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## FOREWORD

On the main entrance of the Imperial Record Office of India, now known as National Archives of India, New Delhi, there used to be written: *History is a science, no more no less*. It implies that history is science because it is based on scientific data, scientifically collected. From the other point of view, history is an art also because its presentation involves artistic skill. Science has been the subject of study of Sardar Jagjit Singh who taught Chemistry to the graduate classes for a number of years. During his teaching career he acquired a scientific attitude which he successfully applied to the study of history.

Sardar Jagjit Singh (1904-1997), a devoted Sikh and a dedicated scholar, was a prolific writer. He wrote a number of books and articles. One of his most important works is *Ghadar di Lehar* which was subsequently translated into English from the Punjabi original. It was the first scientific account of the saga of sacrifices made for the freedom of the country. Just before the outbreak of the First World War, Hindustan Ghadar Party was founded in the USA with the aim to achieve independence of India by armed revolution. They issued a paper which was named *Ghadar*. These Ghadarites, mostly Punjabi Sikhs, came to India to free the country from the colonial rule. The country was not prepared and subsequently the movement failed. A number of Ghadarites were arrested and hanged including Kartar Singh Sarabha. Another book Sardar Jagjit Singