rightly brought to an end by a power that was to be called the *Sircar* of all. The Misals in the beginning had developed the Sikh character to a high degree and the noblest features of the Sikh organization appeared in those days; but about the time of Ranjit Singh they had lost their old efficacy, and their selfishness and internecine quarrels had reduced the democratic forms to a mere farce.

Ranjit Singh found the Punjab a waning confederacy, a prey to party feelings of its chiefs, pressed by the Afghans and the Marathas and ready to submit to the English supermacy. He wanted to save it from its fate, and to consolidate its jarring elements into one well-organised state. But by the treaty of Amritsar of 1809 he was prevented from fulfilling his dream of bringing all the Sikh states under one head. He had to content himself with the land lying to the north and west of the Sutlej. The friendship of the British, however, was useful in another way. He had no enemy to fear from the east, and could thus advance his power in the west. If the English had remained hostile, or even unfriendly, Ranjit Singh would have been compelled to keep greater portion of his army on the line of the Sutlej, and thus weakened in power he would have found it very difficult to pursue his designs in the west.

He trained his armies on European lines, and made them as fit and strong as any in Europe or Asia. He employed officers, both Sikh and non-Sikh, without making any distinction between them. From 1822 he even took Europeans into his service.

After signing the treaty with the British in 1809, the Maharaja marched against Kangra, and saved it from the Gurkhas only to make it his own. Then he turned his attention seriously to the conquest of the remaining Punjab. There were three main powers to be counted with: Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar. Three times he tried to storm the fortress of Multan, but it was so ably defended by Nawab Muzaffar Khan that the Sikh forces could do nothing against it. At last, in 1818, Ranjit Singh sent his strongest army to attack the fort. The brave old Nawab defended it to the last and died fighting, when it was taken with all the booty contained in it.

Ghulam Jilani, a Mohammedan historian, while describing the conquest of Multan, relates a story which shows the spirit with which the Sikhs were fighting. During the bombardment one of the Sikh guns had lost one of its wheels. The Sardar in charge of the gun said that if he could fire a few more shots he would succeed in causing a breach in the wall. There was no time for repairs, and delay was dangerous. He, therefore, proposed to his gunners that they should prepare themselves to sacrifice their lives by laying their shoulders one by one under the axle on the broken side. Their lives would be lost, no doubt, but it would be a worthy contribution to the glory of the Khalsa. They all jumped at the idea, and there was a wrangling amongst them for priority. But they were soon silenced by the Sardar, who ordered that they should come in only in the order of their ranks, the senior (meaning himself) going in first. One by one the brave gunners went forward to lay down their lives, and it was after the tenth or the eleventh shot, when as many of them had been sacrificed under the pressure of the gun, that a breach was seen in the wall, and Akali Sadhu Singh rushed to the spot with sword in hand, shouting *Sat Sri Akal*,

to proclaim 'Victory to the arms of the Khalsa'. Ghulam Jilani tells us that he was then moving about amongst the Sikhs in disguise and that more than once even he felt inspired and moved by their spirit of self-sacrifice to follow them under the axle. But if there was anything that kept him behind, it was the desire in his mind to narrate to the world the story of this unique spirit of self-sacrifice.

Then in 1919 he conquerèd Kashmir, which he had invaded so often without success. During the next two years he took Attock and the Derajat. Peshawar was finally reduced in 1824, after a most bloody battle at Nowshera, in which Akali Phula Singh, one of the greatest soldier-saints, met his death. The Maharaja, who believed in the policy of trust, handed over the Province of Peshawar to its former Mohammedan ruler, who apologised for his past conduct and promised to hold it on his behalf as a tributary chief. This policy of trust failed again and again, and the tribal hordes would often descend upon the well-settled parts of the Punjab and loot the people. Ranjit Singh had to send Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa who subdued the land with a severe hand, but was himself slain in the battle of Jamrud. Experience taught the Maharaja that wild measures alone could not cure a people of wildness. He therefore modified his method, and supplemented it with a gentler one of creating a feeling of fellowship and neighbourliness among the tribal Pathans for their Indian victims. The Maharaja sent stalwart Sikhs and Hindus with their families to settle in the frontier districts. They founded cities, like Haripur and Abbotabad, and a number of *Garhis*, in which they lived side by side with Pathans as neighbours and friends. Ranjit Singh also kept the Khans of the border tribes satisfied by granting them a great measure of freedom to control their local affairs.

Sind too would have fallen before the advancing armies of Ranjit Singh, but there the English checked him.

It should not be understood that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was always fighting. No, he was as great in administering the country as in making conquests. He divided the Punjab into four *Subas* or provinces: Lahore, Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar. Each of these *Subas* was further divided into *Parganas*; each *Pargana* into *Taalukas*; and each *Taaluka* was composed of a number of *Mauzas* or villages. He put very able officers in charge of these provinces and districts. The author of the *Tarikh-i-Hazara* describes in detail how the rule of Sardar Amar Singh Majithia, the Governor of Hazara, was of a great advantage to that district, and was extremely popular. This is all the more important as Hazara was one of the districts on the frontier where the administration has always been a difficult problem. Misar Rup Lal of Jullundur has been described as an able and humane ruler, true to his word and engagements, and loved by the cultivators and dreaded by evil-doers. A better man could not have been chosen. The name of Diwan Sawan Mal of Multan is remembered even now for his love of justice and honesty. Within a short period he succeeded in introducing agricultural reforms which changed the whole look of the country.

Next in importance to the Nazim, was the district officer, or Kardar, who came into direct contact with the people and exercised great influence over them. In his work, as collector of revenues, he was assisted by a chain of officials, such as Kanungos, Patwaris, Muqaddams and Chaudhris. The land revenue was then, as now, the most important source of income for the state. Out of the total revenue, amounting to a little over three crores of rupees, about



two crores came from land revenue. There were very few other sources of revenue, such as modern governments have; therefore the main burden of supporting the government machinery fell on the land. Still the charge on the land was regulated by some well-understood principles. It was high or low according to the nature of the land and the condition of the crops. The government share ranged between 50 and 25 per cent of the whole produce. During hard times the Maharaja's government was not found wanting in sympathy for the cultivators. There were large remissions in the charge of the revenue. Sometimes, as during a famine in Kashmir, thousands of maunds of wheat were sent to the affected area for free distribution from the mosques and temples.

To improve the resources of the peasants, the Maharaja provided seasonal canals, nine of which were taken out of the Sutlej and seven out of the Chenab. He was liberal in granting Taqavi loans from the government treasury for the construction of wells.

The arrangements made for the administration of justice were simple and just suited to the needs of the people. In villages the disputes were settled by the arbitration of Panchayats. There were no written laws for the guidance of these Panchayats, but still the people were not left to the caprices of the judges, who had to decide cases according to the customs prevailing in each locality. In towns this function was performed by Kardars, Nazims, or sometimes by separate officials called Adaltis (judges). A separate court was set up at the capital known as Adalat-i-Ala or High Court. Over them all was the Maharaja himself to hear appeals and petitions made against the decisions of the above-named authorities. This right of appeal as well as the dread of the Maharaja's frequent and unexpected tours kept the local

officials in check, and the cases of bribery and corruption were not many. The Maharaja's presence was felt everywhere and was deeply respected.

The Maharaja was respected not only in his own territory but also abroad. His friendship was sought by distant rulers. Even the King of England sent a present of some fine horses to him. Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, took pride in meeting him at Rupar, and Lord Auckland, another Governor General, came to see him in his own capital at Lahore.

To the last he remained a faithful friend of the British. There was a strong party of men at his court who wanted him to break with the British and go forward, but he did not listen to them. He said, "I might perhaps drive the Angrez Bahadur as far as Aligarh, but I should be driven back across the Sutlej and out of my kingdom." When one of his own sons actually begged him to allow an army to be led against the English, Ranjit Singh replied, "No, my son, remember the two hundred thousand Maratha spearmen who opposed the English—not one remains." He was tempted by offers of friendship and alliance from powerful states. The Bhonsle of Nagpur had made a strong appeal to him for assistance; while the Gurkhas of Nepal, who were still feeling the humiliation of their defeat, made repeated attempts to win his alliance. The Jat Raja of Bharatpore, when pressed by the siege of his strong fortress, in 1825, made a passionate call for help to his brother Jat in the Punjab. But Ranjit Singh turned a deaf ear to all these entreaties, and stuck to his friendship with the British. When in 1838 they proposed to send a force to restore Shah Shuja to the throne of Kabul, he also sent his force along with theirs.

Soon after this the Maharaja fell ill, and prayers for his recovery were offered in mosques, mandirs

and Gurdwaras. The Maharaja breathed his last on 27th June, 1839, and every Panjabi felt a personal grief in his death.

Since the days of Raja Anang Pal, who had fought and suffered for the liberties of the Punjab, people had never known such a popular hero as Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who had endeared himself to all classes of people. It was a great thing to have a pure Punjabi king ruling over them as one of them, who loved them all alike without making any distinction of caste or creed. He gave highest posts to Hindus and Muslims as well as to Sikhs. Fakir Aziz-ud-Din was his highly trusted foreign minister and personal physician. The Maharaja would not take even a morsel of food unless it was first tested and certified to be wholesome by this physician. Fakir Nur-ud-Din was the governor of Lahore, and was so much honoured by the Maharaja that he had orders to remonstrate even with the Maharaja if the latter were found doing any act of injustice. These orders were given in writing, and are preserved by the descendants of the governor. Generals like Mohkam Chand and Diwan Chand, governors like Sawan Mal and Ventura, and financiers like Bhawani Das and Ganga Ram were trusted and honoured as much as Sardars Hari Singh Nalwa and Amar Singh Majithia. If he made great gifts to the Golden Temple and other Sikh Gurdwaras, he was no less generous in endowing the Hindu and Muslim places of worship with jagirs.

In the matter of endowing education too he was equally liberal and impartial. There were about four thousand schools, belonging to different communities, scattered all over the country, with about one lakh and twenty thousand students. Most of these schools were attached to mosques, temples and gurdwaras, and the Maharaja was most generous in helping the custodians of these places of learning.

Even in dealing with his fallen enemies the Maharaja showed unprecedented generosity. Touching this noble quality in him Sir Henry Lawrence writes that 'members of deposed ruling families may be seen in Delhi and Kabul in a state of penury, but in the Punjab there is not to be seen a single ruling family whose territories may have been conquered by Ranjit Singh, and which may have been left unprovided by him. Not only the Sikh ruling houses, but those of other faiths too were provided for by him with equal munificence.' When, for example, in 1809 he conquered Kasur from Nawab Kutub-ud-Din, he gave him the jagir of Mamdot, which brought a revenue of 190,000 rupees a year. It continues to be enjoyed by his descendents. In the same way, when in 1818 he conquered the province of Multan, he granted a big jagir in Sharkpur and Naulakha to the Nawab's sons. In 1834 when Peshawar was made a part of the Punjab, he gave to Sultan Mohammed Khan and other Barakzais the fertile tract of Hasht Nagar that brought in three lakhs a year.

The Maharaja was so kind by nature that throughout his long reign of forty years he did not sentence even one man to death. W. G. Osborne says in his *Court and Camp of Ranjit Singh*, 'He has never been known to take life, though his own has been attempted more than once.'

There are many stories of his generosity current in the country. An old woman had heard that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was like the philosopher's stone which by its touch turns iron into gold. She came with the iron plate on which she used to cook her food and approaching the Maharaja began to rub his back with the sooty iron. When the King's officers saw this, they tried to drive her away as a mad woman. But the Maharaja would not have this. He asked them to let her explain herself. In her

simple way she said that she was very poor, and having heard that the King possessed the power of the golden touch she had come with her cooking plate to have it turned into gold. The Maharaja was pleased with her simplicity, and gave her gold equal in weight to the iron plate.

There is another story showing to what lengths the Maharaja would go to help his subjects. During famine days it was usual with him to open depots of grain from which people were helped according to their needs. Once the Maharaja was watching the distribution of grain from his granary. Ten seers were being given for each family. There was a great crowd, and an old man found it very difficult to get his turn. The Maharaja who was dressed in simple clothes came forward to help the man. But the man did not recognise him. The Maharaja got for him his share of ten seers. But the man wanted more. He said he was too old to come again and again, and should be given at least a maund. His bag was filled with the required weight of grain, but he could not lift it, as he was old and weak. The Maharaja, who took delight in playing such jokes, offered to take the bag to the man's house. With a maund of grain on his head, he went along with the old man, talking and comforting him. When he was coming out of the house, he was met by his bodyguard, which was looking for him. The old man recognised him, and felt ashamed, but the Maharaja put him at his ease, saying, "Don't worry, old man, it was a good joke, and it has breathed me well."

One sign of a well-developed character is humour, and Ranjit Singh possessed plenty of it. Once in his talk with Dr. Joseph Wolff, an old Christian missionary, he was asked how one might come unto God. His reply was characteristic: "One can come nigh God by making an alliance with the British Government, as I lately did with the Governor General at

Rupar." Like every Punjabi he liked to play practical jokes, which contained much wisdom in them. Here is one. Some Sikhs complained to him that they were disturbed in the morning by the Azan of Mohammedans. The Maharaja replied that if the Sikhs undertook to awaken the Mohammedans at the time of prayers, he would stop the Mohammedans from calling Azan.

He enjoyed a good joke, even if it was at his own expense. He was one-eyed, but none durst call him so. Yet nothing pleased him so much as being called "one-eyed" by children in the street. He would often invite them to come round him and teach him this wisdom. It was this child-like simplicity which endeared him to all who came into contact with him.

## ARE SIKHS HINDUS?

The question whether Sikhs are Hindus should have no place in decent times. It is always asked when there is trouble between Sikhs and Hindus; and as I desire peace between them, I do not feel comfortable in having to answer this question. But as it is being forced upon Sikhs, and perhaps also on Hindus, I wish to state bare facts, historical and religious, which may help the sincere inquirers in understanding the true relationship between the two great communities.

What is meant by Hinduism? Is it to be taken as a Culture, or a Religion?

### 1

Most people take it as a culture, to which all those people are supposed to belong whose ancestors were Indo-Aryans or were influenced by the Indo-Aryan institutions. Some would simplify it by saying that all those whose religions were born in India are Hindus. If we take Hinduism as a culture, then what is the position of Sikhs? Some Sikh leaders too have expressed the view that they are not Hindus by faith, but they belong to the Hindu type of culture. This comes of not understanding the meaning of culture, which is often confused with civilization or the manner of life. It does not mean civilization, but the intellectual side of civilization. It means the peculiar training of the mind which makes a people think, feel and do things in a peculiar way. In practice it refers to the modes of thought,

as expressed in Philosophy and Religion, and the ways of taste, as expressed in Art and Literature.

If we examine the fundamentals of Sikhism and the evolution of Sikh history, we find that this movement was a rapprochement between the Hindu and the Muslim types of culture, and was not identified with any one of them. The whole genius of the time was moving in the same direction, and the Sikh Gurus were no exception to the rule. The whole Bhagti movement was the work of Gurus and Saints who combined in their thought-culture not only what was inherited from the Hindu past but what was best in the Muslim outlook also, with its freedom from monistic and polytheistic ideas and a strong sense of joy in life and worldly duty. Even at the basis of Sikh theology was working the same synthesis between the Hindu and the Muslim thoughts. The idea of the unity of God itself underwent a tremendous change. He no longer remained an abstract entity of the Hindu philosopher, or a being outside and above Nature, as conceived by the Muslim divines, but a personal being at once immanent and transcendent (*Vide* pp. 41-42). The similarity of views had become so common that Guru Arjun felt no difficulty in incorporating the writings of Hindu and Muslim saints in the Holy Granth prepared by him.

Another feature of this synthesis was the use of a common vernacular even for religious purposes, instead of Sanskrit or Arabic which exclusively belonged to one community. In the Punjab the clearest proof of the Hindu culture being distinct from the Sikh culture is the fact that the two people are not agreed on the question of vernacular, the Hindus adopting Hindi and the Sikhs Panjabi as the medium of their thought-expression. Panjabi adopted by Sikhs has been culturally so developed



by the combined efforts of Sikhs and Muslims that in its references to the Muslim tradition are as frequent as to the Hindu and Sikh traditions.

In music also some adjustments were made by musicians like Tan Sen, who is credited by Abul Fazl with having introduced 'great developments' into his art. He is accused by conservative Hindu musicians of having falsified the traditional *Rags*, which means that he made some necessary departures from the old modes in order to suit the Muslim taste. The Sikh Gurus also made some modifications in the same way, as is evident from their omission of certain measures like Hindol, Megh, etc.—because they led people to wild transports of joy—and Deepak, Jog, etc.—because they made people too sad. Both these extremes were against the spirit of Sikhism which works for *Sahj* or a steady vision of life. They therefore avoided the use of these *Rags*, except when they could be used to modify other *Rags*; as for instance, Hindol was combined with Basant to vivify its serene joyfulness, and Deepak was used to heighten the seriousness of Gauri and to make it more vigorous. In Tilang, Asa and other frontier *Rags* a visible combination was made, not only in the execution of music, but in the composition of the pieces set to music also, Arabic and Persian words being used as frequently as Hindi words.

Besides Music other arts also show the same combined development. In architecture the Sikhs adopted the Indo-Sarcenic style, which was a mixture of the Hindu and the Muslim styles. The Rajputs, who were under the influence of the Mughals, may have continued the mixed tradition, but the recent Hindu renaissance has fallen back on the archaic Hindu style, and carefully avoids any medieval mixture. The Sikhs, however, still stick to the synthesis adopted in the days of the Gurus.

The difference can be realized if we compare the styles used in the buildings of Hindus and Sikhs. The Hindu Colleges, Gurukulas and the Benares Hindu University are built in the pure Hindu style; and if any mixture is allowed, it is of the cheap P. W. D. style, but no trace of Muslim arches or domes is allowed to contaminate the purity of the square brackets and the pointed *shikhars*. See, on the other hand, the buildings of the Sikh temples at Patna, Nander or any other far-flung place, or of the Golden Temple, Saragarhi Memorial and the Khalsa College, Amritsar. They are in the mixed style made current in the Mughal days.

In Painting the Hindu artists are still emphasising an expressionless art, which may be classically Hindu and perfectly in keeping with the meditative mood of old India, but it is un-Indian in so far as it omits to take cognisance of the change in the spirit of India brought about by the virile West. Muslim painters, like Chughtai, on the other hand, seem to be fond of colour and are less deep and suggestive in expression. The Sikh painters, like Thakur Singh, Sobha Singh, etc., are combining the two effects and are more realistic. In this they are following the tradition of their forbears, who even in the days of the Sikh rule were in the forefront of those who were for realism in art. In the Punjab they were the first to cultivate the sense of perspective in drawing distances, to depart from mere symmetry and to introduce variety and fine shading in colour.

It would appear from these observations that while Hindus and Muslims are tearing up the old solder set by their medieval ancestors and are reviving their individual past, Sikhs are still trying to keep the happy synthesis intact. They refuse to be drawn to this side or that, because they believe

that the evolution of a unified nation is possible only on the lines followed by them.

## 2

If we take Hinduism as a religion, we have to determine what its essential features are. It has been found very difficult even by great Hindu thinkers to ascertain and fix upon even one thing common to all Hindus. Even the word *Hindu* is not acceptable to all those who go by this appellation. Arya Samajists, Jains, Brahmos, Budhists, etc., have, at one time or another, rejected this name and have resented its application to them. Perhaps the belief in the Vedas is shared by most of the Hindus. Next to it is the doctrine of transmigration of souls. Caste system is another thing that distinguishes Hindus from all the rest of people. Respect for the cow is another feature of Hindu life. Tiraths or holy places are also respected by the different denominations of Hindus. Untouchability, in one form or another, enters into their daily behaviour, and does not allow them to have free intercourse with people of other denominations. Even when converting people of other religions they have to subject the new converts to a process of *Shuddhi* or preliminary purification, which is not thought necessary in the case of those who come from higher castes.

Guru Nanak began his career with the declaration : 'There is no Hindu, no Muslim.' In *Var Ramkali* he says, 'It is nonsense to be called a Hindu or a Muslim.' Bhai Mani Singh in his *Gyan Ratnavali* says, "The pilgrims asked Baba Nanak at Mecca whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim, and he replied, 'I am the witness of both'." When he died, both Hindus and Muslims quarrelled over his remains, one party thinking that he was a Hindu and the other that he was a Muslim.

Guru Arjun too declared boldly in his Book :

"I don't keep the Hindu fast, nor that observed by Mohammedans in Ramzan.

I serve Him, and Him alone, who is my ultimate refuge.

I believe in the same Gosain who is also Allah.

I have broken off with the Hindu and the Muslim.

I won't go on Hajj to Mecca or do worship at the Hindu places.

I shall serve only Him and no other.

I won't worship idols or read Namaz ;

I shall lay my heart at the feet of the One Supreme Being.

*We are neither Hindus nor Mussalmans :*

We have dedicated our bodies and souls to Allah-Ram"—  
(*Bhairo*).

The mission of the Sikh Gurus was to approach all people and to make them one: Guru Nanak says, 'The true Guru is one who can unite all sorts of people' (*Sri Rag*). At first converts came from Mohammedans as well as Hindus. Guru Nanak left a host of followers in Mesopotamia, Persia and other countries visited by him. We learn from the *Janamsakhi* of Seva Das (1588) that Kiri of Pathans and many other places in India, inhabited by Mohammedans, came over to the faith of Nanak. Bhai Gurdas (1629) in his 11th *Var* mentions many Mohammedans among the prominent Sikhs living in different localities. Examining the cases of these conversions it appears that Pathans, Sayyads and Shias, whose races had been defeated by the Mughals, were more inclined to accept Sikhism than the Mughals who had too much pride of the conqueror in them to adopt the religion of the conquered. The chief complaint of Jahangir against Guru Arjun, as recorded by the Emperor himself in his *Tauzak*, was that 'so many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by his ways and teachings.'

With conversions made from all quarters, it was difficult, if not impossible, for caste restrictions or untouchability to remain. It is held by some Hindu

writers, like Indubhusan Banerji (in his *Evolution of the Khalsa*), that the earlier Gurus, particularly Guru Nanak, never meant to attack the institutions of caste, sacred thread, or holy pilgrimages. Whatever else great prophets may or may not have been, it is certain that they were sincere. You cannot imagine Guru Nanak saying, with his tongue in his cheek, that 'Caste is nonsense' (*Sir Rag*), that it is blindness of the soul on the part of a Brahmin to twist a sacred thread and put it round the necks of others (*Var Asa*), and that 'pilgrimages, austerities, formal acts of mercy, alms-giving and religious gifts are all dispensed with, when one gets even a grain of the honour of God's Name' (*Japji*). It is certain that the Gurus wanted to destroy these customs root and branch. If they did not succeed completely, it was not their fault. It takes two parties to effect a reform: the reformer and the party to be reformed. The Gurus knew what sort of material they had to handle. The corruptions which had taken centuries to gather could not be expected to be removed at once. It took the Gurus ten generations to effect some of the reforms they had initiated. And yet some remained uneffected up to the last. One of them was the abolition of the caste system. The difficulty of the task may be gauged from the fact that Islam and Christianity too have tried to break this steel-frame, but who can say that they have succeeded? The Sikh Gurus did succeed in the beginning, when hosts of Mohammedans and low-caste people were assimilated in the fold of Sikhism. But when the forces released by Sikhism brought on religious persecution by Mohammedans, the Sikhs and Hindus found themselves in the same boat, and as would happen in such cases they had to club their resources together, and to suspend all their inter-communal controversies. The caste system could not be broken in these circum-

stances, although the pride of caste which was a hindrance in the way of true religion was totally removed. The Jats who were considered Sudras enjoyed the greatest prestige along with the Khattris, and the Brahmins were no longer held in esteem. 'All the four Varnas were equalised' (Bhai Gurdas).

In order to remove the Hindu prejudice against Mohammedans and Sudras, who were considered untouchables, Guru Amar Das obliged all his visitors to dine together in his free kitchen\* before he would talk to them. The Raja of Haripur as well as Akbar had to do the same.

In order to show that a man born among Mohammedans or Sudras could rise to the greatest spiritual heights as much as any high-caste Hindu, Guru Arjun included in his Granth the compositions of Kabir, Farid and Bhikhan, who were Mohammedans by birth, and Ravidas, Namdev, etc., who were considered untouchables. This was a practical way of securing the highest honour for them, because the Book in which they got a place was considered divine and was held in greatest veneration by Sikhs, even the Guru taking a lower seat than the Book prepared by him.

Mohsin Fani, the author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, who visited the Punjab in the Sixth and Seventh Gurus' time, writes about the Sikhs :

"The Sikhs of Guru Nanak condemn idolatry and believe that all the Gurus are identical with Nanak. They do not read the Hindu Mantras, nor do they pay any regard to their shrines. They do not believe in the Hindu Avatars, and do not study Sanskrit which, according to Hindus, is the language of gods."

"The Sikhs do not have any faith in the ritual and ceremonies enjoined by the Hindu Shastras, nor do they observe

\*"The whole congregation would come to the kitchen and, without considering any distinction of caste or creed, were seated in a line. They were treated as if they were all equally handsome and clean."

—Suraj Prakash, *Ras i.*

any superstitious restrictions about dining. A learned Hindu named Partap Mal, seeing that a Hindu boy was inclined towards Islam, said to him, "There is no need for you to turn Mohammedan. If you want to get freedom in eating and drinking, you may better join Sikhism."

The only restriction they followed was, and still is, about the eating of beef. Like Hindus they would not kill the cow or eat its flesh. They did not, however, worship the cow or hold it sacred.

Guru Arjun made the Sikh community well-organised and self-contained, having its own scripture and its own temples.

The Sikhs from the beginning observed no elaborate ceremonial in their temples. "We worship the Name, believe in the Name, which is ever and ever the same and true" (*Sri Rag*). Guru Amar Das declared the Guru's Word to be superior to all the scriptures of the world, and the Sikhs were enjoined to use only the Guru's Word in worship. See his *Anand*. He held that 'the same superstition that had created the Smritis and Shastras was at the bottom of the belief in gods and goddesses' (*Majh*). Guru Nanak was of the opinion that 'all the four Vedas talk of the phenomenal nature and describe the three conditions; but the fourth unconditioned state is known from the true Guru' (*Gauri*). Guru Amar Das rejected the six systems of Hindu philosophy and declared that the Guru's system was the best: 'This system of God is obtained by fortunate ones through the Guru's Word by means of true detachment. The six systems of the Hindus are in vogue nowadays, but the Guru's system is profound and unequalled. It provides the way of salvation, and the True One comes to reside in the heart. This system, if adopted with love, can save the whole world' (*Asa*). Guru Arjun said, 'Men ponder over the Vedas and Shastras to secure deliverance, but superior to all the religious ceremonies and observances taught therein is the

practice of the Name' (*Asa*). 'Nobody can get salvation by reading the Vedas and Western Books, Smritis and Shastras' (*Suhi*). Guru Gobind Singh was more denunciatory. He said, 'Those who attach themselves to God give up their belief in the Vedas' (*Vichitra Natak*). He would allow no compromise with Hinduism. He insisted that in Sikh temples nothing but the Guru's Word should be recited or sung. Sujan Rai of Batala, writing about Sikhs in 1697, says in his *Khulasa-tul-Tawarikh*: "The only way of worship with them is that they read the hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments."

There was a need of clear definition, especially because the Khalsa was to be made self-governing after the Tenth Guru. So far the Sikhs, under the guidance of the Gurus, had been able to keep their doctrines distinct from Hindus and Muslims, and, while liberally benefitting by their association, had taken care to maintain their growth free from obsession from either side. But the opportunities for the operation of this balanced spirit began to decrease, when the Sikhs had to fight against the tyranny of the Mughal government. The growing antipathy of the Muslims against the Sikhs began to tell upon the work of Sikh mission among the Muslims, until, with the intense religious persecution started by the later Mughals against Hindus as well as Sikhs, the scope of conversions to Sikhism came to be confined solely to the Hindu masses, who brought to the contemplation of the new moral forces revealed by Sikhism an imagination saturated with the spiritual convictions of the old era.

Guru Gobind Singh had to take strong measures to restore unity and distinctness of the Sikh mission. When the Guru entered on his mission, he called upon the Sikhs to rally round him. But such was



the fear of persecution by the Government that many of the Sikhs denied their Sikhism and declared that they had never departed from their old faith. It was so easy for them to slide back into Hinduism. Anybody among the Sikhs, in a moment of weakness, might say, "My name is Ram Chand. Look at me. Don't I look like a Hindu?" The Guru, astonished at this illuiveness of the so-called Sikhs, said, "Now I shall create such Sikhs who, in spite of themselves, will not be able to hide their religion." He ordered that

"The Sikhs should wear long hair and come to me.

Once a man becomes a Sikh, he should never shave himself;

He should not touch tobacco,

And should receive baptism of the sword" (*Suraj Prakash*, iii, 21).

He insisted that the Sikhs, in spite of their sympathy and love for other communities, should not confuse their ideals with those of others :

"The Sikh is to keep his observances distinct from those of other people of all the four Varnas. He should have dealings with everybody, but his belief and programme of life should be different all the same" (*Suraj Prakash*, Rut iii, Ch. 50).

"The Khalsa should be distinct from Hindus and Muslims" (*Rahnama* of Bhai Chaupa Singh and also of Bhai Daya Singh).

"He created the Khalsa as the crown of Hinduism and Islam" (*Gurvilas*).

"Now I shall create an infinitely strong Panth, distinct from Hindus and Muslims" (*Panth Prakash*).

"Previously there used to be only two communities, Hindus and Muslims. Now there shall be three" (*Suraj Prakash*).

The Guru laid down definite rules of conduct to be followed by Sikhs; e. g. :

"He who keeps alight the unquenchable torch of truth, and never swerves from the thought of one God;

Who has full love and confidence in God; and does not put his faith, even by mistake, in fasting or the graves of Moham-medan saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Jogis' places of sepulchre ;

Who recognises only the one God and no pilgrimages, alms, non-destruction of life, penances, or austerities;

And in whose heart the light of the Perfect One shines,—he is to be recognised as a pure member of the "Khalsa" (*Swayyas*).

Similar rules are to be found in the *Rahatnamas* left by certain veteran Sikhs of those days. Some of them may be cited here :

"A Sikh should have marriage connections with Sikh families" (*Chauha Singh*).

"A Sikh should have nothing to do with *Janeu* or frontal mark" (*Ibid*).

"He should not put on a *Janeu*, or perform marriage, saradh or death ceremonies of the Hindus, but should perform all ceremonies according to the Sikh ritual which consists of prayer" (Bhai Daya Singh).

"A Sikh should avoid worshipping Jogis' sepulchres, idols, tiraths, gods and goddesses, and should have nothing to do with fasts, spells, charms, Pirs, Brabmins and their incantations and Gayatri" (*Ibid*).

This phase of pure Sikhism, however, lasted only for a short time. After the death of the last Guru, when most of the veteran Sikhs disciplined by him had been martyred and their descendents forced to live in exile, away from their homes, the rump congregations began to drift back to the old customs and beliefs. Those who came from low castes began to be distinguished from those who came from the so-called high castes. Some who in the days of persecution could not dare to confess Sikhism openly were allowed to go about without the outward signs of Sikhism. Such men were called *Sahjdharis* or slow-adopters. In those days, when to wear *keshas* was to invite death, nobody could have the heart to question the disguise adopted by the *Sahjdharis*, who believed in Sikhism but could not afford to die for it. The *Sahjdharis* who had adopted this apologetic attitude never pretended to be representative Sikhs. They always looked up to the spirit and form of their brethren in exile whom they helped in every way.

The spirit and form were, however, kept in tact in the ranks of the *Khalsa* even after it had been slackened in towns and cities. The *Panth Prakash* of Rattan Singh (1809) bears ample witness to the

fact that in spite of hard times the fighting Sikhs still conformed to the rules laid down by Guru Gobind Singh. They still kept aloof from idolatry, performed the *Anand* from of marriage, obeyed the Panth as the highest authority, conducted themselves by resolutions passed in their assemblies, did not believe in the sacred thread, incarnations, caste or the pollution of food, and freely reclaimed those who had gone over to Islam. Many notable Sikhs married Mohammedan women converted to Sikhism. Some converts from Mohammedanism\* were appointed to the holy places of Bhaliani, Phul, etc.

When Ranjit Singh came to rule, Sikhism received a rude shock even in the ranks of the Khalsa, where it had been preserved more or less in its pristine purity. Hindu influences began to work even in religion, and in court ceremonies strict regard to the spirit and form of Sikhism was not observed.

After Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when kingship became a thing of jewels and clothes, Sikhism too, with the higher classes, became a mere fashion of the turban and the beard, until a people with sterner ways and better discipline struck the sceptre from their hands. It was the people who still retained some semblance of the old spirit, but they too, with the change coming over their temples along with the shock they had received on the battle-field felt paralysed for the time being. They declined in numbers too. The English, however, forgot their late enmity in admiration for the noble bravery of the Sikhs, which now began to be used on their side and tried to befriend them. This friendship put some heart again into the Sikhs, and they began to enlist in the British army, where they could keep their baptismal forms intact. But in all other ways the Sikhs showed no

\* See my *Sikhism*, Ch. vii.

life, religious or national, in them. They worshipped the same old gods, indulged in the same old superstitious practices from which their Gurus had so heroically worked to extricate them. Their baptism and five symbols became a mere anomaly. They were Hindus then, and it would have astonished them, if anybody had suggested to them that they were not.

It was towards the end of the last century that a new movement was started among the Sikhs, of which the object was to study the original sources of Sikhism, and to restore it to its pristinetime purity. Those who undertook this task found that much of the true Sikhism was overlaid with Hinduism, and that the work of restoration would require the rejection of the Hindu excrescences. I shall describe this process in a separate chapter, which will show that the cry '*We are not Hindus*' is not the creation of the present-day reformers, but is an echo of the old slogan which had better been left unraised in these days.

## THE NIRANKARIS AND NAMDHARIS

A great upheaval, second only to Chilianwala, came to rouse the Sikhs from stupor, but, as it was not preceded by a general educational awakening, it was not felt by the whole Sikh nation. Attempts were made to restore Sikhism to its original position. But the circumstances had so changed and the progress of Sikhism had been so long neglected that to a great extent the battle had to be fought over again.

Two reform movements, the forerunners of the Singh Sabha movement, began about the same time in the North-Western Punjab. One was the Nirankari and the other the Namdhari movement. The first originated with Baba Dyal of Peshawar, who came to settle in Rawalpindi and died there in 1854. He preached against idolatry and sought to restore the worship of one *Nirankar* or God in spirit. He inveighed against the fast-increasing evil of drink, which the military service had introduced. The purely Sikh forms of marriage and funeral services were revived, and widow remarriage and other reforms were encouraged. But owing to the want of education the movement touched only a few business men of the locality, who came to believe in Baba Dyal as a successor of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

The Namdhari movement was started by Baba Balak Singh (1799—1861,) a shop-keeper of Hazro, and his disciple Baba Ram Singh of Bhaini in the Ludhiana district. This puritan movement was a protest against the prevailing laxity of morals and

sought to revive the old devotional spirit among the Sikhs. It was a vigorous campaign against the immoral and superstitious practices of the priests in charge of Gurdwaras. Baba Ram Singh, born in 1815 of a poor carpenter family, rose to be a great leader of men. He had learnt discipline in the Sikh army, which he left in 1841 at the bidding of his religious preceptor, and wonderfully organized his followers. He appointed a *Suba* in every district, two *jathadars* in every tehsil, and one Granthi in every village. He established elementary vernacular schools and free kitchens wherever he went, and exhorted the Sikhs to live simple lives and support these institutions. He saw that Western culture was undermining the simplicity of life and the strength of character. He, therefore, banned Western education and interdicted Government service and courts. He anticipated many features of the modern national movement, such as the wearing of *khaddar*, boycott of government institutions and emphasis on truth and non-violence. His followers were able to carry out many of his behests. They have stuck to *khaddar* more faithfully than the ever-shifting followers of Mahatma Gandhi. In the matter of boycott they have been much more persistent. In their simplicity they have suffered for truth too, so far as they could understand it. Their suffering, however, which has often stood the test of non-violence, has been marred by strong reactions in favour of violence. But they have terribly suffered for their remissness. In principle they are still pacifists, plying their white woolen rosary more than the sword.

Baba Ram Singh's preaching made a great stir in the country. The priestly class, annoyed with his criticisms, shut the Gurdwaras against him and his followers; and the Government interpreted his

attacks on Western civilization as due to racial hatred. Measures were adopted to restrain his and his followers' activities.

The Baba's mission was specially marked by the teaching of righteousness, toleration and mercy. It is true, some of his followers got out of control and in a religious frenzy committed unpardonable excesses. But this evil was due to an intensity of feeling in ignorant men, aggravated by great provocation. The large majority of Namdharis disapproved of such actions,\* and the Baba's influence was always exerted on the side of moderation and kindness. A murderer, who had escaped conviction, came under the influence of Baba Ram Singh. He went at once to the Sessions Judge, confessed his guilt, and cheerfully accepted punishment. In the summer of 1870 a few Namdharis happened to pass by the Lahori Gate of Amritsar, where, in spite of the long tradition and an order† of John Lawrence passed in 1847 against cow-killing in Amritsar, a slaughter-house had been established. There was a rumour in the city that four butcher shops were going to be opened in the sacred city. A great indignation prevailed among the Hindus and Sikhs. The Namdharis, who had a great hatred for cow-slaughter, came after some deliberation to the city, fell upon the butchers, and killing a few of them ran away. After a year Baba Ram Singh, who came to know of it, sent for those men and said to them: "You have committed murders, and innocent Nihangs have been arrested. Go to the court and confess your guilt so that the innocent may be saved." They went, cleared up the

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\**The Ludhiana Gazetteer.*

†This order inscribed on a wooden board was upto 1922 still hanging outside the north-western entrance of the Durbar Sabib. Amritsar, but it has now been taken down for safety.

case before the authorities, and calmly resigned themselves to their fate.

In January 1872 a bullock was provokingly slaughtered by a police officer of Malerkotla before the very eyes of a Namdhari Sikh, who had remonstrated with the owner of the bullock for his cruelty to the animal. The news told in the yearly diwan at Bhaini stirred up wrath in the audience, and, in spite of the attempts of Baba Kam Singh to dissuade them, about 150 Sikhs got out of hand and marched towards Malerkotla to take revenge. The baba Sahib at once informed the police about it.\* First Malaudh and then Malerkotla were attacked with sticks and axes, and 10 men were killed and 17 wounded, while the Namdharis got 9 killed and 33 wounded. They were ultimately surrounded by the army, and Mr. L. Cowan, the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, without trying them ordered 50 of them to be immediately blown away from guns, and 16 others were tried by the Commissioner, Mr. T. D. Forsyth, and executed on the following day. Baba Kam Singh, who was admittedly 'a thoroughly religious character' and who had helped the Government in this crisis, was deported with his Subas to Rangoon, where he remained prisoner upto 1885, when he died.

The Government of India recorded on these proceedings an elaborate resolution, which contained these words: "His Excellency in Council is under the painful necessity of affirming that the course followed by Mr. Cowan was illegal, that it was not palliated by any public necessity, and that it was

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\*For these and other facts mentioned before about the Namdharis the author is indebted to some Namdhari records and a history called *Panth Prakash* by Bhai Kala Singh. This book mentions among the Sikhs, who attacked Malerkotla, two women also who are said to have been let off when men were blown away from guns. For the remaining account the *Ludhiana Gazetteer* and some information supplied by Namdharis has been availed of.



characterised by incidents which gave it a complexion of barbarity. And so His Excellency was compelled with deep regret to direct that Mr. Cowan be removed from the service." Mr. Forsyth, too, though later recompensed in other ways, was removed from his appointment as Commissioner. Sir Henry Cotton says in his *Indian and Home Memories*: "For my part, I can recall nothing during my service in India more revolting and more shocking than these executions, and there were many who thought as I did, and still think that the final orders of the Government of India were lamentably inadequate."

The troubles of the Namdharis did not end with these executions or the deportation of their revered leader. A police guard was stationed at the door of their central temple at Bhaini, and all the Namdharis were interned in their villages and their movements restricted. Most of these restrictions, which involved unthinkable police harassment, continued upto very recent times. It was only on 10th December, 1920, that the long-standing restrictive orders were cancelled and the police guard was changed into a police station.\* For fear of harassment the Namdharis changed the peculiar mode of their turban and wore the woolen rosary under their clothes. They were left in isolation, and in their agony they had nothing else to console them except the memory of Baba Ram Singh, whom they raised, unauthorised by him, to the position of a Guru or successor of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh.

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\*The Government communique announcing the removal of restrictions against the Namdharis begins thus:

"In 1872 after the Kuka disturbances restrictions were placed by the Punjab Government over the movements of the leaders of the sect and a police post was established at Bhaini Ala, their headquarters in the Ludhiana District. These restrictions involved the reporting of their movements by the leaders, supervision over visitors to the shrine and prohibition of meetings without sanction from the authorities."

Of course the setting up of a Guru after Guru Gobind Singh, except Guru Granth *cum* Guru Panth, was against the basic principles of Sikhism, and this was responsible for the growing isolation of the Namdharis from the general Panth. But we must try to appreciate the difficulty of the Namdharis also. They believed in the Holy Granth as their scripture, but their loyalty to the principle of the Panth as Guru was put to the highest strain when, at the advent of the British rule, the authority of the Guru Panth, as residing in the Akal Takht, began to be used against them. Ever since the control of the central Gurdwaras had gone into the hands of the Government, all independent elements among the Sikhs had come to look upon the Panthic authority exercised by the Akal Takht as a sort of Vichy government, whose *Hukamnamas* could not be relied on as free from all political prejudices. The cleavage of the Namdharis from the central authority dates from the occasion of Diwali in 1867, when Baba Ram Singh came to pay his respects at the Akal Takht and the priests refused to offer prayers for him. When asked why they did so, they replied that the Namdharis often threw away their turbans in ecstasy, that they invested women with the same forms and symbols as were given to men, and that they condemned the eating of meat, which in the form of Jhatka was allowed to all Sikhs. The priests, reinforced by Nihang Sikhs, demanded that the Namdharis should be ordered to wear blue dress in future. Baba Ram Singh's only reply was that he would do as the Guru would direct him to do. He offered prayer himself, and came away in disgust.

Later on when the authority of the Akal Takht was used to declare the Namdharis as non-Sikhs, their position became much more difficult. Should they have believed themselves to be Sikhs—which was to

disobey the authority of the Guru Panth as residing in the Akal Takht—or should they have obeyed the authority and gone out of the pale of Sikhism? They chose the former, and stayed in Sikhism. I think the true solution would have been to behave as the other reforming bodies did in those circumstances. When the Singh Sabha people were ostracised by the Akal Takht, they neither denied their Sikhism nor their belief in the Guruship of the Panth. They declared the Akal Takht to be merely the mouthpiece of the Panth, which was different from the priests of the Takht, and was enshrined in the hearts of all the Sikhs thinking collectively with the sense of the Guru in them. They started the idea of reforming the management of the central Gurdwaras, of which the first step was to free them from the Government control. In the meantime they formed a central body of their own to give decisions in the name of the Panth. This process took a long time, and it was only in 1920 that the central Gurdwaras were freed from the Government control, and one central body was elected to wield the supreme authority of the Panth. This was the only solution which should have recommended itself to the Namdharis. It, however, did not recommend itself to them, and they fell back upon the same idea of Guruship which had prevailed before the death of Guru Gobind Singh, i. e., the personal Guruship of one man who is supreme in all matters, social, religious and political; with this modification that he does not create the scripture but interprets it, does not command the whole Panth but only a section of it which is directly under him. This makes the community of the Namdharis a self-contained and compact unit, but it also isolates it from the main body and makes it less effective as a means of spreading Guru Nanak's mission.

I think the time has come for Sikhs to revise their relations with their Namdhari brethren, and to

undo the wrong done to them, so far as we are concerned with it. As for example, the general body of Sikhs encouraged the Government to deport Baba Ram Singh and his Subahs. (See the letter of the Secretary to the Government of the Punjab to the Secretary to the Government of India, dated 7th February, 1872.) Later on when the Namdharis were being harassed by the police, the leaders of the Singh Sabha movement excluded the Namdhari Sikhs from their Sabhas, by providing a rule in their constitution that 'those who were considered mischievous by the Government could not become members'. The reference was clearly to the Namdharis. In 1888 the Khalsa Diwan Lahore presented an address to Lord Dufferin who was asked not to consider those as Sikhs, but as enemies of Sikhism, who were creating disturbances,—meaning the Namdharis. The Government was asked to deprive all such people of their rights as Sikhs. The leaders in those days had every right to condemn the disturbances and those who indulged in them, but it was irreligious slavishness to condemn as non-Sikhs all Namdharis, who might be numbering thousands, for the sake of a few—not more than 150 all told.

Such bitter memories are rankling in the minds of the Namdharis, and it is our duty to take the sting out of these memories by being more kind to them. It is true that the Namdharis, in the course of this long time, have deviated much from the accepted form of Sikhism, as understood by us. But the gulf will be only widened by our quarrelling over the differences. The only possibility of rapprochement lies in meeting and cooperating more and more in as many cases as possible. Coercion is not the way to unity. Can't we afford to love them, without compromising our principles? In the first meeting

of the All Sects Conference, held at Bhaini Sahib, we were able to convince the Namdharis that they should address the Holy Granth as *Guru Granth Sahib*, and all the sects and orders of Sikhism were persuaded to join in the Prayer invoking the Ten Gurus. Were not these two things a clear gain for the Panthic unity? If we agree to meet, we are sure to evolve a working unity on all controversial points. The rest we may leave to the Guru who is a great unifier of hearts.

## THE SINGH SABHA MOVEMENT

The first attempt at reform, in the shape of the Namdhari movement, was successfully paralysed owing to the want of a common feeling among the Sikhs, which could be engendered only by education. It is a significant fact that, while all other communities at that time got the inspiration for reform from Western education, the Sikhs' first endeavours in this line were the result of their own inherent genius. They realised, however, that their attempts to rouse the whole community to feel the necessity of reform would be fruitless unless they first got themselves educated. The Government also learnt a lesson that, in their own interest, they should not antagonise the reforming element among the Sikhs; rather they should help it and, if possible, to guide it in the work of reform. Political contingency may have required that as many elements as possible should be segregated from the general body of Hindus who were responsible for the agitation for political reform in India. But it would be unjust to accuse Sir Sayyad Ahmad or his counterparts among Sikhs of misguiding their communities to serve the ends of the British Government in India. It was in the interest of Sikhs and Mohammedans that before they could consciously and usefully take part in the political life of India they should go through a discipline of education and religious reform. Both these communities were backward in this respect, and they were quite justified in cooperating with the Government in order to secure the much-needed help from them.

So far as the Sikhs were concerned, it was inevitable that the movement of reform among them should take the form of dehinduising them. This would have come, even if the Government had stood aside, because the only trouble with Sikhism at that time was that its doctrines and institutions had been completely Hinduised. The reformers, therefore, had a tremendous task before them to rediscover the pure doctrine and then to preach it to the ignorant masses.

#### KHALSA DIWAN OF AMRITSAR

The first association of reform, called the Singh Sabha, was founded at Amritsar in 1873, only a year after the Namdhari trouble. Its inaugural meeting was held at the Manji Sahib at 2 o'clock on the Dussehra day. It was attended by the Pujaris, Mahants, Gyanis, Granthis, Udasis, Nirmalas, besides prominent Sardars like S. Thakur Singh Sandhawalia, who was the moving spirit of the body. Its weekly meetings were held at the Manji Sahib (where even now you may find a dilapidated room bearing a sign-board of the Sabha). In the meetings lectures and discussions were held in an atmosphere of controversy and denunciation which did not allow much of spiritual content. It was perhaps necessary at that time. Gyani Sardul Singh put forward a point for discussion that the birthday of Guru Nanak should be celebrated in the month of Vaisakh instead of Kartik. The discussion went on for three years, and as a result a *Gurparnali* or calendar was prepared giving the true dates of the births and deaths of the Gurus. Another subject for discussion was the text of the *Dasam Granth* which was subjected to a close examination for the purpose of discovering how much of it was Guru Gobind Singh's own composition, and how much came from other writers. Thirty-two different versions were collected to work upon. The

work growing apace, it was entrusted to a separate body, constituted under the Singh Sabha, which was called the Gurmat Granth Pracharak Sabha. Dr. Charan Singh (father of Bhai Vir Singh) was its secretary. The work of collating the different texts was completed in 1896, and its report was published in 1897, embodying the results of the research and preparing a true recension of the Dasam Granth. Inspired by these researches other works of great importance were prepared, such as Gyani Gyan Singh's *Panth Prakash* and *Twarikh Khalsa*, Pandit Tara Singh's *Guru Granth Kosh* and *Tirath Sangrah*, etc. In 1894 Bhai Kaur Singh and Bhai Vir Singh established the Khalsa Tract Society, Amritsar, for the purpose of issuing monthly tracts on Sikh religion. This society has done much to popularise Panjabi and the stories of Sikh history.

Beside the Singh Sabha of Amritsar, there were other centres where similar associations were being formed. The most important of such places was Lahore, where Professor Gurmukh Singh was working most zealously with the purpose of organising Sikhs and making them feel their lost individuality. Through his influence in 1877 classes were opened in the Oriental College for teaching Panjabi as the only\* modern Indian language, besides the classical languages. He himself was appointed Lecturer in Panjabi, besides Bhai Harsa Singh, and later on

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\*This was a sop thrown to the Sikh notables who had liberally contributed towards the funds of the University. Instead of giving the Sikhs any special privileges in the University, the promoters of the University scheme made a special provision for the teaching of Panjabi in the Oriental College. This privilege was not given to Urdu or Hindi. See the rules of the College as framed originally in 1888. But now those rules have been modified to include Urdu and Hindi as well. They run: 'The University shall maintain an Oriental College with the main object of promoting the advanced and enlightened study of Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and such modern Indian Languages as the Syndicate may appoint.'



Bhai Dit Singh, as an additional teacher. Prof. Gurmukh Singh was the greatest figure in the Singh Sabha movement. Besides being a great scholar of Sikhism, he possessed a strong personality which overawed even Rajas and Maharajas. He had a clear vision of Sikhism as conceived by the Gurus, and was determined to restore it to its original shape without any compromise with Hinduism. He had the knack of gathering about him men of sterling worth. With their help he founded a Singh Sabha at Lahore, on 2nd November, 1879, and got it affiliated to the Singh Sabha of Amritsar, which became the central body called the Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar. A branch Singh Sabha was also established at Amritsar to serve as a local centre. The objects of these associations were: To inculcate love for Sikhism among all those who called themselves Sikhs or Khalsas; to preach the principles of this great religion; to publish literature in aid of this religion; to publish the authentic texts of the Guru's Word and other books, such as the Janamsakhis and the Gurparnalis, after correcting and amending them; to promote the study of modern knowledge through the medium of Panjabi, and for this purpose to issue papers and magazines. Special care was taken to keep out apostates, the opponents of Sikhism, and those who had proved obnoxious to the Government. Even Europeans could become members in the educational branch. It was provided in the fundamental rules that nothing against the Government could be discussed in the Singh Sabha meetings.

These rules became the model for all the Sabhas founded in connection with this movement. Prof. Gurmukh Singh went about preaching the mission of the new order, and was able to create and get affiliated scores of Singh Sabhas in the country. This made the Amritsar Diwan very prominent, and all the

influential people, even those who were conservative in their outlook, were attracted towards the centre of this movement. Baba Khem Singh Bedi, a descendent of Guru Nanak, became the president of the Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, and Prof. Gurmukh Singh its chief secretary, with several secretaries in charge of sub-committees for religious, literary, educational and press matters. As the Akal Takht and the Golden Temple authorities were cooperating with this Diwan, the Hukamnamas from the Takht were often issued in favour of the reformers. This welcome phase, however, lasted only for a short time, because the Diwan contained many leading members whose zeal for reform was only skin-deep. They were not ready to shed off the old tradition in its entirety. They still clung to untouchability, idol worship, man-worship, etc. There began to appear a cleavage between the wholehoppers, most of whom belonged to the Lahore centre, and the slow-paced reformers who belonged to the Amritsar centre. Prof. Gurmukh Singh found his position more and more difficult. He was for the removal of the disabilities of the untouchables, who had been presenting their difficulties before the Diwan, but had always been put off with one excuse or another. Things came to a head on the question of providing cushions for the seating of Baba Khem Singh, when he came to pay a visit to the Golden Temple. He claimed this as a special privilege as a descendent of the founder of Sikhism. Prof. Gurmukh Singh and others of his way of thinking were against this practice. They wanted equal treatment for all, and did not want to allow any invidious distinction to be made in the presence of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. Prof. Gurmukh Singh was forced to sever his connection with the Amritsar Diwan, and to found a new Khalsa Diwan at Lahore, to which he affiliated almost all the Singh

Sabhas. The Amritsar Diwan was left only with the three Sabhas of Amritsar, Faridkot and Rawalpindi. Its president was Baba Khem Singh and secretary his staunch disciple, Bhai Avtar Singh Vahiria. This Diwan, though truncated, still enjoyed some prestige on account of its association with the central temples and the great authority of Baba Khem Singh and certain ruling princes. It held its annual meetings as usual on the Diwali and Vaisakhi occasions. Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot gave Rs. 75,000 for erecting the building of the Free Kitchen attached to the Golden Temple. He also spent Rs. 25,000 on the electrification of the sacred premises. To counteract the so-called innovations introduced by the extreme reformers like Bhai Gurmukh Singh a Hinduised commentary of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib was prepared by Gyani Badan Singh and published at the expense of the Faridkot Durbar. A stream of books and pamphlets issued from the prolific pen of Bhai Avtar Singh Vahiria and others to meet the ever-advancing tide of reform-literature as produced by Bhai Dit Singh and Bhai Gurmukh Singh. Bhai Avtar Singh, in his book *Khalsa Sudhar Taru*, and later on in his bigger books called *Khalsa Dharam Shastar* and *Gur Darshan Shastar*, tried to prove that the Sikhs were Hindus, that the Gurus worshipped gods and goddesses, and that it was wrong to convert Mohammedans to Sikhism, or to abolish caste-system and untouchability. After firing a few more shots in the air this fighter of a losing cause retired to his native city, Rawalpindi, along with his master, Baba Khem Singh, and gave no further trouble to the staunch reformers. Baba Khem Singh, however, did much for the spread of female education in the western Punjab, and brought thousands of Hindus into the fold of Sikhism.

## KHALSA DIWAN OF LAHORE

All the real supporters of reform gathered round Bhai Gurmukh Singh who had founded the Khalsa Diwan of Lahore in 1886. Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha was its patron, Sir Attar Singh, C. I. E., Shamsul Ulama and Mahamahopadhyaya, Chief of Bhadaur, its president, and Bhai Gurmukh Singh its secretary. It also enjoyed the patronage of the Lieut. Governor of the Punjab and the Commander-in-Chief of India. In a short time all the best elements of Sikhism were attracted towards this new Diwan. In the early days of reform, there was not much difference between Singh Sabha and Arya Samaj. Guru Granth Sahib used to be opened in the Samaj meetings, and many prominent Sikhs were found working shoulder to shoulder with the promoters of the Samaj. Bhai Jawahir Singh, of Gujranwala, was one of them. He was a vice-president of the Samaj. Bhai Dit Singh and Bhai Mayya Singh, two great speakers and writers, were also working with him. They were, however, greatly annoyed by the attacks of their Samajist associates on the Sikh Gurus, and they came away in disgust. They were welcomed with open arms by Bhai Gurmukh Singh, who saw in them great dynamic personalities, destined to work wonders in the cause of Sikhism. A press was already owned by the Khalsa Diwan. Now a newspaper, called *Khalsa Akhbar*, was started, with Bhai Dit Singh as its editor. Through his paper and scores of books,\* written evidently with a gusto and force never known before, he was able to demolish the old theories of his opponents and to create a strong opinion in favour of the new movement. Incidentally modern poetry and especially prose received a great

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\*Some of them were: *Life of Guru Nanak*, *Durga Parbodh*, *My Discussions with Swami Dayanand*, *Biographies of Sikh Heroes*.

impetus from his advocacy. His allegorical burlesque, called *Swapan Natak*, which was a disguised attack on Baba Khem Singh, involved him in some trouble through litigation, but having influential personalities like Sir Attar Singh at his back he came out unharmed.

Two other personalities attracted by Bhai Gurmukh Singh were Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha and Mr. M. A. Macauliffe. Bhai Kahan Singh was a great scholar of Sikh literature. Besides being trained in the old school of scholarship wherein depth of knowledge and mastery of detail was emphasised, he also cultivated a variety and vastness of view which is characteristic of western learning. He did not possess the force and verve of Bhai Dit Singh, but he had more depth and comprehensiveness which made his work more permanent and less polemical. His book, *Ham Hindu Nahin*, did more to dehinduise the Sikhs than anything else. His other books, *Gurmat Prabhakar* and *Gurmat Sudhakar* articulated Sikh doctrines most clearly. They were standard guide-books and sometimes the only stock-in-trade of Sikh preachers. His later book, the *Encyclopædia of Sikh Literature*, was his *magnum opus*, and did much to elucidate the Sikh creed. Indirectly he was also responsible for much of the work done by Mr. Macauliffe, who studied Sikhism under his care and was persuaded through him to give up a very lucrative Government post and join the Lahore Diwan for the purpose of translating the Sikh scriptures. From 1893 to 1909 Mr. Macauliffe worked at this tremendous task, and completed it to the satisfaction of learned Sikhs. But by that time the Lahore Diwan had become defunct; and the new leaders, led by inherent superstition or jealousy, did not approve of his publishing the Guru Granth Sahib in English. They said that it would mean desecration of the Holy

Book, which would be carried about like any other volume without proper respect. Mr. Macauliffe was therefore obliged to give up the idea of publishing the translation of the whole Book, and had to content himself with giving only a few portions of it along with the lives of the Gurus.

Even this did not satisfy the factious party. The Government too, which had promised to help the author with a grant of Rs. 15,000, was now averse to paying anything more than Rs. 5,000, which the author declined to accept. He came to Rawalpindi in 1910, when the annual session of the Sikh Educational Conference was being held. Nobody went to receive him at the railway station. Broken in health, and more broken in spirit on account of the debt incurred in connection with the publication of *The Sikh Religion*, he appealed to the promoters of the Conference to include a resolution about his book, recommending that it was a work worthy of Sikhs' consideration. The permission asked for was refused, and the old tottering benefactor of the Sikhs had to return disappointed. He went back to England, and died soon after, in 1913. Then a resolution of appreciation was passed at the Educational Conference.

Another luminary who did yeoman's service to the cause of reform was Bhagat Lakshman Singh of Rawalpindi. He joined Sikhism in 1895, when he was thirty-three, and had already made a name as a writer and journalist. Reinforced by the enthusiasm of a new convert he threw himself heart and soul into the reform movement. He was serving as a Professor in the Gordon College, and was at the same time secretary of the local Singh Sabha. His bold advocacy of the Sikh cause, especially in the matter of spreading education among the masses, brought him up against Christian interests in villages, and

he was obliged to sever his connection with the Mission College. He came to Lahore, and started a weekly journal, called the *Khalsa*, in English. The paper ran its course only for about two years, from 1899 to 1901, but it did much to counteract the nefarious propaganda of certain renegades from Sikhism (Bawa Chhajju Singh and Bawa Arjun Singh) who were spreading misrepresentations about the mission of the Sikh Gurus. Bhagat Lakshman Singh returned to Rawalpindi in 1901, and carried on an unceasing campaign of reform, which resulted in the formation of a net-work of Singh Sabhas and Khalsa Schools in the Rawalpindi district. His *Life of Guru Gobind Singh* and scores of booklets, written off and on, laid the foundation of Sikh literature in English, which gives due prominence to the mission of the last Guru, which is often forgotten even by Sikhs.

There were many other leaders who touched the reform movement on its different sides. One such was Dr. Jai Singh of Rawalpindi, the founder of the famous firm of chemists on the Mall, Lahore. He carried on the work of *shud:hi*, reconverting those who had gone away to Islam or Christianity.

The main work of the Khalsa Diwan was the foundation of the Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1892, and laying those broad lines of reform which made the Sikh community self-conscious and self-contained. The dynamic force generated by Bhai Gurmukh Singh and his great associates was still working in full vigour, when God summoned him away from his field of action, and he died of heart-failure in 1898. Sir Attar Singh\* had already died in 1896. Bhai Dit Singh died in 1901. The Lahore Diwan

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\* He was one of the most learned men of his time. Some well-known books by him were: *The Sakhi Book*, *Travels of Guru Teg Bahadur*, *Rahitnama of Prahlad Singh and Nand Lal*.

could not survive these incessant shocks, and its place was taken by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar.

#### CHIEF KHALSA DIWAN

The first meeting of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was held in the Malvai Bunga attached to the Golden Temple on the 30th October, 1902. The inaugural prayer was offered by Babu Teja Singh\* of Bhasaur. Bhai Sahib Bhai Arjun Singh, chief of Bagarian, was elected president, and Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, secretary of the Singh Sabha of Amritsar, was appointed secretary of the new Diwan. Out of about 150 Singh Sabhas, scattered all over the country, only 29 agreed to join. Their representatives, along with 47 others, formed the general body. With the exception of a few leading members who still stuck to the Lahore Diwan for the old sake's sake, most of the local workers, like Sodhi Sujan Singh, B. A., Bhai Takht Singh of Ferozepore, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid of Tarn Taran, S. Sadhu Singh of the Forest Department, S. Dharam Singh of Gharjakh, transferred their allegiance to the new dispensation, and began to give their best to it. Sodhi Sujan Singh became assistant secretary to the Chief Khalsa Diwan. Bhai Takht Singh, a staunch follower of Bhai Dit Singh, opened a research library of Sikh literature and history in connection with the Sikh Kanya Mehavidyala, Ferozepore, and called it *Bhai Dit Singh Library*. He became an enthusiastic supporter of the new order in the spread of education and religious reform. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, who had done much to counteract the anti-Sikh

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\* He became a great dissenter later on, and founded a new association, called the *Panch Khalsa Diwan*, which did much useful work in propagating the mission of Guru Gobind Singh, but in the end floundered pitifully in trying to rearrange the text of the Holy Granth by excluding the compositions of the Bards and including those of the Tenth Guru.



propaganda of the Arya Samaj, established a Panjabi magazine, called *Dukh Nivaran*, in 1906, and through its monthly issues as well as through pamphlets spread useful information about health and hygiene, home and its problems, and many other themes, bearing on modern life. Like Bhai Takht Singh he was a great antiquarian, sweet and humble, firm and persuasive—a type that is becoming rare nowadays.

It was such people who fixed the new type of man associated with the Chief Khalsa Diwan. The older type, associated with the Lahore Diwan, was distinguished for his bold, clear-cut views, and intellectual and controversial outlook, making use more often of historical and logical methods than of any spiritual or mystical means. The Chief Khalsa Diwan, on the other hand, represented a new ideology, which did not work so much for discovering new defects in the old system, developing new schools of criticism, or making a bold headway towards neglected reforms, as for supplying the great deficiency of depth and spiritual fervour. So far, according to the need of the time, all the work done had been destructive. The belief of Sikhs in the Hindu books and institutions had been demolished to a great extent, and they had been made to stand on their own ground. But they had not yet had time to look at their own ground, much less to think of building their own institutions on it. The only thing constructive done so far had been the spread of education, and the inculcation of the belief that the Sikhs were a separate community, which should have separate rights, separate institutions, and separate provisions in the law to protect them. Even the Anand Marriage Act, legalising the Sikh form of marriage, came in 1909. For all other purposes we were, and are, governed by the Hindu law. The greatest defect, however, was that our

religious practice was not spiritual enough. It consisted mainly of attending a weekly meeting of the Singh Sabha, in which lectures were delivered against Hindus and their institutions, or debates were held to controvert the attacks of the Arya Samajists. It was reserved for the Chief Khalsa Diwan to usher a new era of spiritual uplift. This was the work of certain holy men and gifted musicians. Sant Attar Singh of Mastuana was instrumental in inaugurating the practice of early rising and attending holy meetings where the sacred word was given out in entrancing music. Never since the days of the Holy Gurus had the Sikhs such spiritual experience. Never had they gathered in such large numbers to listen, in their hearts, to the deeply moving voice of the Guru, and therefrom to imbibe the mystery that is called Religion. Bhai Hira Singh Ragi's music, interspersed with his sacred lore, swayed the hearts of thousands, including even Hindus, and all forgot the days when the Sikhs and Hindus used to fight over their doctrines. Sant Sangat Singh of Kamalia is another luminary of the same order who has come to reconcile intellect with spirit, and whose spiritual talk subdues all controversies and hushes all bickerings. Bhai Vir Singh of Amritsar, who fights shy of speaking in big meetings, has nevertheless had a strong influence in moulding the new type of man, especially among those who lead the movement. His influence on Sikh literature too has been most creative. He may be called almost the originator of modern Panjabi poetry, and his religio-historical romances in prose have done more than anything else to advance the mission of reformed Sikhism. Besides these S. B. Jodh Singh, M. A., and Sardar Trilochan Singh, M. A., LL. B., have had a great deal to do with the formation of Sikh opinion. The latter with his business acumen, as

manager of the Punjab & Sind Bank, has linked up the different Sikh institutions and business magnates with the Bank, and through it with the leaders of the Chief Khalsa Diwan.

The Diwan enjoyed the greatest prestige among Sikhs from 1902 up to 1914. Its secretary, Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia, was also the secretary of the Khalsa College, the premier institution of the Sikhs, with which were associated the most influential officials of the Government. The members of the Diwan were mostly drawn from the elite of the community. When the Khalsa College went into the hands of the Government in 1908, most of the leaders of the Diwan withdrew from the management of the College and came to found a new institution, the Sikh Educational Conference, which was as important as the College, if not more. It was controlled by the educational committee of the Diwan, and held its sittings annually in different centres. Wherever it met, it left a school behind it, until in a few years it came to support a host\* of Primary, Middle and High Schools. It heroically fought for the cause of the Panjabi language, and its influence was felt by the educational, postal and railway authorities. The Sikh schools were not only dispensers of education, but they also served as strongholds of Sikhism wherever they were established.

\*So far it has held 30 sittings, and has dispensed Rs. 499548 to different schools in the form of aid and Rs. 69200 as stipends to needy students. Before the opening of this Conference there were not more than a score of Sikh schools in the whole province, but now the number is:—

For boys: 5 colleges, 61 high schools, 35 middle schools, 2 lower middle schools, 45 primary schools, 7 hostels, 6 miscellaneous.

For girls: 1 college, 4 high schools, 25 middle schools, 150 primary, and 111 mixed schools.

Even the Singh Sabhas, which were organised for propagating reform, could not compete in popularity with the schools.

This spread of education created among the Sikhs a public spirit with which they came to feel their religious and political disabilities. By 1914 this feeling of discontent was aggravated by the *Komagata Maru* and the *Rikab Ganj* affairs, and at the same time the minds of the Sikhs were being stirred by the events of the Great War, which was creating a passion for democracy everywhere. The Sikhs were no longer content with the leadership of the Chief Khalsa Diwan. Led by such bold papers as the *Panth Sewak* of Lahore, they wanted the Diwan to quicken its pace, or to get out of the way and give its place to some other body. But there was no other body yet born, and the Diwan had to carry on as well as it could. In spite of its representations the Sikh claims had been ignored in the Minto-Morley scheme, and even in the Montford scheme, which recognised the Sikhs' claim to separate representation, only 8 seats out of 54 were recommended for them. In the autumn session of the Punjab Council in 1918, while refusing to accept the amendment of S. Gajjan Singh to his resolution recommending the distribution of seats between Hindus and Mohammedans according to the Congress plan, Mian Fazl-i-Hussain told the Sardar that as his community had kept aloof from the Congress it had no ground to complain. This was a clear indication to Sikhs that they could no longer rely for the protection of their rights on the support of the Government or of those bodies which could not afford to break away from it. The Sikhs, therefore, organised a political body of their own, called the *Sikh League*, and held its first session at Amritsar, along with the Congress, in 1919. They also started

a paper, called the *Akali*, at Lahore. It had great influence with the common people in villages. A new phase of reform began among the Sikhs. It was called the Akali movement.

#### AKALI MOVEMENT

The previous movements of reform had touched only the white-collar people of cities. The new movement was truly democratic. It came from villages, and up to this time has been controlled mainly by the rural element, which does not make any nice distinction between religious and political matters. It does not see much use for the educated element, which is supposed—perhaps truly—to be supine and nerveless, and therefore unfit to be trusted for showing vigour or sacrifice in times of emergency.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to describe the great movement of Gurdwara reform, which entailed so much suffering and sacrifice. It was indeed a task quite beyond the capacity of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, and it was well that the Guru chose a new set of people who alone could have the dash and determination required for the purpose. It opened the way for a real reform of religion, which had been obstructed by the fact that the Sikh temples were in the hands of unreformed priests. No amount of preaching or education, which the Singh Sabha movement had so far achieved, could actually effect any improvement in the rites and ceremonies observed by Sikhs as long as the performers of these rites and ceremonies—the priests—were strongly entrenched behind the law of the land against all reform. It was necessary, therefore, that the management of the temples should be in the hands of those who wanted reform. By going through untold sufferings the Sikhs, called *the Akalis*, have secured a law, which gives them control over all the historical Gurdwaras.

All this change, however, means a change on the management side only, and does not necessarily mean any reform in the service or ritual observed in the temples. In effect, the talk of reform is a luxury indulged in by those who are outside the pale of management. Those who are actually running the show have to look to the taste of the audiences. They cannot afford to make any sudden changes in the daily routine of worship observed in the temples. The Akalis, as priests, do not find themselves as helpless as their predecessors, because the audiences are not the same as before. They have made some improvements. As for example, women are allowed to go up to the holy of holies in the Akal Takht, which they could not do before; but it will take some time before they are allowed to take part in the actual services, such as singing hymns in the Golden Temple or taking part in administering baptism. They have abolished certain obnoxious customs, such as the annual killing of a goat before the Akal Takht, and the worship of idols in the precincts. But other customs, for which there is no authority in Sikhism, still continue to hold the ground.

There is a sacred lamp, called *jot*, still burning in the Golden Temple. The people are still seen pressing the marble walls of the Baba Atal, or touching worshipfully the lock of the treasure-room. The anniversaries of the Gurus have begun to be celebrated with great *eclat*, but the Hindu days of *Amavas* and *Puranmashi* are still attracting greater crowds to the Sikh temples. The strange kinds of recitation, such as the *sampat path*, are not encouraged, but who can say that recitations still allowed are quite free from superstition?

The reason is obvious. No party that has to run institutions can help being conservative. 'It has

to satisfy many helpful interests. It cannot afford to antagonise its audiences. And the Akalis are no exception to the rule. There are other reasons beside this. The authority of the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, which controls the management of the Sikh temples, is free from outside control, but it is not yet acknowledged by all the Sikh elements as supreme in religious matters. Certain Sikhs, among the Udasis and Nirmalas, whose temples come into the ambit of the Gurdwara Act, also refuse to admit its authority. and are ready, when challenged in the courts of law, to declare that they are not Sikhs. (And yet, strange to say, when they succeed in their attempt to save a temple in this way by apostatising themselves, the first thing they do is to offer thanks before the Holy Granth!) The Chief Khalsa Diwan has always stood apart, considering itself as competent to decide the Panthic affairs as the S. G. P. C. Under these circumstances the S. G. P. C. cannot feel strong enough to enforce unity of belief or worship, or to apply sanctions when anybody proves refractory.

At present there are mainly two schools of thought: one dominated by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, which, continuing the old tradition of the Amritsar Diwan, is more conservative; and the other by the S. G. P. C., which, inheriting the extreme tendencies of the Lahore Diwan, is more critical. The former, inspired by Bhai Vir Singh and his paper, the *Khalsa Samachar*, emphasises the divinity of the Gurus who are identified with God, while the latter believes in the humanity of the Gurus and is less mystical. The one stresses the worship of saints, and comes out now and then with biographies of holy men, who preached asceticism and self-renunciation; while the other party holds this kind of thing as mere man-

worship and does not encourage too much kowtowing before human beings. They also do not favour the use of a rosary in worship, the whispering of Mantras in private into the ears of disciples, the letting or sub-letting of recitations and other mysteries which are indulged in by the saints of these latter days.

In my view, there are two great elements of Sikhism: One is *Nam* (or the Name) and the other is *Sewa* (or Service). The Chief Khalsa Diwan has come to emphasise the practice of *Nam*, and does not see much opportunity for *Sewa*, while the other party has come to monopolise *Sewa*, without seeing much use in practising *Nam*. The desirable thing would be to combine the two. When that is done, the Khalsa will be one and supreme.



## KHALSA COLLEGE, AMRITSAR

Soon after the establishment of the Lahore Diwan an active campaign was started to found a central college for the Sikhs to be worked in connection with a system of schools in the outlying districts. The movement was due to such enthusiastic workers as Prof. Gurmukh Singh of the Oriental College and Sardar Jawahir Singh, a clerk in the N. W. R. Office, Lahore, and they were whole-heartedly helped by the Government and the Sikh States. Those were the days when the Sikhs fully trusted the Government as their best friend; and the Government too fully confided in the devotion and friendship of the Sikhs tested in many trying crises. That was the time when a Viceroy could say: "With this (educational) movement the Government of India is in hearty sympathy. We appreciate the many admirable qualities of the Sikh nation, and it is a pleasure to us to know that, while in days gone by we recognised in them a gallant and formidable foe, we are to-day able to give them a foremost place amongst the true and loyal subjects of Her Majesty the Queen Empress;"\* and a Lieutenant-Governor could feel "that the British Government owed the Sikhs a debt of gratitude for their large share of the credit for victories won by Punjabi Regiments in Hindustan and in China, and afterwards in Abyssinia, Egypt and Afghanistan."†

The Sikhs, too, appreciated this sympathy in such glowing terms: "They are actuated by no

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\*Lord Lansdowne in his speech at Patiala on 23rd October, 1890.

†Sir J. Lyall while laying the foundation-stone of the Khalsa College Main Building on 5th March, 1892.

other motives than those of philanthropy, of friendliness towards the Sikhs, and we are very grateful to them."\*

The College was founded in 1892. Col. W.R.M. Holroyd, Director of Public Instruction, Mr. J. Sime, another D. P. I., Sir W. H. Rattigan, Mr. W. Bell, Principal, Government College, and several other European gentlemen gave active assistance to the Sikhs in the work of founding and conducting the College. They were associated with the Sikhs with the latter's free consent and were elected as special members, simply to help them, and were not there to exercise official control.

At first the idea was to open the College at Lahore. This was the well-considered opinion of the leaders of the Lahore Diwan, who were supported in this by the Government. The Lieut.-Governor urged that Lahore was the centre of all intellectual activities, and if the Sikhs chose to keep away from it, they would suffer intellectually (*oot ke oot rahoge*). The leaders of the Amritsar party, however, were for locating the College at Amritsar. The tussle went on for a long time, until the Lahore party had to yield before the superior propaganda of the Amritsar party, and the decision was made in favour of Amritsar.

The next question was of choosing the locality. The Government offered the whole land extending from the Ram Bagh, including the historical gardens, to the Railway Station. But the same advisers who had urged the Sikhs to avoid Lahore now came forward to advise the avoidance of the neighbourhood of the city, which was supposed to offer all sorts of temptations to the would-be students. At last, with

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\*The Secretary of the Khalsa College Council, while referring to the European members of the Council in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Khalsa Collegiate School on 22nd October, 1893.

the help of Mr. Nickel, the secretary of the Municipal Committee, the present site was chosen, and the villagers of Kot Said Mahmud, Kale, etc., were persuaded to offer their lands covering about 100 acres for Rs. 10,000 in all. In return for this generosity their children were promised exemption from the payment of fees.

The site chosen was eminently historical. It was the place where the first battle was fought between Sikhs and Muslims in the days of the Sixth Guru. What a happy turn of events that the descendents of those contestants for military glory should now be rubbing shoulders in the same fields for winning laurels in healthy games or in the arts of peace!

On 22nd October 1893 the institution began as a Middle School. Three years later High classes were opened, and then it was raised to the status of a college by the opening of Intermediate classes. In 1899 came the B.A. classes and in 1905 the science classes up to the B.Sc. The M. A. class was added in 1916.

When, owing to the death or abstention of its active members towards the end of the 19th century, the Lahore Diwan gradually deteriorated, the College too was found verging towards bankruptcy, and it was seriously proposed by Sir Mackworth Young, the Lieutenant-Governor, that the College classes should be abandoned altogether. But fortunately the Chief Khalsa Diwan, another central body, came into existence at Amritsar just at the time when the Lahore Diwan became defunct, and Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, the moving figure in the new dispensation, became Secretary of the College in 1902. To facilitate business the unwieldy College Council, under the advice of the Lieutenant-Governor, delegated all its governing powers to a small

Managing Committee of thirteen members. With the return of public confidence and the patronage of princes, the financial condition of the College began to improve, and in 1904, as a result of a great Sikh Conference held at the College under the presidency of the venerable Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha, the Endowment Fund, not including the promises, went up by a leap to Rs. 15,30,477, and the Main Building Fund stood at Rs. 3,28,480 including Rs. 50,000 granted by the Government. Sir Charles Rivaz, the Lieutenant-Governor, exerted himself utmost in the interest of the College, and with his help  $\frac{1}{2}$  anna per rupee on the Government revenue was collected from the Sikh zemindars.

The policy of the Government up to that time had been of trust, and in return for its help it did not require any official control to be introduced\*. But after some time the questionable policy of Lord Curzon, inaugurated by the Universities Act of 1904, came to overtake the former policy of sympathy: and when the mistrust of the educated classes led the Government to take the Universities under a stricter State control, the Khalsa College, which was the fountain-head of Sikh education, also came in for its share. A little incident† in the College and the

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\*The European members did show some anxiety in 1900 to reserve the Principalship for a European even when a Sikh at a great sacrifice was offering himself for the post, but on this point the Sikh members themselves were divided. Even the appointment of Sardar Sundar Singh as Secretary in March 1902 was strongly opposed by the European members, who wanted Mr. Cole, the Principal, to be also the Secretary, but they could not withstand the growing influence of the new Sikh party and, in spite of the threatened deadlock, Sardar Sundar Singh was confirmed in his position.

†The Sikh engineer, Sardar Dharam Singh, who was working honorarily and was against carrying on the building operations on the original extravagant scale, was replaced, at the suggestion of the Lieutenant-Governor, by a paid European engineer. This

general unrest in the country in 1907 scared away the old trust which had always inspired the Government officials in their dealings with the College. After the Managing Committee had worked for six years, much to the advantage of the institution, it was discovered by the Government and the Punjab University that the Committee had been illegally constituted in 1902 and that its funds were bogus\*. The threat of disaffiliation was held out, unless the fundamental rules of the Society were changed, which meant that the Society should consent to the introduction of Government control. A sub-committee, appointed by the Punjab Government and consisting of the Commissioner of Lahore (Chairman), the Director of Public Instruction, a Sikh Sardar who was a 'safe' man, and Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia who protested all along, proposed revision of the constitution of the College. The draft rules, approved by the Government and passed by an Executive Committee suggested by the Government, were placed before the old Council on 10th June, 1908, but without the requisite number of votes forthcoming the rules were declared passed, and the remaining

appointment and specially Major Hill's remark about the honorary services of the Sikh engineer, that 'the labour of love was nonsense,' created a great sensation in the community. About 75 Sikh associations sent resolutions of protest against the European member's remark, from which the Managing Committee were also obliged to record their dissociation. There was a strong agitation against Europeans or officials being present on the management. When the new engineer came to the College on 10th February, 1907, some boys are said to have behaved rudely towards him. The whole student body put on black badges and held a fast. The Government was highly offended and the Phulkian States withheld payment of the interest on their endowed money.

\*The reference was to the fact that the donations of the Sikh States, on which the College mainly depended, were deposited with the States themselves and were not placed in the hands of the College trustees. But this had been the case from the beginning, and up to the present remains the same.

votes were secured later on by July 3rd\*. By the new arrangement the Commissioner became president, and the Deputy Commissioner, the Director of Public Instruction, the Political Agent, Phulkian States, and the Principal were appointed *ex-officio* by the Government to the College Council. With the Commissioner as Chairman, the Deputy Commissioner as Vice-Chairman of the Managing Committee, and the Secretary nominated and removed by the Government, the effective control of the College may be said to have passed into the hands of the Government.

The Principal, Mr. Cole, could say complacently that "the reconstitution of the College Managing Committee on the lines indicated by the Government and the University has served to place matters on a more definite basis;" but the Sikhs thought otherwise. There was a great outcry in the community. The independent-minded members, like Sardar Harbans Singh of Atari, resigned, and the position of Sardar Sundar Singh also became more and more difficult. The great influence he commanded in the management was too much for the Principal and the official members, and "the Government expressed a desire that the constitution should be changed as it did not work well"† It was proposed in September, 1912, that the number of members from the British districts should be reduced and the Secretary should not be an honorary but a paid officer, to be appointed and removed by the Government. He was not to have a seat on the Managing Committee, and his powers were further sought to be limited and placed at the mercy of the Principal. After a hard contest the Secretary's position was more or less maintained, but the proportion of the members from the British

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\*See the Secretary's report for the year 1908-09.

† The Secretary's report for the year 1912-13.

districts on the Committee was reduced, and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab was given the power "to suspend the rules and to direct the Committee to take such action as the special circumstances may appear to demand, and it shall thereupon be binding upon the Committee to take such action." Sardar Sundar Singh had, of course, to resign his office in November 1912, and certain 'strong' men on the staff, like Prof. Jodh Singh, M. A., and S. Narain Singh, M. A., were forced to retire soon after. To help the institution the Government consented to provide three English professors, including the Principal, to the College.

The College became very unpopular and, as admitted by the new Secretary, was openly cried down as a Government college. The Lieutenant-Governor, who came to distribute prizes in 1914, noted this change in the attitude of the Sikhs, but tried to justify the officialising of the College by referring to the happy results of the Sikhs being led by British officers in the army. The story of India in the leading strings was repeated here. The same efficiency and the same outward show of prosperity\* was there, but it stunted the growth of the native genius.

Some of the apathy of Sikhs towards their College was overcome by the new Principal, Mr. G. A. Wathen, who loved the institution and believed in the greatness of its future. He chose to forego the chances of becoming the Director of Public Instruction, and preferred to remain at the head of this institution in the most trying of times in its history. He developed the College from different sides until in efficiency and

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\*More than 15 lakhs have been spent on the buildings alone and the capital for the maintenance of the College exists mainly on paper. The Government and the States can stop the College any day by refusing their grants.

numbers it could vie with the foremost colleges in the Province. He used all his influence with the Government in the interest of the College, getting a special grant of three lakhs for the completion of the main building, persuading the authorities to accept the idea of opening a railway station opposite the College bearing its name, and getting employment for hundreds of its alumni in the higher grades of government service. He was the first to put before the Sikhs the idea of turning the Khalsa College into a university. One day suddenly he called a meeting of the staff, and announced that he had just come from Simla with a university in his pocket. He set about preparing a scheme for the Sikh University, and talked seriously of securing a charter for it, which was to be at least as good as that of the Aligarh or the Benares University. It was contemplated that the Prince of Wales on his visit to Amritsar would inaugurate it. But the emergence of the Akali movement just then diverted the attention of Sikhs in quite another direction, and the sympathy of the Government too was suspended for the time being. In the turmoil that followed it was feared that the College might suffer a permanent set-back, but the opportune intervention and bold but wise initiative of the staff not only saved the institution from the storm, but secured its release from the government control.

Long before any political movement had begun in the country, the Sikhs had been talking and writing about nationalising the management of the Khalsa College. They had requested the Government in their Educational Conference of April, 1920, to hand over the control of the College to the community. Resolutions to the same effect were passed by Sikh associations all over the Province, nay even in Basra and Baghdad. The professors of the College also



had, a year before, drafted a few essential changes to be made in the constitution of the College, and the Principal had sent the draft to the Commissioner-Chairman. But nothing substantial had come out of it. Now seeing that the storm of Non-cooperation was coming, and fearing that it would destroy their beloved College, they wanted to be beforehand with it by proposing changes themselves and getting the indefensible weakness removed. They decided to take strong action, so that their earnestness might not be doubted. They sent a letter to the Government asking it to withdraw its control from the management of the College before 5th November, 1920, or they would resign. After much haggling for a month, during which the College remained closed and the professors had to resign, the thing was done and the College saved. By that time the first wave of educational Non-cooperation had spent itself.

The wisdom of the staff lay in the fact that by acting strongly in the matter they had taken the wind out of the sail of the non-cooperators who wanted to see the College disaffiliated; and at the same time they were able to free the College from the government control. They scrupulously avoided giving the impression that they were acting in collusion with the extreme element in the community. Throughout the campaign they did not make any violent speeches, nor did they allow any outsiders to come into the College for agitating among the students. When they put in their resignations, they asked S. Jodh Singh to offer prayer on their behalf. When the Government asked them to suggest names of the new members who were to take the places vacated by the Government members, they again avoided the extreme element and put forward the names of moderate Sikhs, such as Sardar Sunder

Singh Majithia, S. Harbans Singh of Atari, S. Jodh Singh, etc. They did not touch the seats allotted to the Sikh States. S. Sundar Singh became the president and S. Harbans Singh the secretary of the Managing Committee. After some time the Principal's chair also came to be occupied by a Sikh.

The new management began to work with enthusiasm. It was unhampered by any differences with the Akalis, who freely associated the leading members of the management and the staff with the inmost circles of their movement.

Differences, however, did arise later on when the Akali movement gathered greater momentum, and great sacrifices had to be made, in which some of the professors of the College too were involved. A very salutary rule was promulgated by which no employee of the College could take part in outside campaigns of unacademic nature. But troubles now and then have been cropping up in the College, as a result of outside melees, for which the differences between the Akali and the Chief Khalsa Diwan elements are mainly responsible. One such trouble occurred in 1937, which resulted in the removal of six professors, who were, however, able to found a new college at Lahore. Thus does God bring some good out of much evil. Khalsa College has lost nothing by this exodus, and the community has gained a new college in a central place like Lahore. But these upheavals leave a bad taste behind, creating disharmony in the community, which being very small cannot afford to bear these incessant shocks. The bitterness created does not allow the parties to work together in any capacity and for any purpose. As for instance, there can be no research in Sikh history or religion, which requires the cooperation and sympathy of all sections of the community. Nor can the Panthic institutions make any advance towards their inherent destiny.

The wisest thing for the community would be not to allow party quarrels to invade the academic institutions, which should be looked upon as the sacred temples of learning, to be respected and supported by all. This can be done only if we learn to distinguish between institutions and associations. Associations are always managed by the common vote of constituent elements. But institutions are like homes, surrounded by the halo of permanency, tradition, quietness of atmosphere, and filial respect. This halo is impossible to maintain if every now and then the noise of party strife invades the sacred precincts, and the relation of labourers with their factory owners is allowed to develop between the alumni and their alma mater. The Khalsa College has a great future before it, which can be attained only if it is left alone.

## THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

The city of Amritsar with the Holy Tank was founded by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru, who settled here about 1574 and in 1577 obtained the site with 500 bighas of land from its owners, the Zemindars of Tung. It was Guru Arjun who built the Temple, the first brick being laid in 1589. Its head priest was always appointed by the Gurus. After Guru Gobind Singh's death, when differences arose between the true Sikhs, called the Tat Khalsa, and the Bandei Khalsa, his widow appointed Bhai Mani Singh, the most learned Sikh of the time, to take charge of the Golden Temple in 1721. Soon after, by order of the Lahore Nawab, soldiers were stationed in the neighbourhood of Amritsar, and the Sikhs were not allowed to visit their Temple. "A proclamation was issued by the Lahore Viceroy ordering a general massacre of long-haired Singhs wherever found. They were hunted like wild beasts, a price being fixed on their heads; thousands were put to death, refusing pardon on condition of renouncing their faith and cutting their hair." "Bands of Sikh horsemen were to be seen at dawn riding at full gallop towards Amritsar, running the gauntlet of the Mohammedan troops" (*Gordon*).

Bhai Mani Singh, who was held in great esteem by the Mohammedan Qazi of Amritsar, felt emboldened to apply for leave to hold the Diwali fair in Amritsar. The matter being referred to Lahore, permission was granted on the condition that Bhai Mani Singh should pay Rs. 5000 after the fair. Bhai Mani Singh invited Sikhs from far and near in 1738. But the Governor

of Lahore sent a force to Amritsar under the pretext of keeping order during the fair, but really to fall upon the approaching Sikhs and destroy them. After some losses the Sikhs were apprised of the trap and the fair was not held. Bhai Mani Singh was arrested for not paying the sum, which he had hoped to pay out of the offerings of Sikhs, and was condemned to death. He was offered the usual alternative of Islam. But he stoutly refused to barter his religion. His body was cut to pieces, limb by limb and joint by joint.

This reign of terror continued upto 1763. Massa Ranghar, the local governor, used to hold his nautch parties inside the Temple and the precincts were used as stables. The Sikhs were away from the Punjab wandering in jungles as outlaws. A body of Sikhs in Bikaner learnt of the desecration in 1740, and sent Bhai Mehtab Singh of Mirankot, district Amritsar, to avenge the insult. He came with a follower, killed the governor and cleared the precincts. He was afterwards martyred. In 1757 and again in 1762 the Abdali invaders demolished the Temple twice and filled up the sacred Tank. But the Sikhs soon came back and restored the Temple and the Tank in 1763.

When they became supreme and established *misals* or confederacies, they removed the Udasi custodians of the Temple and appointed Bhai Chanchal Singh, a baptised Sikh, as Granthi. This man used to pare nails before he took charge of the greatest temple of the Sikhs. It was Maharaja Ranjit Singh who adorned the temple with marble and gold and attached to it a jagir for its maintenance. The Bungahs or hospices were built by Sikh Chiefs and Sardars for the accommodation of Sikh pilgrims from their domains. The jagir attached to the *Guru ka Langar* or free kitchen has been appropriated by some

former Sarbrah, and a quarry of marble stone which once belonged to the Darbar Sahib has been disposed of in some way.

When the British Government annexed the Punjab in 1849 there was a Committee of Control composed of baptised Sikhs, but the affairs of the Temple were soon reduced to confusion. In 1859 in order to settle the long-standing disputes of the pujaris or priests about their pay, a meeting of some Sardars was summoned at the house of Raja Tej Singh of the Anglo-Sikh War fame. Mr. Cooper, the Deputy Commissioner, was also present. After the main business for which the meeting had been called was over, somebody put a question: "Khalsa ji, can we carry on the management of the Darbar Sahib without the help of Sarkar?" There could be only one reply to the question in those days of national paralysis, especially when the greatest officer of the district was present. A committee of nine baptised Sikhs was appointed as a Committee of Trustees with a government-appointed president called *Sarbrah* or Warden. From the proceedings published it appears that the Committee carried on its work regularly, controlling the administration, authorising the spending of money and keeping the establishment under discipline. The Sarbrah only carried out their instructions. About 1883, however, the Committee was quietly dropped and the whole control came to be vested in the Sarbrah who received his instructions from the Deputy Commissioner.

In the beginning the Committee of the Golden Temple was also the Municipal Committee of the town. It used to grant out of the octroi revenue Rs. 50 per day for the expenses of the Golden Temple and the Akal Takht. As the Sikhs are in a hopeless minority in the city, their affairs have never been looked after adequately by the administration of the

city on which upto very recently they had no representation. Even now there is no representative of the Golden Temple on the Municipal Committee. Gradually the revenue allowed to the Darbar Sahib was cut down, until only 6 pies in the rupee were paid. This right too was taken away, and now only the lighting expenses of the Temple, Rs. 3000 as canal charges on the water\* supplied to the sacred tanks, and Rs. 375 for the Diwali illuminations are paid out of the municipal funds. The Sarbrah had to handle lakhs of rupees a year, but he was never called upon to present accounts to the public. In fact he was responsible to nobody except the Deputy Commissioner. The pujaris or priests, who used to have a very respectable position and exercised some check on the administration, were gradually reduced to a very low position. Many of them ceased to perform any duty in the Temple. They adopted other professions such as pleadership or shop-keeping. But they received their share in the income of the Darbar Sahib all the same. Some of them sent their servants to do the service in the Temple. Those who attended their duties were paid only a few pice a day, and many of them naturally turned dishonest. They began to harrass the visitors for tips and to steal loose coins† thrown on the

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\*Originally water was supplied to the tanks of Amritsar and Tarn Taran by a canal, called Hansli, dug by Sikhs themselves out of the River Ravi. The work of digging began in 1778 from Madhopur, district Gurdaspur, under the supervision of Udasi leaders, Santokh Das and Pritam Das of the Akhara Brahmabuta, and was continued from village to village by relays of voluntary diggers until it was completed in 1781. Under the British Government the Hansli was taken over by the canal department which made it a part of its own system. The sacred tanks of Amritsar are given water by the 'Darbar Channel' cut from the village Tung out of the Jethuwal Distributary of the Upper Bari Doab Canal. Since 1925 the Channel has been cemented through the noble efforts of Sant Gurmukh Singh of Patiala.

† This practice had begun after 1721, when the money offerings instead of being sent to the Guru's widow were allowed by her to be distributed among servitors of the Temple on the spot.

carpet before the Holy Book. The ill-paid *daroga*, whose duty was to keep watch over the money, was bribed by the priests and he too began to share in the loot. The Granthis, with the exception of the Head Granthi who had a jagir, had no other source of income except the presents offered to them by generous visitors, and they tried in various ways to increase their income. Instead of making the Holy of Holies the radiating centre of light and devotion, the priests regarded it as a practising ground for robbery. The *Karah Parshad* or the sacred food offered by pilgrims for distribution in the congregation was taken away to the houses of magistrates and police officials or was thrown away before horses or their grooms. The costly scarfs, offered to serve as wrappings for the sacred Book in the Golden Temple or other temples elsewhere, were auctioned by the Sarbrah or appropriated by the priests for the use of their wives and children.

The precincts began to be used by pundits and astrologers for the propagation of superstitious practices. Idols were openly worshipped in the holy compound. Obscene booklets were sold and shops of all sorts were opened in the premises. On the Basant and the Holi days licentious songs were sung by musicians inside the Temple. Rogues roamed about harrassing women. Brothels were opened in the neighbouring houses where unwary women visiting the Temple were taken for immoral purposes, some sadhus acting as agents.\*

In 1905 with the general awakening in the country, the Sikhs felt their grievances keenly and determined to right some of the outstanding wrongs. The idols were removed, and a widespread agitation was set on foot to nationalise the control of the

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\* See the *Punjab* of October 1, 1906, also the *Haq Pasand*, a non-Sikh paper of about the same date.



Darbar Sahib. Sardar Bahadur Arjun Singh, an ex-Sarbrah, proposed in a meeting of the Chief Khalsa Diwan that, in consultation with the Panth, the constitution of the Golden Temple called *Dastur-al-Amal* should be changed. The resolution was accepted, but nothing came out of it. It became difficult even to get a copy of the *Dastur-al-Amal*. Then in the summer of 1906 the *Khalsa Advocate* and the *Punjab* of Amritsar strongly urged that the rules governing the Darbar Sahib and other Gurdwaras should be so altered as to remove certain patent evils. They urged that the posts of the Mahants and Pujaris should not be hereditary, as they never were intended to be, that the appointments should depend solely on efficiency and good behaviour of the incumbents, that the jagirs or other property attached to a Gurdwara should not be considered as the personal property of its Mahant, but should be entered in the name of the Gurdwara, so that the Mahant might not be able to sell the property and, when found guilty of misconduct, his ejection might be easy. They considered it most objectionable that the Sarbrah of the Golden Temple should be appointed by the Government and that the Sikhs should have nothing to say as to its management. They urged that the Sarbrah should be an able and energetic Sikh, elected by the Panth, and not an old septagenarian appointed by the Government, and that in the meanwhile the old Committee of 1859 which had been abolished should be restored. Under the auspices of the Sikh Youngmen's Association of Quetta a public meeting of the civil and military Sikh residents was held on the 22nd December 1906 and it was resolved to ask the Government to hand over the control of the Darbar Sahib to the Chief Khalsa Diwan. In the covering letter complaints were made about the non-publication of

accounts, the hereditary system of service and the intolerable evils prevailing in the precincts as well as in the Bungahs bordering on the Temple. Following the lead of the Quetta Association other sabhas and associations passed similar resolutions. In May 1907 the *Punjab* urged the formation of a "Gurdwara Sambhal Committee" or a Committee for the Control of Gurdwaras. Then followed a period of moral depression consequent upon the general unrest and the measures taken to suppress it. About 1914 the Sikhs again raised a voice in favour of national control, but War came and the Sikhs set aside all agitation to help the Government wholeheartedly in the hour of its need.

When the War was over, the question of the control of the Darbar Sahib was again raised. In the Sikh League of 1919, the Sikhs demanded that the management of the Golden Temple should be handed over to a representative committee of Sikhs constituted on an elective basis and responsible to the Panth. A Sikh member of the Punjab Council asked questions about the management and requested the Government to shew accounts to the public. Very evasive replies were given, and it was said that the question of management would be determined in the Reformed Council. But the public was very much agitated over it, and demanded some immediate action. Wherever Sikhs gathered, in their daily meetings in the Singh Sabhas or at the annual meetings of their diwans, they put forth their demand that the Darbar Sahib, Nankana Sahib, and the Khalsa College should be handed over to the Panth. Even the Sikhs of Basra, Baghdad and Maymyo sent resolutions to the Government to withdraw from the control of the Darbar Sahib. The Government, in its communique of July 14, 1920, tried to answer all the agitation by quoting the following reply given

to a question in the Punjab Council on 13th March, 1920 :—

“The question of management of the Golden Temple at Amritsar has been under the consideration of Government for some time. It has been decided to defer the action until the Reforms Scheme has been brought into operation. The elected representatives of Sikh Constituencies will then be consulted as to any changes which may be contemplated.

It should be explained that the action proposed will be under the Religious Endowments Act, 1863, and that it is desired to carry out new arrangements in accordance, so far as can be ascertained, with the general wishes of those who are interested in the Temple. The most suitable way of ascertaining these wishes is to consult the gentlemen who will be elected for the Legislative Council as representatives of Sikh Constituencies in the Province, and the Government intend to consult these gentlemen at an early date after the conclusion of elections. With their assistance a Committee will be selected in whose hands the appointment of the Manager and scrutiny of accounts will thereafter rest. When the Committee has been constituted, it is the intention of Government to stand aside from the management entirely in future.”

The Sikhs were not satisfied with this delaying process, nor with the proposed method of selection or the scope of the Committee's functions as suggested in the communique. When the boycott of Councils was preached and the ambiguous definition of a Sikh was published by the Government, people despaired of getting any satisfactory committee formed.

The complaints against the conduct of the priests and the Manager grew so loud that the position became intolerable. One day in August 1920 the holy congregation were abused at the Akal Takht and

refused the morning service. They came to the Manager's house and complained. He promised to go himself next day at the morning service and make the priest beg pardon. But he never came. Then the people held meetings of protest. The Deputy Commissioner, instead of asking the Manager to retire, sent policemen to forbid a meeting of Sikhs within the precincts of the Temple. The people, however, held the meeting in spite of the police, and passed resolutions against the Deputy Commissioner and the Manager. The Manager was sent on leave for two months. But the public wanted his resignation. It was decided that the Manager's effigy should be taken out in a regular funeral, if he did not resign by 29th August. Thousands of ladies also held meetings and passed resolutions. The Sikhs were holding a meeting in the Jallianwala Bagh, when the Manager came and with folded hands begged the Khalsa to forgive him, announcing at the same time that he had resigned. Thus did the old Manager leave; and another was appointed in his place by Government.

The enormities of the priests could be made impossible only if the control of the Temple were handed over to the Sikh community. But it was not done, in spite of hundreds of resolutions passed by Sikh representative bodies all over India. Resolutions also came from Canada, Burma, and from Sikh military officers in Mesopotamia.

The Sikhs were tabooed in the Temple. A Sikh, regularly baptised from a low caste, would not be admitted along with other Sikhs into the Temple, but if he became a Christian and came with a hat on, the priests would run to meet him and take him all over the Temple. The girl students of Bhasaur were not allowed to sing hymns in the Darbar Sahib and before the Akal Takht. Even big

Sardars, Professors and Students of the Khalsa College could not get their prayers offered there, merely because they had reformed themselves. The rule among Sikhs is that anybody in the world can become a Sikh, and after receiving baptism all persons become equal in claiming religious rights. Ever since the modern revival of Sikhism great emphasis had been laid on the conversion of low-caste people, and different bodies like the Lahore Diwan and the Chief Khalsa Diwan took lively interest in the uplift of depressed classes. In 1906, the Chief Khalsa Diwan held a very big Diwan at Jullunder, the home of Ramdasias and other so-called outcastes, and brought hundreds of these people into the fold of Sikhism. Again in 1919, a large number of them were converted at Amritsar. The Diwan also did much to reclaim the criminal tribes entrusted to it at Moghulpura and converted thousands of Meghs and Kabirpanthis in Kishtwar.

There is a religious body in Amritsar, called the Khalsa Brotherhood, which holds Annual Diwans for the purpose of preaching equality among men, and converting men and women of all castes to Sikhism. On the 12th October 1920, a few low-caste men baptised at the annual meeting of this society were brought in a procession to the Golden Temple. The priests refused to offer prayer for them. The Sikhs insisted on the right of every Sikh to get his prayer and sacred food offered at the Temple. The Holy Book was opened, and by a miraculous chance the following words of Guru Amar Das were read out by the Granthi, who himself was among the objectors :—

"Brother, He sends grace even to those who have no merit, and takes from them the true Guru's service, which is most noble, as it turns our hearts to the love of God. He Himself forgives and brings us into union with Himself. Brother, how worthless were we and yet the perfect and the true Enlightener took us into His fellowship. My

dear, what a lot of sinners He has forgiven by reason of His true word! How many He has ferried across the world-ocean in the Guru's safety-bark! By the touch of the philosopher's stone, that is the Guru, base metal has become gold, selfishness has departed, and the Name has come to reside in the heart. Our light has blended with His light, and we have become one with Him.\*

The words had a wonderful effect. Hundreds of men in the audience were visibly affected. The priests too were convinced, and they agreed to offer prayer and accept sacred food from the hands of the newly-converted Sikhs. There was no unpleasantness in the whole proceedings and the priests were left to carry on their work.

When the whole party was coming out successful and going towards the Akal Takht, a temple just opposite to the Darbar Sahib, the priests of the Takht fled from their posts and those who remained refused to offer prayer or accept the offerings consisting of money and sacred food, and then they too fled away from the postern gate.

The place, founded by Guru Hargobind in 1609, is one of the greatest importance. The Guru used to receive his Sikhs here and discuss with them important matters connected with the welfare of the community. It was here that he put on the sword, symbolising a new phase in the development of the Sikh character. It was here that the weak and the oppressed came from far and near to seek help against tyranny. Once in the days of the *misals* a Brahmin of Kasur came and laid his complaint before the assembled Khalsa that his bride had been taken away from him by the local Nawab. The Sikhs stood up and vowed under the leadership of one Sardar Hari Singh that they would not rest until they had restored the Brahmin's wife to him. They went and did it. It was also here that later on by a resolution of the Khalsa Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the

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\**Sorath*, III.

Lion of the Punjab, was punished for associating with an evil woman. It is the chief Takht or Throne of Authority, from which orders called *Hukannamas* are issued to the whole community. The weapons used by Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh are kept here.

This place could not be left vacant. The assembly led by Bhai Kartar Singh of Jhabbar called for 25 volunteers to sit and watch there temporarily, without touching the money or property. Sardar Sundar Singh the Sarbrah was informed of it and he agreed. The priests were called upon to express regret for having deserted the sacred throne. They did not come, even when the Sarbrah called them.

The next day on October 13, the Deputy Commissioner sent for the Sarbrah and a few representatives of the Sikhs and the priests to his bungalow to discuss the new turn of events in the Golden Temple. The priests did not attend. The Deputy Commissioner formed a Provisional Committee of nine Sikhs, all reformers, including the Sarbrah at its head, to manage the Golden Temple until a permanent one was formed.

A *Hukannama* was issued from the Akal Takht summoning a general assembly of the Sikhs to meet on 15th November, 1920, in the front of the Takht for the purpose of electing a representative body of the Panth to control the Golden Temple and all other Gurdwaras. Two days before the meeting, however, the Government hastened to appoint a Managing Committee, consisting of 36 members, all reformers, for the Golden Temple and other shrines affiliated to it. The Sikhs of all shades of opinion from different parts of the country, including the Sikh States, came to the big meeting held on the 15th and 16th of November and resolved to form a committee of 175 members to control all the temples of the Sikhs,

whether in the Punjab or elsewhere. They wisely included the 36 members of the Government-appointed committee also, and elected them to a sub-committee formed to manage the Golden Temple and the allied shrines. As the Governor had said at the time of the formation of the committee of 36 that they could add any number to themselves and do anything they wanted with their constitution, it was legitimate for the committee of 175 to take their place. As long as the bigger committee did not come into existence, S. Harbans Singh of Atari, as President of the Government-appointed committee, with Sardar Sundar Singh Ramgarhia as Manager, carried on the administration.

The inaugural meeting of the big committee, called the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, came off at the Akal Takht on December 12, 1920. After a hard scrutiny conducted by Five Beloved Ones, during which most pathetic scenes of reconciliation between hostile elements were witnessed, the following office-bearers were elected :—

Sardar Bahadur Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia :  
President.

Sardar Harbans Singh of Atari : Vice-President.

Sardar Sundar Singh Ramgarhia : Secretary.

A sub-committee including the office-bearers was formed for drafting a new constitution and *Dastural Amal* of the Darbar Sahib. A new election of the S. G. P. C. was held in July 1921, according to the new constitution, by which every adult Sikh got a vote. Four-fifths of the members were elected and the remaining one-fifths were nominated by the elected element. The elected members had the wisdom to nominate almost all the co-opted members out of the moderate party. They included such eminent men as Sardar Harbans Singh of Atari, Professor Jodh Singh, Babas Gurdyal Singh and Partap Singh,



the Namdhari leaders, Baba Jaswant Singh Bedi, Sant Sangat Singh of Kamalia, Ragi Hira Singh, Sardar Kahan Singh of Nabha, and Sardar Kam Singh Kabuli. Sardar Kharak Singh became President, Sardar Sundar Singh Ramgarhia Vice-President, and Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh, Bar-at-Law, Secretary. An Executive Committee of 31 members was elected, with Local Committees for the temples of Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Nankana Sahib.

This control of the Panthic committee was allowed to continue until suddenly in November 1921 it was discovered by the Government that this control exercised by the S. G. P. C. was not legal. The keys of the Darbar Sahib were snatched away from Sardar Sundar Singh Ramgarhia, the president of the Local Committee. After making great sacrifices the Sikhs were able to vindicate their right. The Government realised its mistake, and wanted to restore the keys to Sikhs, but no one would come forward to accept the keys unless all the Sikhs arrested in this connection were released unconditionally. The Government bowed before the united will of the Sikh community, and after releasing the leaders it handed back the keys to Sardar Kharak Singh, the popular president of the S. G. P. C.

Ever since then the possession of the Golden Temple has remained undisturbed with the Sikhs. In July 1925 the Sikh Gurdwaras Act was passed, which provided the management and control of the Golden Temple along with the other shrines in Amritsar by a Local Committee of 12 members, three of whom were to be elected from the urban area of Amritsar, four from its rural area, and five nominated by the S.G.P.C., one of whom must be a representative of the Sikh States. This committee is elected for three years.

The affairs of the Golden Temple were in confusion when the Shromani Committee took its charge.

No regular charge of the treasury had been given by the retiring Sarbrah. All the important papers relating to the period before reform were found missing, and no proper means existed of checking the existence of all the various valuable articles kept in the treasury. The importance of a proper scrutiny can be realised from the fact that, while in one eye of a jewel-peacock a pearl worth Rs. 3,500 is present, in the other there is one worth Rs. 50 only. All the papers connected with the governance of the Temple were removed at the advent of the British control. When the Akalis took charge, some documents relating to the service, payment and disputes of the priests still existed, and with the help of a Patwari 64 bundles were sorted and docketed according to subjects; but now even those are missing. Some of the very precious manuscript copies of the Holy Granth and Janamsakhis, kept in a side-room of the Akal Takht, are also missing.

The annual income of the Temple is about three lakhs, mainly from cash offerings. Up to the year 1721, there was no custom of throwing coins before the Holy Book. The offerings were sent to the Guru, and after the Tenth Guru to his widow at Delhi. There was no tinkling of money in the holy presence to clash with the sweet sounds of sacred music. But when Bhai Mani Singh was sent to act as head priest of the Golden Temple, he was also told not to send the money of offerings to Delhi, but to spend it on the service and the servitors of the Temple on the spot. Money then began to be offered to the Holy Book, and continues to do so, as a not very becoming accompaniment of the entrancing strains of music. It is true, the service of the Temple requires money for its maintenance. But why should not people offer help in a less ostentatious manner? Could not a slit be provided for throwing in coins in one of the walls of the Darshani Porch?

There is, however, a good arrangement made for keeping the money safe. It is also being well utilised. About Rs. 18,000 are spent annually on the Free Kitchen attached to the Temple. The Committee is running a high school, an hospital, a library, a big rest-house and a host of other institutions for public good. It also bears the expenses of the Sikh Mission operating in the United Provinces, where at least three lakh people have been brought into the fold of Sikhism. The Tanks of the Golden Temple and the Kaulsar have been cleaned. This work done in 1922, with the help of all sections of the community, including the Rajas and Maharajas, has called forth the best forces of sacrifice and organisation, and is as important as anything else done by the Sikhs during the campaign of reform.

With the establishment of the Panthic Committee many of the longstanding evils have been removed. All shops in the precincts, which used to give refuge to men and women of evil repute, have been abolished and the hawkers of all sorts forbidden to carry on their trade within the sacred compound. The pure ceremony of baptism has been restored at the Akal Takht, where thousands have received the Sikh *pahul* since the formation of the Committee. Attempts are being made to widen the path round the Temple by demolishing the old ill-looking *bungahs* or hospices. The whole place has acquired a Sikh look again. It is again the bee-hive of Sikhs as it once used to be. Holy congregations meeting in the Darbar Sahib where music never ceases and before the Akal Takht where Sikhs receive the idea of their national power, the lofty banners flying, and the holy choirs moving nightly round the Golden Temple, again bring visibly before the Sikhs the glories of the Khalsa which are recounted in the daily prayer.

## GURDWARA REFORM MOVEMENT

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To Sikhs even more important than their associations are their temples, which have played a great part in their history. So much of their history is taken up with either founding of temples or their protection against different kinds of aggressors. The Sikh Prayer, in which the most stirring events of Sikh history are recounted, grows most eloquent when reference is made to the brave heroes who suffered martyrdom for the sake of temples. Much of the daily religious discourse turns on the labours of the devout Sikhs, like Bhai Buddha, Bhai Bhagtu, Bhai Bahlo, Bhai Kalyana and thousands of others, in connection with the excavation of sacred tanks or the collection of material for the raising of temples; or it expatiates on the sufferings borne by the Sikhs, like Bhai Mehtab Singh\* and Baba Dip Singh†, in their attempts to rescue their

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\*After the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, Granthi of the Golden Temple, in 1738, the temple was turned into a nautch-house and its precincts into a stable by Massa Ranghar, the Mohammedan taluqdar. The Sikhs, who had been declared outlaws, were passing their days and biding their time in the desert of Bikaner. They heard of the desecration in 1740, and sent Bhai Mehtab Singh of Mirankot, a village near Amritsar, to free the temple. He came with only one companion and, killing the taluqdar and his party, cleared away in a few minutes. Afterwards he himself was martyred.

† Hearing at Damdama Sabib near Bathinda that the Amritsar temple was being desecrated by Ahmad Shah Abdali, he vowed to go and save the temple or give up his life there. He came fighting, until at a short distance from Amritsar his head received a mortal cut. But it is said that he did not mind it, and supporting his head with one hand he fought on with the other, until he fell down in the precincts of the temple, where his cenotaph stands.

temples from the rulers or the immoral priests. Sometimes it is a Massa Rangarh and sometimes a Sarbrah, but the story is always the same. To tell the truth, the freedom of their temples has always been the measure of the Sikhs' freedom or prosperity.

During the days of persecution, when the Sikhs were living in a forced exile outside the Punjab, their temples had come into the charge of certain monastic orders or those who professed Sikhism but did not conform to its outward symbols. The prominent Gurdwaras were made the chief mark of hostility by the enemy. When Taimur, the son of Ahmad Shah Abdali, took charge of the Punjab in 1757, the first thing he did was to destroy the Amritsar temple and fill up the sacred tank. This enraged the Sikhs as nothing else had enraged them before, and when in 1758, under two Jassa Singhs, they won complete victory over the Afghans, the first thing they did was to restore the temple and the tank. When the Durrani came again in 1762, in his zeal to root out the Sikhs, he again demolished the temple, polluted the sacred tanks with the blood of cows, and took away the Holy Book to Kabul. But the Sikhs rose again strong as ever and restored the temple in 1763. Similarly in Delhi a mosque had been erected on the spot where the body of Guru Tegh Bahadur, executed by the orders of Aurangzeb, was burnt. When, however, Sardar Baghel Singh of the Karorsinghia Misal got control over Delhi, he used his authority only to raise temples over the places sacred to the memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Harkishan, Mata Sahib Kaur and Mata Sundri, and then he retired.

With the establishment of a centralised Sikh Government the security and splendour of the temples was ensured. Munificent jagirs were added to them. All the wealth of art was lavished on their

Buildings and their equipments, and richest offerings suited to the taste of a ruling people began to pour in from all directions. Once a beautiful canopy, decked with gems and jewels, was presented to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When he stepped towards the royal chair placed underneath it, he was so greatly impressed by the beauty of the workmanship that he exclaimed: "Oh! take it away to the Golden Temple. The Guru alone deserves such a precious thing." That canopy is still preserved in the Golden Temple treasury, although many of the precious stones have since been removed by somebody. There is another story showing how the most valuable things were considered worthy of the Sacred Temple only. At the marriage of Prince Nau Nihal Singh, the grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when a garland of pearls worth lakhs was brought to him to wear, he said that it was too good for him and he at once sent it away to the Golden Temple, where it is still exhibited in *jalau* on certain ceremonial occasions. All this interest, however, was shown on the ornamental side of Sikhism, and no intelligent attempt was made to preserve the purity of the ritual, which was likely to grow corrupt as soon as the Sikh influence was lifted.

In the days of the Gurus the temples were supervised by local sangats in the Guru's name, or by masands, who were appointed by the Guru himself and who, according to the *Dabistan*, worked for their living and did not receive any pecuniary help unless they happened to be very poor or were found incapable of helping themselves. They were punished, and their order was abolished by the Tenth Guru, when they became corrupt. This wholesome tradition was kept up even after the Tenth Guru, when the Panth itself as the Guru-incorporate became self-governing and continued to govern the temples

through local congregations. The income of the temples was not permanent and being very small, hardly sufficient to maintain the incumbents, there was no temptation for them to grow corrupt or defy the congregations. Besides, the money of offerings was looked upon by the incumbents as poisonous\* and was spent on the free kitchens invariably attached to the temples or in some other way beneficial to the sangat.†

There are many examples of Sikh preachers who refused to accept jagirs. Bhai Lakha Singh refused to accept the *patta* of the pargana of Sujampur granted to him by Sardar Amar Singh Bapa in 1764. Bhai Bhagat Singh refused to accept the grant of seven villages made by Sardar Sada Singh Bahrwalia Nakai in 1766. Bhai Suba Singh refused the pargana of Mirpur granted to him by Sardar Gujar Singh of Gujrat. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in recognition of his services to the Panth, made a grant of land near the Akhara of Santokh Das to Pandit Nihal Singh who had translated the Japji into Sanskrit. The Pandit tore up the *patta* in the presence of the Maharaja and refused to see him in future. The names of Bhai Dargah Singh, Jai Singh, Thakur Dayal Singh, etc., are worthy of mention in the same category.‡

Even when they accepted any permanent source of income as a charitable endowment, the priests were kept straight in their conduct by the influence of sangats. There are instances of changes made not only in the management but also in the control of Gurdwaras. The Golden Temple of Amritsar and the Gurdwaras of Anandpur, Gandiwind and Hafizabad

\*See *Macauliffe*: Vol. I, p. 45 and Vol. III, p. 8; Bhai Gurdas: Var XXXV, 12; and Rattan Singh's *Panth Prakash* prepared at the desire of Sir David Ochterloney.

†See *Suraj Prakash*: instructions of Guru Gobind Singh to one Santokh Singh.

‡See the *Nirmal Panth Pardipka*.

were once in the hands of Udasis, but when the Sikh sangats thought it fit they removed the Udasi priests and appointed Singhs instead. Similar changes were made from time to time in other places also.

But with the establishment of the British Government the situation was entirely changed. The central Sikh temples at Amritsar and Tarn Taran gradually passed into the hands of Government. The new law made the position of the Mahants or priests virtually as independent as that of persons owning private property. The law, as amended later, did provide in a case of misuse of trust that any two or more persons interested in the affair, with the consent of the Advocate General (Section 92 of the C. P. C.) or the Collector (Section 93 of the C. P. C.), could bring the matter to a court. But this provision was hedged round with so many restrictions in favour of the incumbent who enjoyed great influence on account of his riches, and the whole procedure was so lengthy and expensive that it could be rarely availed of. The Mahants began with impunity to sell off the lands and property attached to the temples and to squander the income on drinking and loose-living. In many cases, with the connivance of authorities, they got the Gurdwara properties entered in their own names and became their masters.

They could defy the Sikh sangats with impunity not only in the matter of disbursing the income of jagirs, but also in the observance of ceremony and ritual. Those who had no other source of income except the daily offerings could not dispense with the congregations: but here too the Sikh control being absent, they began to adapt the ritual to the inclination of the people who formed a majority in the congregation. The extent of this mischief may be measured from the fact that the Sikhs nowhere form



a majority in cities. In the central Gurdwaras at Amritsar and Tarn Taran the Manager and the priests were secure against any check from the public and could introduce any changes they liked in those temples. Many superstitious and corrupt practices began to prevail, first unobserved and then in defiance of the Sikh sentiment. Idols were set up and openly worshipped in the precincts. Thieves and rogues began to haunt these places with impunity. The worst of it all was, that these places being the premier temples, their example came to be followed everywhere else.

#### PRELIMINARY STAGE

While the struggle was going on for getting control of the Khalsa College, the Sikhs were also getting control of their temples. For, the control of the temples to them is as important as the Khilafat is to Mohammedans; and Swaraj too means nothing to them, if it does not mean this. The freedom of their temples is also the measure of their religious purity. They live their religion in their temples, which are not only places of worship, but training grounds of social service, public deliberation and other kinds of practical religion as well.

After carrying on for some years the reform propaganda through Singh Sabhas and schools, the Sikhs found that their work was seriously hampered by the corrupt condition of their temples.\* All efforts of the reforming Sikhs were practically undone when, opposed to their solitary temple in a city, there were hundreds of other temples made proof against all reform by wealth and the absence of popular control.

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\* "The world is on the way to ruin when sacred places become corrupt"—*Dhanasari, I.*

There were three ways open to Sikhs to carry out reform in their temples: boycott, pressure of public opinion, and litigation. Boycott could never be effective against priests, who possessed enormous wealth and could easily dispense with the offerings made at the temples. With the existing law litigation too, without the conscientious support of Government, could be of no avail, as the priests could afford to weary out the poor congregations in this expensive game. Some of the priests had an income of Rs. 200 a day, others had a yearly income of Rs. 200,000 or Rs. 300,000 from land alone, besides what was got from cash offerings every day. The Sikhs, therefore, in the beginning relied chiefly on the pressure of public opinion and went to law-courts whenever they hoped for Government support.

The Singh Sabha, helped by such newspapers as the *Khalsa* of Lahore, was the only movement by which public opinion was formed and exerted, and there being no political movement among the Sikhs their public voice did not carry as much weight as it deserved. Besides the fear of Government always kept the leaders in check. They would push their claims so far as they safely could, but never beyond the point where official displeasure began.

Wherever reform was needed, Sikhs would go in large numbers and hold a diwan. Thousands of people would thus see with their own eyes the things that required reform, and the custodians of the place too would see for themselves the awakening among the Sikhs and the Panthic power this awakening brought with it. The Mahant would accept reform forthwith, or weigh the influence he could exert with the officials and challenge the whole community in the courts of law. From about 1895, a jatha of Lahore Sikhs under the leadership of Sardar Mehar Singh Chawla would go yearly on foot to Nankana Sahib

and hold a diwan there. Public subscriptions were raised for extending the building and gold-plating the central dome of the Janam Asthan, providing certain rooms to the Baradari and a well to the Bal Lila. After some time it was proposed that a representative committee should be appointed to control all the Gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib. On a fixed day a meeting was held, which was attended by many Sikh leaders and Mahants of the local Gurdwaras. The Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, Mr. Halifax, was also present. After some discussion the Mahants, who were present, agreed that the Gurdwaras were the property of the Panth and that they would serve under a Committee of Control. They signed a document to that effect, which document and a lengthy report by Mr. Halifax must still be found in the District Office of Gujranwala. Soon after this agreement was signed, the Mahants, it is said, acting on the advice of a Hindu Tehsildar, changed their minds, and as the Deputy Commissioner came away the matter was left where it was. Mr. Halifax went again to Nankana Sahib some months later, but was not successful in settling the affair. The Sikhs, however, went on struggling until about 1905 the lands attached to the Nankana Sahib temples were entered in the name of the temples instead of their Mahants.

The case of Bawli Sahib Lahore was started about 1904. Although two courts had found that the misconduct of the Mahants was proved beyond doubt, the Chief Court set aside the decision on merely technical grounds. In the summer of 1905, a few students of the Khalsa College came at night to the Golden Temple and threw the idols kept in the precincts into the tank. Those who disliked this action tried to instigate influential parties among Sikhs against the reforming party. Maharaja Sir Hira Singh was asked to interfere, but he refused. Then

the priests of Hazur Sahib (Nader) in the Daccan, which is one of the four thrones or places of highest authority for the Sikhs, were moved to condemn the reformers. These priests issued a bull, addressed to the other thrones at the Akal Takht, Patna and Kashgarh (Anandpur), asking them to join them in the condemnation of the Singh Sabha people who were converting Mohammedans and men of low castes, and were giving the same baptism of equal Sikhism to women as well as to men. There was great indignation expressed at the conduct of the priests. They were reminded that "the Gurdwaras belonged to the Community and not to the priests who were mere servants of the Panth."<sup>\*</sup>

From that time onward, as the rest of India was slowly awakening to a consciousness of its lost liberties, the Sikhs began to agitate for the freedom of their temples. The abuses prevailing in the sacred places were mercilessly exposed and were rightly ascribed to the want of Panthic control. The *Khalsa Advocate*, the *Khalsa Samachar*, the *Khalsa Sewak*, the *Punjab* and other newspapers were most active in advocating the temple reform. Besides airing grievances about the central temples at Amritsar, it was complained that the Gurdwaras in Majha and Malva were being converted into private houses by Udasis and other Sadhus.<sup>†</sup>

The Chief Khalsa Diwan had formed a sub-committee for the reform of Gurdwaras; but the position of the Diwan was not strong enough to effect reform in the teeth of all the opposition that was daily gathering strength. In 1915, a pamphlet was written in English, advocating the freedom of temples as the basis of all reform. It was circulated by the Diwan among prominent Sikhs for opinions and suggestions.

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<sup>\*</sup> The *Punjab* of Amritsar: October, 1905.

<sup>†</sup> The *Punjab*: October 15, 1906.

The few gentlemen who cared to respond were not very hopeful about success in reclaiming the Gurdwaras, and the matter was dropped as impracticable.

The most serious attention of the Sikhs was, however, drawn to the necessity of reform by the irresponsible conduct of the Rikab Ganj Mahant who had sold the land belonging to the Gurdwara into the hands of Government without letting the public know anything about it. A strong agitation was launched by a new kind of leaders, like Sardar Harchand Singh of Lyallpur and Sardar Sardul Singh Caveessieur, who took the matter out of the hands of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and secured success by employing a new technique. A band of 100 volunteers was organised to march to Delhi and to restore the demolished wall with their own hands. But before the volunteers could reach Delhi the Government got the work done of its own accord and peace was restored.

The Sikhs were greatly agitated over the cases of the Gurdwaras of Smadh Akali Phula Singh, Hafizabad, Chittagong, Dhubri, etc. The *Panth Sewak* of Lahore was bringing to light many cases of corruption and misconduct on the part of Mahants. After the terrible year of 1919, when the whole of India went through an unprecedented crisis, the agitation about reform assumed a new shape. The Sikhs could not remain content any longer with piecemeal reform of their temples. They had tried the courts for a sufficiently long time and, except in a few minor cases, had found them quite unavailing.

The process of law was dilatory and the expenses almost prohibitive. The court fee of Rs. 10 on the plaint was only a small fraction of the enormous expenses that the reformers going to court had to incur. Even this fee became too much for the poor enthusiasts, when the courts insisted that it should be

levied on the full value of a property attached. The plaint of the Sialkot Sikhs in the case of Babe-di-Ber was rejected on the ground that the plaintiffs had failed to pay the court-fee on Rs. 50,000. The Sikhs had to depend on public subscriptions, while the Mahants had at their disposal the vast revenues of the Gurdwaras. The few successes of the Sikhs rather worsened the situation. The Mahants were put on their guard, and they found out the weakness of the law and the strength of their own position.

They began openly to defy the Panth by selling the property of Gurdwaras and recklessly wasting the money on wine and mistresses. One of them was carrying on his love affair with his own aunt. His love letters in which he admitted his wine drinking were filed in the court. Another Mahant, whose love letters were also captured and whose photo drawn with a loose woman was on the court file, boasted in another court that he had got more than 300 Gurdwaras under him. The existing law had proved a veritable boon to him. He said in the court that he was the Shri Mahant or the acknowledged head of all the Sikh temples in northern India; and the sign of his Shri Mahantship, he said, was that he received from Government two boat-loads of *bhang*, which he supplied to all the Gurdwaras under him. Another Mahant, that of Nankana Sahib, who had taken the vow of celibacy, was openly living with a low-class Mohammedan woman and had children by her, whom he was providing with property worth lakhs out of Gurdwara funds. What could the Sikhs do to reform them?

They had tried the experiment of litigation in many cases, but after some time they began to despair. They could not free the temple of Sialkot from an apostate who openly flouted Sikh religion. What was this law that allowed a man, even whose company

was forbidden to Sikhs, to give the rule in their temple. In the past they had resorted to law in the hope that the Government would realise their position and help them. But the Government failed to realise their position. When in those days a bill\* to secure a little more effective control of religious and charitable endowments was introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council, it was the Punjab Government that heroically stood up against it, saying "the bill is in advance of the public opinion!" Which public opinion? The question of Sikh temples had just at that time become most serious, and if there was any province in which the particular reform was needed, it was the Punjab. Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia from his seat in the Imperial Council had expressed his profound regret at the strange attitude of the Punjab Government, and the Home Member had said that if so be thought (that the Bill was in advance of public opinion), then the Punjab should be excluded from the area to be provided under the Act. The Sikh press and certain associations like the Reform Committee of Sialkot protested against this indifference of the Government to the question of temple reform.

What to say of Government helping the Sikhs in their attempt to get control of other Gurdwaras, it would not withdraw its own control from the premier temples at Amritsar and Tarn Taran. Sardar Gajjan Singh, who presided over the first meeting of the Sikh

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\* Act XIV of 1920. It authorised any person interested in a religious or charitable trust to apply to a competent Court for the examination of accounts or for any information about the object, value or condition of the trust. No application, however, could be made in respect of accounts relating to a period more than three years prior to the date of petition. It also provided that the trying Court, if it thought "necessary in the public interest," might direct the defendant to deposit a sum to meet the expenses of the plaintiff in whole or in part.

League at Amritsar in 1919, asked for this control. The League itself in a resolution referred to "the sore and longstanding grievance of the Sikh community" that the administration of the Golden Temple was still in the hands of a Government nominee, and demanded that it should be placed in the hands of a representative body of Sikhs, constituted on an elective basis and responsible to the Panth. It also asked that "the management and control of Sikh temples and endowments should no longer be withheld from the community."

Finding the existing law of no avail and the Government indifferent, the Sikhs, in the words of a memorandum by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, began to rely mainly on the ancient right of reform by the assertion of public opinion. It meant that the Sikhs in their usual daily or extraordinary meetings held in the temples would exercise the right of gurmatta which had been granted to them by Guru Gobind Singh. In actual practice it worked like this: Whenever grave complaints were received about a Mahant or custodian of a Gurdwara, some representative Sikhs would approach him with a request to remove the grievances and to come to an understanding about the management. Sometimes an agreement was reached. But if the Mahant refused to reform, and in spite of warnings continued in his perverse course, he would be called upon by a gurmatta in a public meeting to explain himself. If his faults were proved, he would be asked to submit to a religious form of punishment, which usually consisted of cleaning the shoes of the congregation, bringing water to the temple, or completing the reading of the Sacred Book once or twice. That the man of sin trembles before his pure accusers has been often exemplified during this movement. He not only trembles, but sometimes actually runs away, leaving the temple into the hands of the reform-



ers, who are obliged to make a temporary arrangement for the continuation of service. This temporary arrangement often becomes permanent. when the runaway priests, in spite of invitations to come back, do not consent to resume their duties. This happened actually in many cases, as at the Akal Takht. It is true that in this method there is a danger of violence. Only in two cases, however, actual violence with loss of life occurred, and in both cases, it is important to observe, the reform party scrupulously refrained from raising even the little finger to defend themselves against violence, and suffered terribly. In all other cases the Mahants submitted and often saw prudence in applying to the reform committee to take charge of the Gurdwaras. The trouble arose only when the Government gave up its policy of non-intervention, which it had followed since the successful termination of the Sialkot broil, and the Mahants began to feel that the Government, as well as the law, would support them in resisting the reform activities of the Sikhs.

Some people are of opinion that the Sikhs should have waited and postponed the movement until the coming of Swaraj in India. But the Sikhs could not wait up to the advent of Swaraj, because the property attached to the temples was being sold or alienated everywhere, and immoral practices could not be tolerated. Besides no Swaraj is successful without religious reform, as Russia and China have learnt to their cost. More than half of what Swaraj meant to Sikhs was the emancipation of their religious and educational institutions and their management by themselves. When others were thinking of building a new heaven and a new earth of national freedom, the Sikhs had still to struggle hard to get rid of the foreign control even from their central Temples and their central College. Could they wait?

They had tried many times before but had failed, simply for want of strong public spirit. Now that with the coming of national feeling they gained a sufficient amount of enthusiasm, they did not want to miss the opportunity. People called them impatient. But reformers have always been so. They are compelled to move fast, because bigots or their supporters will not move early. Reformers are compelled to do their work in times of excitement, because bigots will not do the needful in times of peace.

#### AKALI AGITATION

The Akali stage of the Gurdwara Reform Movement may be said to have begun with the Rikab Ganj case of Delhi, where the new technique of sending *jathas* or bands of volunteers was employed successfully (see page 184). Encouraged by the success of this method the Akalis began to use it everywhere. The next case to come up for the Panthic agitation was that of Sialkot.

There is a Gurdwara there, called *Babe di Ber*, named after the visit of Guru Nanak who had sat there under a *Ber* tree. The temple was endowed with a jagir by S. Natha Singh Shahid, which jagir was continued by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the British Government. Its value in 1855 was Rs. 3680, which according to the conditions of the grant was to be spent on the Gurdwara and the free kitchen attached to it. The appointment of the Mahant was always subject to the approval of the Sikh public. This is evident from the applications put in from time to time by the Mahants themselves. As for instance, in 1885, when Mahant Nihal Singh wanted to appoint Bhai Prem Singh to officiate for him temporarily in his absence, he stated in his application that all the residents of Sialkot approved of this appointment.

In 1887 Bhai Nihal Singh convened a meeting of the citizens of Sialkot and with the approval of the Sikhs Bhai Prem Singh was appointed his successor. When a rival claimant to the Mahantship filed a suit against Prem Singh in 1890, the latter stated in his defence that the office of the Mahant was not in his power, nor could it be regarded as a hereditary post, that the appointment was in the hands of the Sikhs who had faith in the shrine.

This Prem Singh appointed Harnam Singh, his grandson, as his successor, in 1901, with the approval of the local Sikhs. When Harnam Singh died in 1918, Prem Singh sought to nominate another grandson, named Gurcharan Singh, as Mahant. As the Sikhs were opposed to this appointment the Deputy Commissioner who was invited to the installation ceremony did not attend. But the Collector sanctioned the mutation of the jagir in favour of Gurcharan Singh and referred the contending parties to the civil courts.

The Sikhs had been trying to bring the management under some control through courts ever since 1891, but even when they had been able to prove the drunkenness of the Mahants and their mismanagement and misappropriation of funds, the courts would do nothing to remove the grievances. On one occasion in 1907, the Deputy Commissioner consigned the petition of Sikhs to the record room with the illuminating remark 'Seen'. On another occasion a large number of citizens, including Mr. Ganda Singh, petitioned the Deputy Commissioner to appoint a committee of management for the shrine, which was being mismanaged by the Mahant. The Tehsildar reported in 1910 that the Mahant was wasting the income on his own luxuries, but the Revenue Assistant whitewashed the whole thing by saying that the character of the Mahant was not very objectionable,

because he only drank and was not a drunkard! The Deputy Commissioner admitted that the Mahant bore "the marks of heavy drinking," but he would do nothing but *advise* the Mahant to give up drink.

On the appointment of Gurcharan Singh, a minor, to the gaddi of Mahantship, the Sikh people through their Singh Sabha petitioned the authorities to appoint a committee of management to assist the Mahant. But the authorities supported Mr. Ganda Singh, an apostate, whom the widow of the late Mahant had appointed Manager of the shrine and guardian of the child Mahant. The whole Panth felt scandalised over this outrage. They agitated. They went to court, which required them to pay the court fee on the value of Rs. 50,000, which they could not pay, and the plaint was rejected.

They had tried the courts long enough. but the law had utterly failed to help them. So they decided to help themselves. They formed a *Khalsa Sewak Jatha* for the reform of Gurdwaras in the city. They began to hold meetings in the Gurdwara of Babe di Ber, where they would sing hymns and agitate about their grievances, especially against the desecration of the Gurdwara by the appointment of an apostate from Sikhism as its manager. The congregations were daily harrassed by *goondas*, and the authorities instead of protecting them issued warrants against their leaders under Section 107, Cr. P. C. Sardars Amar Singh and Jaswant Singh of Jhabal, the well-known leaders, went to Sialkot at this stage. and by their speeches encouraged the agitation and counteracted the mischievous propaganda spread by interested parties among Hindus and Muslims. Sardar Kharak Singh, a local grandee (later a foremost leader) came forward to help the cause of reform. The congregation determined by a resolution not to allow the apostate to function as manager,

although the District Magistrate had ordered under Section 144, Cr. P. C., that for the next two months nobody was to interfere with the management of Mr. Ganda Singh. On 5th October, 1920, the Khalsa gathered in large numbers at Sialkot and in a big meeting a committee of 13 members was elected for the management and control of the Gurdwara. Next day Mr. King, the Divisional Commissioner, came and summoning a deputation of nine leading Sikhs told them that the Government did not want to interfere in the religious affairs of Sikhs who were at liberty to manage the affairs of their Gurdwaras as they pleased.

In the meantime things had begun to hum at Amritsar, where as we have seen the Sikhs were able to free the Golden Temple from the dead hand of the priests and to organise a central committee of control for the Gurdwaras in the country.

Seeing the strength and earnestness of the reforming Sikhs, the Government officials also followed a helpful policy. In November, 1920, S. Kartar Singh Jhabbar and S. Amar Singh of Jhabal with a jatha of 25 men went to Panja Sahib (District Campbelpur), where the old Mahant had died, and the new incumbent, Sant Singh, was asked to accept a committee of control.

Sant Singh agreed to sign a document admitting the control of a committee affiliated to the S.G.P.C., but later on, at the instigation of a Brahmin, went back on his word and was declared a *tankhahia* (a Sikh placed under a religious ban) by the gathering of Sikhs. He was not to be allowed to function as Mahant as long as he did not apologise for his perfidy. He gathered villagers to help him in ejecting Sikhs, but the police did not allow them to attack the Sikhs. The Khilafists of Rawalpindi called off the hostility of Mohammedan villagers, and the hostility

of the Hindu population did not count for much. The Deputy Commissioner asked the jatha as to who had sent them. Bhai Kartar Singh of Jhabbar showed him two telegrams which he had received from S. Harbans Singh of Atari and S. Sundar Singh Ramgurhia, promising the S. G. P. C.'s support in the undertaking. The D. C. ordered the Mahant not to go to the Gurdwara and asked him to go to court if he had any complaint. He filed a suit under Section 145, Cr. P. C., which was dismissed by the D. C. in December 1920. The Sikh representatives from the neighbouring districts gathered in a big meeting at Panja Sahib on Guru Nanak's birthday and formed a committee of management for the Gurdwara. The temple has improved a great deal under the new management. Its old building has been demolished, and a new magnificent building has been erected in its place. The tank or reservoir of spring water, which is one of the wonders of natural beauty, has also been widened. The free kitchen maintained there is one of the most exemplary institutions dispensing charity and giving a practical demonstration of the Sikh principle that all are equal and pure in the matter of social intercourse.

The attitude of the Government being helpful, the Sikh congregations in different localities were able to effect reform without any hitch. The Gurdwaras of Chomala Sahib (Lahore), Tham Sahib (Jhambar Kalan), Khara Sauda, Ker Sahib, Machhike, Sheikhpura, Rori Sahib, etc. were brought under Panthic control. Seeing this some of the Mahants came to an understanding with the reforming party and placed their temples under committees of management which were duly affiliated to the S. G. P. C. The best example is of Chohla Sahib, whose Mahant got a house and a salary of Rs. 175 p. m., along with a gift of Rs. 10,000 in cash. The Mahants of Ramdas,

Guru ka Bagh, Khadur Sahib, Babek Sar, etc., also accepted the new arrangements without demur. But the success of the reforming party alarmed some of the officials who began to connect the reform movement with the political agitation in the country. The organisation of the bands, called Akali Jathas, clad in black and marching in military formation, was particularly annoying to the Government. Mr. King, the Commissioner of the Lahore Division, issued a letter\* in which he described the priests' interests in the religious endowments as their *established rights*. They were told that, if they apprehended attacks on their shrines, they could apply for police protection. This encouraged the priests to put up a strong resistance against all attempts at reform, and clashes began to occur between them and the reformers.

One such clash occurred at Tarn Taran in January 1921. The priests made a show of agreement when the Jatha of Bhai Teja Singh Bhuchar approached them, but they secretly collected hired roughts from the countryside, who fell upon the Jatha and wounded 17 of them. One of them, Bhai Hazara Singh, died of his wounds next day. Another named Bhai Hukam Singh succumbed to his injuries a few days later. The priests came of their own accord and confessed their guilt, handing over a written apology and placing themselves at the mercy of the Panth. The Sikhs forgave them and formed a committee of management. Both the parties agreed not to go to court. In spite of this, cases were started, not only against the priests but also against the Akalis who were accused of attacking the priests. Charges were framed against 16 priests

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\*Even Valentine Chirol declared about this letter 'that in the circumstances it would have been wise to add an admonition to the effect that legal rights also involved duties and responsibilities which must be properly discharged.'

and 17 Akalis. Fifteen priests were sentenced each to 3 years' R. I. and 2 of the Akalis were sentenced to one year's R. I.

A more bloody event occurred at Nankana Sahib, the birth-place of Guru Nanak. The temple was in the custody of Udasis who had to administer a big landed estate. As long as the income of the Gurdwara was small the Mahants consulted the wishes of the Sikhs, who paid a yearly visit to Nankana Sahib. But when, with the opening of the canal, the value of the land increased enormously, the Mahants grew corrupt and began to look more to the friendship of revenue and other officials than to the restraining influence of the public. What else could be expected from a professed ascetic, who had to administer and enjoy an income of two or three lakhs a year without feeling any check or control from public? One Mahant was a notorious drunkard and adulterer. He had contracted a dirty venereal disease which did not allow him even to walk steadily. Another, who succeeded him, lived with the rich widow of a well-known Sardar and had a son by her. He invited dancing girls and held nautch parties even in the Janam Asthan. His successor, Mahant Narain Das, falsified all the promises made by him before a Sikh assembly, in the presence of a Magistrate, and lived as recklessly as any of his predecessors. He kept a Mohammedan drummer's woman, and had sons and daughters by her. So many cases of rape and drunkenness were reported to have occurred in the temple.

In October 1920 a big diwan was held at Dhawal where a resolution was passed by the assembled Sikhs calling upon the Mahant to reform himself. But he, instead of doing anything to remove the grievances of the public, began to make preparations for violence. He collected about 400 'good fighters,



including some doughty Pathans, and armed them with axes and firearms to give a suitable reception to those who might dare to come to pay a visit to the holy place on the day of Guru Nanak's birth. Bhai Lachhman Singh, a tall and handsome Sardar of Dharowal, who came with a few people to pay his respects at the temple, was set upon by the gang of desperadoes, but the timely intervention of the D. C. and the C. I. D. Superintendent 'averted what might have been even a worse tragedy than what actually happened on the 20th February.\* The Sikhs knew of the Mahant's preparations, and referred to them in their meetings and the press,† but they wanted to effect reform by meeting violence with non-violence. In a meeting of the S. G. P. C. they resolved that the whole Panth should gather at Nankana Sahib on March 4, 5 and 6 and should call upon the recalcitrant Mahant to reform himself. The Mahant redoubled his preparations, and when everything was ready, his paper, *Sant Sewak*, openly threatened that if the Siks came to Nankana Sahib they would be well-peppered. Some local men, like Bhai Lachhman Singh of Dharowal, Kartar Singh Jhabbar and Buta Singh of Lyallpur, resolved hastily to prevent the Mahant from executing his horrible purpose by going to Nankana Sahib themselves with their followers before the date fixed. When the leaders of the S. G. P. C. like Master Tara Singh and S. Teja Singh of Samundari, came to know of this, they disapproved of this move and sent out messengers in all directions to prevent people from approaching Nankana Sahib. Bhai Kartar Singh and Buta Singh were persuaded to give up the idea, but Bhai

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\*Mr. King's statement in the Legislative Council on the 15th March 1921.

†See the *Akali* of Lahore, dated October 8, 1920.

Lachhman Singh, who had vowed to be a martyr, was resolute, and would not be deterred. He started on horseback on 19th February at 8 P. M., with a jatha of 23 persons, and went on gathering more men on the way until near Nankana Sahib the number reached about 150. It was the morning of 20th. After taking the vow of non-violence the whole jatha entered the Gurdwara of Janam Asthan with the purpose of seizing it in the name of the Panth. The hired men of the Mahant fell on them and butchered about 130 of them in cold blood with axes and guns. The dead and the dying were gathered up into piles and were burnt with kerosene oil. The whole world was shocked to hear the horrible news. Thousands Sikhs, wearing black turbans, rushed to the spot and witnessing the scene of carnage shed tears of blood. In spite of misrepresentations spread about them, they behaved most peacefully towards the people of the Mahant, as is evident from the enquiries made by non-official bodies, like the Khilafat Committee and the Swarajya Ashram, meetings of the Hindus and Muslims of Nankana Sahib, etc. After some hesitation Mr. King, the Commissioner, handed over the possession of the Gurdwara to the representatives of the S. G. P. C. But the attitude of the Government became definitely hostile,\* and the Sikhs dissociated themselves from the enquiry instituted into the case. The Sessions Court sentenced the Mahant and seven of his men to death, eight to transportation for life and sixteen Pathans to 7 years' E. I. The High Court, however, held that in view of his failure to secure protection from Government, the Mahant was

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\*The contributory causes of this change in the Government attitude may be (1) the excited condition of the Sikh masses in the whole countryside and (2) the bullying of some officers by the Akali leaders. See p. 149 of the *Lives of Martyrs* by S. Gurbax Singh Jhabalia.

fully justified in taking steps for his own protection. He had lost his head under a deep sense of wrong and helplessness, and acted as he did. His sentence of death was reduced to one of transportation for life. Only three sentences of death were maintained. This decision created a very unpleasant impression among the Sikhs.

The police became suddenly active in taking up cases, however slight, against the Sikhs, and the Associated Press freely spread misrepresentation about them. The Government issued instruction to District Magistrates to attach a Gurdwara whenever there appeared an apprehension of interference on the part of Akalis. There began a regular campaign of arrests, and even old cases were raked up against the reforming Sikhs. The new policy of the Government had the effect of encouraging opposition to the Sikh cause from all quarters. The Mahants and priests were emboldened to seek independence of the Sikh Panth. Certain Udasi Mahants, in their memorial to the Government, went so far as to say that the Udasis were not Sikhs at all, but a sect of Hindus. This plea was accepted by many courts, especially in the case of Manak, which greatly annoyed the Sikhs. Hindus too, who had been sympathetic so far, began to show signs of antipathy and in some cases, as that of Bhai Joga Singh's Gurdwara, actually interfered and claimed Sikh places as their own. They also claimed that as they had a hand in founding some of the Gurdwaras, they should have adequate representation of their community on the Board which was proposed by the Government for the control of Gurdwaras.

The Gurdwara Bill which was drafted contained the provision that the Government would appoint a Board of three Sikh and one non-Sikh who would be President of the Board. The Sikhs did not agree,

and all attempts at reconciliation were frustrated by the recalcitrant attitude of the Mahants, backed by Hindus, who demanded that no change should be made in the form of worship which had prevailed up to the year 1920. This was to stop all progress in reform for ever and bind down the future generations to the prevailing customs of a particular time. The S. G. P. C. met on May 11, 1921, and resolved to do without a Bill and to launch a campaign of Passive Resistance in maintaining the control of the Gurdwaras that had already come under its control. The Government too dropped the idea of introducing a Bill, and advised the Sikhs to proceed gently with the method of persuasion and not of force.

For some time the Government did not know what to do with the Sikhs. It sincerely wished to find out some solution of the Gurdwara trouble, but it did not want to recognise the S. G. P. C., which, on account of its compact organization and the general support it enjoyed not only of Sikhs but of all patriotic elements in the country, was becoming a power to be reckoned with. There was many a trial of strength between the Government and the Akalis, in which the latter came out always successful.

One such tussle occurred in November 1921, when the keys of the Golden Temple were snatched away from the Sarbrah and all those who protested were taken into custody. Hundreds went to jail at the bidding of the S. G. P. C., even non-Sikh leaders contributing their share with enthusiasm. L. Lajpat Rai praised the Akalis in these terms: "As regards non-violence, with its attendant conception of self-sacrifice, they have given the most amazing proofs by their behaviour at Nankana Sahib on the 15th November and later at Ajnala and Amritsar. They have proved themselves worthy descendants of their Gurus, and the example they have set of self-sacrifice,

calm courage, devoid of swagger, and absolute self-control in the face of provocation, will be hard to beat."

The Government saw its mistake, and wanted to restore the keys to Sikhs, but it still hesitated to recognise the S. G. P. C. When it found that nobody would become a Sarbrah or form a rival committee, it was obliged to send the keys to the S. G. P. C. and to release all the prisoners unconditionally. Thus was "the first decisive battle won," as Mahatma Gandhi put it when he heard the news of the Sikhs' success.

After a short lull another tussle began, this time at Guru-ka-Bagh which is about 12 miles from Amritsar. The Mahant of this Gurdwara had come to terms with the Akalis, and had signed an agreement that he would work under a committee appointed by the S. G. P. C., but after the Nankana tragedy he had gone back on his pledges, and the S. G. P. C. was obliged to take charge of the institution in its own hands. Ever since then the firewood required for the kitchen attached to the Gurdwara had always been taken, as of right, from a grove *kikar* trees entered in the name of the Gurdwara. On August 8, 1222, five Akalis in charge of the Gurdwara cut wood from the *kikar* grove for use in the kitchen. They were arrested next day and convicted of theft and sentenced to 6 months' R. 1., with a fine of Rs. 50 each. Sikhs took this as a challenge, and began to pour in to court arrest. The leaders of the S.G.P.C. were also thrown into jail. Then began a new policy to overcome the Sikhs. All the approaches to Guru-ka-Bagh were stopped, and those who proceeded thither were belaboured with lathis and left unconscious on the ground. Everyday at the Akal Takht a party of 100 Sikhs took a solemn vow to go for acrifisce, and under all circumstances to remain

non-violent in word and deed. They marched to Guruka-Bagh, accompanied by a train of ambulance cars, and on their refusal to disperse were beaten mercilessly. When the police had done their worst, they would drag the prostrate and wounded Sikhs by their sacred hair and throw them into muddy ditches or leave them in the fields. Then the forces of mercy, the medical relief party supplied by the S. G. P. C., would come forward to bring the wounded to Amritsar and put them in the Committee's hospitals.

It was a regular game, the conditions of which were understood by both parties. It was played in the presence of thousands, some of whom were able to take photographs of the harrowing scenes, which were published in America and elsewhere. The report issued by the representatives of the *Bande Matram*, the *Zemindar*, and the *Tribune* of Lahore, of the *Independent* of Allahabad and the *Swarajya* of Madras brought the whole country round to sympathise with the Sikh cause. Mr. C. F. Andrews' letters sent to the press from the place of occurrence stirred the conscience of the world and convinced the people that there was something far greater involved in this matter than a mere dispute about land and property. A new heroism, learnt through suffering, had arisen in the land, and a new lesson in moral warfare had been taught to the world (see p. 82).

After 13th September, when the Governor paid a visit to Amritsar and was deeply impressed with what he had heard from Mr. C. F. Andrews, the beating of jathas was stopped and arrests began again. By 17th November the number of arrests made amounted to 5605, out of whom 35 were members of the S.G.P.C., and several hundred were military pensioners who had grown gray in the service of the Sirkar. At last a 'kind-hearted' gentleman, Sir Ganga Ram, C.I.E., a retired Engineer came forward

to rescue the Government. He took the land in dispute from the Mahant on lease and wrote to the Government that he did not require the protection of the police. The arrests stopped, and the Sikhs were allowed to go freely to the Gurdwara and cut wood from its land.

In the next struggle, which was not strictly religious, the rules of the game were not observed, and the true evidence was not allowed to reach the world. There was much confusion, and even the best friends of the Sikhs, like Mahatma Gandhi, were misled by reports published in the press.

As far as I have been able to ascertain the facts, the trouble started with the deposition of Maharaja Ripudaman Singh from the *gaddi* of Nabha on 9th July 1923. The Government called it 'voluntary abdication,' and the S. G. P. C. refuted this allegation by publishing the true facts as far as they were known to it. The Maharaja was considered a good Sikh, who had strong sympathies with the advanced section of reformers not only in religion but in politics also. He seems to have offended the authorities on many occasions by criticising the Government measures and voting with the non-official and popular party in the Viceregal Council. He is also said to have offered personal affronts to the Lieutenant Governors, like Sir Louis Dane and Sir Michael O'dwyer. Such a man was bound to create some trouble for himself. The trouble came when he quarrelled with the Maharaja of Patiala, and created an unfavourable impression in the minds of the Akalis by refusing to see the deputation sent by the S.G.P.C. in connection with his dispute with Patiala. Perhaps by that time he had lost control over his own affairs and was being misled by his advisers. The S.G.P.C., however, gave him its full sympathy when he lost his throne. The Committee took the Government's

action as a side-attack on the Reform movement sponsored by it, and took up the Maharaja's cause as its own. The moderate element, consisting of Prof. Jodh Singh, S. Harbans Singh of Atari and others, withdrew from the S.G.P.C., taking this step as a departure from the strictly religious character of the movement. The Government held that the Sikh movement had been captured by political agitators and that the S.G.P.C. had become a revolutionary body.

The actual trouble began on September 14 with the interruption of the *Akhand Path*, or the continuous reading of the Holy Book, which was going on at Jaito in the Nabha State for the benefit of the Maharaja. From 15th September batches of Sikhs began to march to Jaito to restart the interrupted reading. They were invariably arrested by the state police and left hundreds of miles away in a penniless condition. After some 500 men had been treated like this, a big jatha of 500, calling itself a Death Squad, marched from the Akal Takht to vindicate the right of free association in the Gurdwara of Jaito. It was vowed to non-violence, and, as witnessed by Mr. S. Zimand of the *New York Times*, Dr. Saif-ud-Din Kitchlew and others, it carried no arms.

After marching for twelve days through the countryside, the huge jatha, including some ladies and old men, reached Jaito on 21st February and was fired upon by the state forces. It is difficult to ascertain the number of casualties. The Government's estimate was that 21 had died and 33 were wounded, while the S. G. P. C. reported that there were 300 casualties, including about 100 deaths. More than 700 men were arrested. The Government version was that, 'a crowd of 6000 opened fire on the police,' that the jatha itself was not fired on, and no member of it was injured. Mr. Zimand who had seen the



jatha on its way but was not allowed to see the actual occurrence, wrote a letter to Mahatma Gandhi, stating that 'the jatha and the crowds following the jatha were not armed and behaved in a peaceful and orderly manner.' Only an independent enquiry could have ascertained the truth, but such an enquiry was not held.

A second 'Death Squad' consisting of 500 Sikhs marched, with a vow of non-violence, to complete 101 readings of the Holy Book in expiation of the one interrupted by the state officials. It reached Jaito on 14th March, and was arrested. Many more jathas followed and met the same fate. The movement dragged on for some time more until it was brought to an end by a compromise arranged by some moderate Sikhs.

It was clear that both the parties were tired of the long-drawn struggle, and wanted to come to some understanding, which could take the form of a Gurdwara Bill only.

At last in 1925 the Gurdwara Act acceptable to Sikhs was passed by the Punjab Council, and the Akali leaders who were being tried for waging war against the king were released. The Act provided the control of all historical Gurdwaras by an elected Board, which was renamed Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

## FREEDOM OF THE KIRPAN

The Kirpan or sword is one of the five symbols of the Sikh faith, whose names begin with the same letter. The other four are : Kesh (long hair), Kangha (comb), Kara (iron bracelet), and Kachh (drawers). When a Sikh is baptised, it is enjoined on him not to part with any of these. The Kirpan is a symbol of Power and Dignity\*, both of which India had lost and which Guru Gobind Singh wanted to restore.

None of these symbols was invented by Guru Gobind Singh. They were already in vogue and had been separately used with much the same significance. The word 'Kirpan' was used for a sword. Long before it became a religious symbol with the Sikhs, its name had been applied to different kinds of the sword. In the old Sanskrit dictionaries, like the *Amarkosh* and the *Shabd-kalpadrum-kosh*, it is used as a synonym for *kharag*, *karwar*, *asi*, *chandarhas*, and *rishti*. Guru Gobind Singh himself in his Book of Instruments, called *Shastar-nam-mala*, says :—

"Kari, Karantac (elephant-killer), Kashtrip (enemy-tormentor), Kalayuddh (war-instrument), Karwar (talwar), Kara and Chol are different names of the Kirpan." (11. 41).

In another book, called *Pakhiano Charitra*, he uses *Bhagauti* and *Kharag* indifferently for the Kirpan :

"She took Bhagauti in her hand,  
And with all her might she struck it at his head.  
As the Raja cried out, hai ! hai !!,  
She struck the *Kirpan* again and again." (302.9).

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\*"Charity and Kirpan are symbolic of self-respect."—*Pakhiano Charitra*, 322.

Here Kirpan and Bhagauti are used synonymously.

Again :

"When the attack on the fort began, she took out her *Kirpan* and, coming to close quarters, plied the *Kharag* and with one stroke finished off the enemy." (199.26).

In these verses the Kirpan is synonymous with the Kharag. We have seen that in old Sanskrit dictionaries, too, it is described as the same thing as the Kharag.

Guru Gobind Singh did not fix the size of the Kirpan. It depended on the wielding power of individual Sikhs. But from the samples preserved at the Akal Takht and other Gurdwaras we can get an idea of what a Kharag or Kirpan was. According to old Hindu books the maximum size of a Kharag was 50 anguls or about 3.12 feet; and the minimum size was 25 anguls or about 1.56 ft.

"A Kharag of 50 anguls is excellent and of half that size is inferior. Shorter than that should not be worn at all."—*Agni Puran*.

"The best Kharag is 50 anguls long; and an inferior one is 25."—*Varah Samhita*.

The same size is given in the *Devi Puran*.

Why did the Guru call the sword Kirpan? Because it alliterates with the names of the other four symbols, is a classic and poetical name, and can be applied to all kinds of swords. The Kirpan is called a symbol from the view-point of religious art or æsthetics. In order that the symbols might serve their real purpose, as a help in the performance of religion and might not become a dead weight on religion, the Guru also emphasized the view-point of utility. The Kirpan is, therefore, an active symbol, an instrument of offence and defence, and **not** a charm to be tied along with the turban-ends or stowed away in the back of the comb, as it came to be done in the British days. It is to be kept in a sheath and

worn in a belt (*Pakhiano Charitra*, 52.18). It can cut through armour (*Shastar-nam-mala*, 11.28), through men, horses, even elephants. It is superior to all other instruments (*ibid.* 11.34).

As long as the Sikhs were free, they were able to keep their religious liberty intact and did not part with their Kirpan or sword. They kept it by their side in the day, and took it to their bed at night. When they lost their liberty with the destruction of their empire, the Kirpan was also taken away from them. What a scene, that, at the famous monument of Man-kiala, when the day of the Khalsa was over, in 1849, and the old Sikh veterans were ordered to pile their arms at the feet of Sir Walter Guilbert. How reluctantly each soldier came forward and, embracing his sword, uttered a groan, deep and long, and placed it on the pile in tears.\* Thus was lost one of the five symbols of the Sikh faith. In jails even other symbols, like the comb and the bracelet, were not allowed. And the Sikhs had to struggle hard and long to get a concession even in regard to these symbols for their brethren in jail.

We must admit that by the Army Regulations, which emphasize the initiation of a Sikh recruit in Guru Gobind Singh's baptism, the old tradition of the Khalsa was kept up to some extent. But in other ways, as we have seen, the liberty of the Sikhs was controlled. The Sikhs founded Sabhas and Diwans, purely religious bodies, whose object was to restore Sikhism to its pristine glory. They emphasized the carrying out of baptismal vows, and among other things laid stress on the wearing of the Kirpan. But the law of the country stood in their way.

In 1913, one Baba Nihal Singh Nihang was arrested for wearing a Kirpan. The different Sikh

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\*See *Leaves from the Journal of a Subaltern*, p. 189.

bodies passed resolutions of protest and there began a strong agitation, in response to which the gentleman was released. The Ramgarhia Sabha sent a deputation to Sir O'Moore Creagh, the Commander-in-Chief at Simla, who took a sympathetic view. The Chief Khalsa Diwan, whose Secretary was Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, interviewed several officials in this connection. The Sikhs of Rawalpindi, through their Sabha, showed special activity in moving the Takhts and the general Sikh public; and on June 25, 1914, the possessing and wearing of the Kirpan was allowed by law in the Punjab. After a month it was allowed in Delhi. Then after some months' agitation, and after some Sikhs had suffered arrests, it was allowed in Burma. But whenever a Sikh was found with a Kirpan in the U.P. or Bengal he was arrested. It is true that law did not allow it in other provinces, but it was not the fault of Sikhs. It was an anomaly, which the Government unreasonably kept up. Why should a Sikh be required to part with his religious symbol when stepping out of Delhi and put it on when landing at Rangoon? In February, 1917, after Chaudhri Shamsher Singh, Secretary of the Singh Sabha of Sitapur, had been punished for wearing a Kirpan, it was allowed in the U. P., and then in the N.W. Frontier Province. In other provinces it was still forbidden. The Sikhs have got their sacred places in the U.P., Behar, Bengal, Deccan, etc., and are found travelling in batches to visit these places. One can imagine what trouble they must have undergone in prison and at the hands of the police, which is none too tender in India. On May 19, 1917, it was allowed throughout India. In 1918 the exemption was extended to British Baluchistan and the Residency Bazzars and the Railway lands in Hyderabad State. But still cases were not rare when, in spite of this sanction, the police of different provinces was found

arresting and troubling innocent Sikhs for wearing Kirpans.

The representative bodies of the Sikhs went on agitating, for the Kirpan was still not allowed in the Army. Look at the wonder of it! Those who used the sword, those whose profession it was to wear arms, were not allowed to wear the Kirpan. Three soldiers at Roorkee were punished and dismissed for wearing it. The whole Sikh community cried hoarse over the affair, but they were not taken back. Bhai Mangal Singh of the 34th Sikhs, who was afterwards martyred at Nankana Sahib, was dismissed and sentenced to one year's R. I. for the same fault. His sentence was later reduced. It was in September, 1920, that "in recognition of the loyal and distinguished services rendered by the Sikhs in the Great War," the Government "was pleased to sanction the wearing of the Kirpans by Sikh soldiers both in uniform and plain clothes while serving on the active list."\*

The law, while exempting the Kirpan from all restrictions, did not fix its size, for the Sikhs who had applied for it had stated that its size could be fixed only by Guru Gobind Singh. Nor was its manufacture forbidden. In Schedule II of the Arms Act, which provides for exemptions from the operation of the Act, the Kirpan is declared to be free from *all* prohibitions including its manufacture and sale. For some time the Sikhs freely enjoyed the right of

\*This right was, however, curtailed later on, as would appear from the following words in the 'correction' which was made in the Army Regulations on May 27, 1922:—

"In Units which elect to adopt the wearing of the Kirpan by Sikhs it should be worn on all ceremonial occasions; the other occasions on which it will or will not be worn are left to the discretion of officers commanding units. Uniformity within the unit as regards the method of wearing the Kirpan in uniform and in plain clothes must be insisted on."

manufacturing, selling and possessing the Kirpan. But when the repression of Sikhs in connection with the Gurdwara reform began, those who wore Kirpans also came in for it. In February, 1921, the Deputy Commissioner of Jullundur issued an order requiring the local manufacturers not to manufacture Kirpans of greater length than nine inches. A First Class Magistrate in Lahore passed an order on the application of a Kirpan manufacturer for license that no license was needed for manufacturing Kirpans. But when in March, 1921, S. B. Mehtab Singh referred to it in the Council, S. Sundar Singh Majithia replied on behalf of the Government that although the Sikhs had been permitted to wear the Kirpan, Section 5 of the Arms Act did not allow them to manufacture it without license. He also declared that the Kirpans were in no case to exceed nine inches in length. Consequent upon this Sikhs began to be arrested everywhere for wearing Kirpans which exceeded the length of nine inches, although there was no specific law or notification issued on that point. The Maharaja of Patiala was, however, more explicit. He ordered on 19th March, 1921, that Kirpans must be bought from the Arms Manufacturers of the State, who were instructed to prepare Kirpans of a fixed size and shape. All other Kirpans possessed or carried were liable to confiscation. This order created much heart-burning among the Sikhs and was withdrawn on October 5, 1921. The prosecution of Sikhs for wearing Kirpans went on in the British Districts. Nobody could understand on what principle the police or the courts proceeded. Some people were arrested for possessing Kirpans, while others were not arrested, even though they carried as long Kirpans as they could. In the case of one Hazara Singh, who was tried in April, 1921, the following great moderate leaders were cited as defence witnesses:—

Sardar Bahadur Mehtab Singh, Bar-at-Law; Sardar Trilochan Singh, M.A., LL. B.; Sardar Sundar Singh Kamgarhia, President of the Shromani Committee and ex-Manager of the Golden Temple; Sardar Harbans Singh, Secretary of the Chief Khalsa Diwan and Vice-President of the Shromani Committee; Professor Jodh Singh, M.A., Principal, Guru Nanak College, Gujranwala; Bhai Takht Singh, Manager Sikh Girls' School, Ferozepore; and Sardar Shivdev Singh Uberoi, Honorary Magistrate of Sialkot. They declared that the instrument, for carrying which Bhai Hazara Singh was being prosecuted, was a Kirpan, and that Kirpan was another name for the sword. They themselves had with them similar Kirpans. And yet the man was convicted under Section 19 of the Act and sentenced to 6 months' R. I. Bhai Bachittar Singh, Jathedar of the Akal Takht, who had been picked out of so many Kirpan-carrying Sikhs, was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment, which was, however, reduced to 6 months later on. He appealed to the High Court, which could not come to any decision as to what a Kirpan was, and his petition was rejected. After proceeding in this uncertain way for a few months, the Government in July relaxed its policy of prosecutions, declaring complacently that "the practice of wearing large weapons or ordinary swords appears to have now much diminished." The Sikhs in reality had never given up their practice of wearing the so-called long Kirpans.

In March, 1922, the Government and the Shromani Committee came to an understanding about the Kirpan. It was agreed that the Government would not interfere with the Sikhs for wearing "Kirpans or swords" as long as they ordinarily wore them by the side and did not unsheath them except for purely religious purposes. When listening to the terms of



agreement the Sikh representatives had expressed a fear that the Government might take advantage of the words "by the side" and unnecessarily harass the Sikhs. The Government representative had laughed out the objection, saying that the Sikhs should trust the Government, which wanted to finish the Kirpan trouble once for all. It was, however, destined to be used, like so many other previous agreements, as a mere stalking horse.

The ink was not yet dry on the document when a fresh campaign was started for prosecuting Sikhs for wearing Kirpans. The Burma Government even in February had issued a notification fixing the size of the Kirpan at 9 inches. Sardar Kharak Singh and others were arrested and sentenced heavily in the Punjab. The ludicrous way in which advantage was taken of the words "by the side" will appear from the following cases. A Sikh boy in Hoshiarpur district was going running to his school to avoid being late. As his Kirpan was hanging down his body, he could not run freely. So he took the Kirpan in his hand, though the belt was on his body. The Commissioner of the Division who saw this ordered the boy to be disarmed. On the boy's refusing to give up his Kirpan, he was arrested and, being put before a Magistrate, was tried and sentenced to pay Rs. 55 as fine, or to go to jail for one month and a half in default. The brave boy preferred the latter, and was sent to jail. In a diwan at Samundri the Superintendent of Police snatched away the Kirpan from a Sikh while he was leaning on it. In another place a Sikh was deprived of his Kirpan while he was cleaning it. Sardar Ram Singh of Mandi Dabwali (Hissar District), who was found sleeping with his Kirpan, was arrested and sent to jail. A blind musician was arrested at Mandhra, because his cross-belt having broken on the way he was obliged to put his

Kirpan in his bed. In a communique, dated 19th September, 1922, the Government declared that one "Anup Singh was present at a meeting and was arrested there for carrying his Kirpan in contravention of the orders on the subject. He was not wearing a belt and stated that he would never wear one." Sometimes Sikhs were arrested for possessing two Kirpans. As a Sikh is bound to keep his Kirpan always with him, it becomes sometimes inevitable that he should have two Kirpans with him. As for example, when he buys a new Kirpan to replace an old one, which he already possesses, he will necessarily have two in his possession when he walks away from the Kirpan shop; or sometimes when he comes from his village to a city and buys a Kirpan for his wife or child. The prosecutions in connection with the Kirpan were so manifestly illegal that all disinterested newspapers and associations in India strongly disapproved of the policy of the Government, and the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee in a general meeting condemned "the action of the Punjab Government in prosecuting Sikhs for wearing Kirpans beyond certain length which is not provided in law." Even a Sessions Judge was found to hold that the manufacture of Kirpans was no offence. The following judgment was delivered by Mr. A. H. Parker, Sessions Judge of Ambala Division on 17th June, 1922:—

"In this case Ganesha Singh, who is admittedly a Sikh Lohar of the Ambala District, has been convicted under Section 19 of the Arms Act for manufacturing Kirpans. The Magistrate has sentenced him to one year's rigorous imprisonment with fine. He appeals.

It is admitted on his behalf that he did, in fact, manufacture Kirpans; and the only question which I have to decide is whether the manufacture of Kirpans

by a Sikh is an office under the Arms Act. The Arms Rules of 1920, schedule 2, shows that within the Punjab the arms, *viz.*, "Kirpans possessed or carried by Sikhs" are excluded from the operations of all prohibitions and directions contained in the Arms Act. These Kirpans, manufactured by Appellant are clearly, while in his possession, Kirpans possessed by a Sikh, and I hold that they are excluded from all prohibitions under the Act. In section 5 of the Act there is a prohibition against the manufacture of Arms, but these Kirpans are not subject to that prohibition. I, therefore, consider and hold that Ganesha Singh by manufacturing these Kirpans has committed no offence.

The learned Public Prosecutor, while arguing the case before me, laid stress on the words 'possessed or carried by a Sikh,' and argues that the prohibition against manufacturing is not excluded, since the Kirpans have to be possessed or carried by Sikhs. I cannot agree with the argument, since the schedule shows that all prohibitions under the Act are excluded.

For the above reasons this appeal is accepted, and Ganesha Singh is acquitted and released. Fine, if recovered, will be refunded. The Kirpans, etc., confiscated by the Magistrate, will be returned to Ganesha Singh on the expiry of the term of appeal or the decision of appeal, if any be made against this judgment."

In fact the Government did not know its own case about the Kirpan question. The Government was yet undecided as to whether the manufacture of Kirpans was an offence or not. In answer to a question in the Punjab Council the Hon'ble Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia said on 31st July, 1922: "The manufacture of Kirpans has been treated as subject to the provisions of the law applicable to swords, but doubt has been raised as to the applicability of these

provisions to *Kirpans* and the Government is taking steps to obtain a judicial decision on the point." In the meanwhile Sikhs, like Sardar Kharak Singh, had to rot in jail. The same member also stated that up to the beginning of June, 1922, "there had been 68 persons arrested, 66 brought to trial and 40 convicted during the previous twelve months for keeping, selling or manufacturing kirpans or weapons passing as such. Eighteen persons were still under trial." Read with this the statement of Government made in the beginning of March, 1922, that "for about 8 months past no Sikh has been arrested for wearing a sword or Kirpan." and then say how many had been punished in this connection and in how many months.

From 1925, when the Gurdwara Act was passed and the direct clash between the Government and the Sikhs ceased, there has been peace over the Kirpan question. But the same trouble, as described above, can arise any moment, if the good relations existing between the two parties are suspended. In Bombay and other distant provinces Kirpan cases still crop up now and then which show that the liberty of the Kirpan is not completely won.

# MODERN DIFFICULTIES OF SIKHISM

## 1. CONCERNING PANTHIC ORGANISATION

The present is a time of revival ; and, as during the time of their fall Sikhs had completely forgotten themselves, they have now to rediscover practically all their institutions. They are availing themselves of the tradition, imperfectly preserved in the army, or at the *takhts*, which are the traditional seats of religious authority at Amritsar, Anandpur, Patna, and Nander (Deccan), or as recorded in the *Rahatnamas* and other historical literature ; but the material available is very scanty and there is great scope for the use of imagination in reconstructing the past tradition. There being a great lack of education among the Sikhs, their imagination is not always used to the best advantage in the work of reconstruction, and there being no one central body to give unity and coherence to their religious decisions, there are appearing among certain impatient reformers some very strange and anomalous customs and institutions quite alien to the liberal spirit of the Khalsa. But the mass of the intelligent leaders are wisely checking themselves from any hasty reform of the doctrine, and are very busy in promoting mass education and temple reform, and in trying to secure a central representative body for all Sikhs. They have made great strides in education and their progress in this direction, if it were unchecked by the Educational Department, would be very rapid. As a result of strong agitation, carried on with unprecedented sacrifice,

they have obtained control over most of the historical Gurdwaras, or temples, and have secured a law to help them to obtain control over the remaining ones, whose possession is yet disputed. To exercise this control, they have been provided with a central assembly, freely elected with the vote of every adult Sikh, man and woman. The right of vote accorded to women is likely to produce most far-reaching results, as this gives them a share in the deliberations of the highest association of the community in charge of the temples and the ritual. This association, however, has only a limited scope of work, and cannot guide and control all the activities of the Panth. And the Sikhs are in several minds as to whether they should have another association, wielding a higher and more comprehensive authority, or they should content themselves with the one already obtained for the control of Gurdwaras.

The question of having a supreme Panthic body is most important. At the death of the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, when the Sikhs got spiritual home rule and, wielding the power and authority of the Panth, became masters of their own destiny, they had to dispense with the personal leadership of one man. It was inevitable that, for the exercise of corporate authority, they should create for themselves a central body; but somehow it has not been possible for them up to this day to succeed in providing themselves with this most elementary necessity. In the beginning, when they were left to themselves, they loosely followed the Greek method of the direct participation of every individual in the counsels of the Panth, and for this purpose had yearly or half-yearly gatherings of the *Sarbat Khalsa* (the whole people) at the Akal Takht. When persecutions became rife, however, these meetings were impossible, and the authority came to rest solely in the Akal

Takht. During the rule of the Missals the numbers of the *Sarbat Khalsa* became unwieldy and it was necessary to have some system of representation; but the general ignorance and the newly-acquired lust for power had corrupted the democratic genius of the people, and there appeared on the scene a man of supreme influence in the person of Kanjit Singh, whose ambition was to give the Sikhs an empire similar in power and dignity to that of the Moguls and whose imperialism did not encourage him to think along the lines of representative institutions. During his time no central association or parliament was possible. The people in the meanwhile had lost all hold on the first principles of Sikhism, what to say of its institutions, and, when their rule was supplanted by the British, they were too degenerate and broken-hearted to think of representative assemblies. With the coming of education and a knowledge of Western institutions, the Sikhs too began to form diwans, or associations, to take in hand the work of education and social and religious reform. Owing, however, to the instinctive self-assertion of the Sikhs and to the lack of a wholesale awakening among them, which could be possible only with mass education, no one association was able to take the central place among them. The suffering of the six years (1921-26), however, has welded them together as nothing else did before, and in matters of religion they have learnt to obey one central body. The new law of temples has given them, for the first time in their history, an association representative of their whole community: but, as I have said before, it cannot take the place of the central body, which should wield the *whole* authority of the Panth.

Should they have a separate body for this purpose? There is some difficulty in achieving this. The main point at issue is whether politics should or

should not be included in the scope of its work. In order to make this difficulty of the Sikh organisation clear it is necessary to throw some light on its relation with the State. Guru Gobind Singh at a time of peace had exhorted his Sikhs to recognise the house of Babar as supreme in worldly power, just as they recognised the house of Guru Nanak as supreme in religion. (*Vichitra Natak*, XIII. 9). Yet, owing to certain unfortunate developments in history, the constitution of the Panth does not contemplate the acceptance of superiority of any earthly power outside its pale. During the last 300 years, during which their institutions have grown and developed, the Sikhs have seldom had any chance to work in co-operation with any government other than their own. Either they have been in conflict with the ruling powers or they have been ruling themselves.\* It is only since 1849 that they have had occasion to serve under a friendly government. But then they have had no political status of their own, nor have they been fully self-conscious. It is only quite recently that they have witnessed the growth of their institutions to their full stature, and with it has come the old conflict. The Sikhs must boldly face the fact that their organisation, if revived strictly on its original lines, must clash with the government of the land, or, for that matter, with any other organisation that is not Sikh. For each Sikh, having personal relations with the Panth as Guru, must in all cases give his first obedience to it. Therefore, whenever there is a difference with any body other than the Panth, there is no possibility of compromising the Panth, as it would be

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\*Even Maharaja Ranjit Singh sometimes found himself in very awkward situations when the Akalis wanted to assert the law of the Panth against him. But he knew how to get over these difficulties by humouring the Akalis and keeping up the forms of the Panthic law.



lowering the flag of Guru Gobind Singh. This gives strength and makes the Sikhs unbending under the stress of greatest suffering; but it also obliges them to be uncompromising whenever their collective will expressed in *gurmatta* form is opposed to another will. This is all right in religion, which admits of no conscious compromises with outsiders, because there we have to deal with doctrines and dogmas which are exclusive and fixed; but in politics or other worldly matters, where things are not absolutely sectarian but have to be shared in common with others, and where the co-operation of other communities is essential, an uncompromising attitude does not always succeed, and has often to be modified to suit the conveniences and prejudices of others. But a *gurmatta* is a *gurmatta*, and having once received the sanction of the Guru Panth admits of no give-and-take from any non-Sikh power. This was exemplified during the Akali agitation, when the Sikh leaders could not hold any direct communication with the Government on the question of the Gurdwara Bill, because a *gurmatta*; to the effect that unless prisoners were released first no talk was to be held with the Government, stood in their way. This created differences, because most of the leaders were convinced of the futility of the resolution, and therefore in the end, after much suffering, they had to resort to indirect negotiations with the Government. Hence most of the compromises made with the Government were secret, entered into by the leaders, but kept veiled from the eyes of the general public, to escape from the stigma of lowering the prestige of the *gurmatta*. This is responsible for the present split between the Sikh masses, who, following the old spirit, are uncompromising, and their more intelligent leaders, who see reason in making compromises for the Panth, when necessary, even when the letter of the *gurmattas* stands in their way.

The best way out of the difficulty would be to modify the constitution in the light of the present circumstances, to confine the *gurmatta* only to those matters which are strictly religious and to separate from them the political matters, for which mere *mattas* or resolutions carrying more earthly prestige should be passed. Two main circumstances justify this change. In the first place, our political outlook has changed radically since the days when the foundations of the Panth were laid. In those days the Khalsa was completely independent: God above and the Panth below, with no earthly power to intervene. Now even the most free-minded Sikh is in favour of the British connection, or at least in favour of *swaraj*, which means the rule not of the Sikhs alone, but of all Indians—Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh. In those days the country could belong to one party only, either Hindu, or Sikh or Muslim: but now patriotism has changed its meaning, and has come to include love for the rights of other communities besides our own. Many questions which were supposed to belong exclusively to the Sikh community are now of equal concern to other communities as well, and have therefore passed out of the jurisdiction of the Panth. The question of the Punjabi language, for example, which the Sikhs had made a particular concern of their own, must now pass on to some society representing the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There was a time when, on a complaint being received from a Brahmin that his wife had been taken away by the Nawab of Kasur, the Missals gathered at once at the Akal Takht, espoused the cause of the afflicted husband, and sent out an expedition to avenge the wrong and restore the bride. If such a case occurred now it would have to be handed over to the police: that is, the authority of a separate power other than that of the Panth must be

recognised to deal with it. Many troubles are destined to arise between the Government and the Sikhs unless this distinction is recognised, and the sooner the better. The leaders of Sikh thought owe it as a duty to their community to disillusion the masses and lay before them clearly the definite change that has been brought about in their political conceptions, and the consequent necessity of recognising a change in the ideas of their Panthic organisation.

## 2. CONCERNING SECTS

The belief of the Sikhs that "there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation"\* does not allow them—at least theoretically—to have any sects among them. Sects arise in those religions where no arrangement is made to secure the permanency of Guruship. When the founder dies, leaving nothing behind but his Word, he begins to be interpreted differently by his followers, and in the course of time sects arise as a result of these differences. In Sikhism, however, a peculiar arrangement was made by which no differences were to be allowed in doctrine or its interpretation. The Guru was always one, and always alive. This was not possible physically. So it was designed that with the change of the Guru the spirit should not change. "The spirit was the same, and so was the method; the Master merely changed his body" (*Var Satta*). As long as the Gurus were personally present they did not allow any change in the doctrine, nor did they allow any new centres to be formed within the pale of Sikhism. Whenever anybody tried to found a schism, he and his followers were thrown out. That was the fate of the Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramraiya, etc. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh the whole Sikh community, as a collective unit, was invested

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\*Guru Amar Das in *Var Sorath*.

with the authority of the Guru, and was to guide itself in the light of the Word incorporated in the Holy Granth. It meant that the Word for the guidance of the community was the same as before, only its interpreter had changed his body. Instead of being one person he had assumed the shape of a corporate body, called the Panth (see pages 56-58).

Owing to certain historical causes this principle of Panthic Guruship has had no chance of working effectively, with the result that many sects have arisen in Sikhism, and the Sikhs do not know what to do with them. If after Guru Gobind Singh the Sikhs had instituted a central assembly to exercise the right of personal guidance in the name of the Guru, there would have been no differences in interpretation, and no sects would have been formed round those interpretations. But there being no central authority to check or control, unite or coordinate, there have arisen certain orders of preachers or missionaries who in the course of time have assumed the form of sects. Such are the Udasis, Nirmalas, Sewapanthis, Namdharis, Nirankaris, etc.

What is to be done with them? If the Sikhs exercise their collective authority in the name of the Panth as Guru, they cannot tolerate the existence of separate centres, having their own Gurus and their own interpretations of the doctrine. If, on the other hand, they allow the schisms to continue unchecked, their own authority, their own principle of Panthic Guruship is undermined, and they can make no progress with uncertain or divided doctrine.

In my view the remedy is not to throw out all those who differ from the Singh Sabha form of Sikhism, but to tolerate their differences for some time until we are able to remove the cause which has given rise to these sects. We should give a definite shape to the principle of Panthic Guruship, which

has been so long kept in abeyance. Let us recognise one body as the central authority for the whole community. Is it to be the S.G.P.C. or the Chief Khalsa Diwan? If no agreement is possible on any one of these, then a separate body should be created to assume the accredited position of the Guru Panth, which alone can claim the allegiance of the whole community. Many of the existing sects will not be able to reconcile themselves to the rule of the S. G. P. C., which as custodian of temples may have given them many a cause of difference. Even the reformed sections of the community may find some differences with the S. G. P. C. which, cannot be expected to be as zealous for effecting reforms in the ritual as the reformers would like it to be. The Committee should therefore be a mere custodian of temples and should not be burdened with the additional work of deciding the questions of doctrine for the Panth. If it is invested with the sanctity of the Guru Panth, it becomes too powerful to care for any criticism of its work as manager of temples and their property. It should not be deprived of the sense of responsibility to some authority outside its own constitution. This authority should be of an independent body, which should derive its power, not from the wealth of Gurdwaras, or influence with the Government, or any association with politics, but from the confidence placed in it by the community through its accredited representatives.

This body should not concern itself with the failings or differences of the so-called sects, except when these failings take the form of positive desecration of Guru Granth Sahib or anything else that is sacred. Let the Sikh principles be integrated through preaching, constant co-operation through liason bodies like the All-Sects Conference, and mutual love and toleration. The central body, above

mentioned, should publish a book of Sikh doctrines, well-authenticated with quotations from Sikh Scriptures and history. It should also prepare a standard history of the Sikhs from Guru Nanak down to the present day. These publications and the preaching based on them will level down all differences which justify the existence of sects, and then "there shall be one Guru, one Word and only one Interpretation," as designed by the Gurus.

### 3. CONCERNING NEW NEEDS OF MISSIONARY WORK

The standardisation of the Sikh doctrine is necessary not only for unifying the different Sikh elements, but also for organising missionary work beyond the borders of the Panjab. In fact no serious attempt has been made, since the days of the Gurus, to spread their message outside the Panjab. All sporadic attempts made to establish connections with Bombay and Malabar have come to nothing. The cause may be that the bodies responsible for these campaigns were not very serious in undertaking the work. Or it may be that their engagements in other spheres, or rivalries with other local associations did not allow their best men to leave the Panjab. The failure in the case of Malabar has a special significance. About five hundred men and women from that region were converted to Sikhism, and were baptised at the Akal Takht with the ceremony conducted in English. They were sent away to their province with the good wishes of the whole Panth, but in a short time almost all of them went back to their old faith. The reason was that they could not be provided with any spiritual outfit, such as the daily prayers done in their own tongue. No Gurdwara was provided. But even if one had been built for them, what programme could

they have followed in it? Which Scripture was to be installed therein? What music, what prayer?

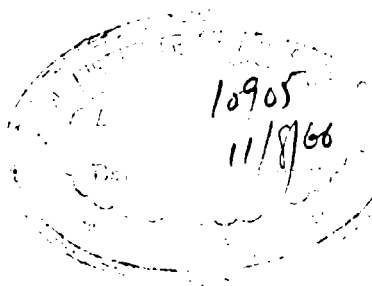
Here is the crux of the matter. As long as Sikhism had to deal with people whose language was akin to Panjabi or Hindi, it had all possibilities of advance. But as soon as it came in contact with people who could not be approached in the original language of the Sikh Scripture, the attempt failed, because those responsible for the missionary work were not yet certain whether they could use translations in place of the original. This is the problem. Can Malayalam, or for that matter any other language, serve the purpose of the Guru's Word? If Sikhism is to go to America or England, which language is to be used by the new converts, English or Panjabi? They will have to recite prayers individually, and approach God in their own tongue. How can their prayer be realistic if they offer it in the original Panjabi or Hindi?

But the difficulty is: Will the translation of the Guru's Word convey to them its whole content? Can the whole community, especially those who live in the Panjab, accept the translation with the same faith and reverence as they have been showing to the original? Will not different renderings create confusion in the Sikh world?

The answer to these pertinent questions depends on what our conception is of the 'inspiration' of the Word. Does the inspiration apply to the letter or to the meaning? If we believe in the verbal inspiration of the Guru's Word, then it is impossible to take translations as of equal efficacy with the original. But if we think that the idea lying behind the Word is sacred, then translations can be allowed. From this point of view, the divine Idea which the Guru shares with God is immortal; and the clothing of the Idea, which the Guru has in common with humanity,

is mortal, changeable and liable to grow strange and obsolete in a few lifetimes. 'For the immortal puts on mortality when great conceptions are clothed in the only garment ever possible—in terms whose import and associations are fixed by the form and pressure of an inexorably passing time.' Sikhism is for all time, and so is the Guru's utterance; but the language in which it is couched will become dead even to us Panjabis in a few generations. What shall we do then? We shall have to translate it. Then why should we not allow it to reach distant people in their own language?

The Guru himself believed in making translations. Guru Arjun, while preparing Guru Granth Sahib as the scripture of Sikhs, laid down an injunction for his followers that they were to translate the Holy Volume into Indian and foreign languages so that it might spread over the whole world as oil spreads over water.\*



\**Suraj Prakash*, Ras III.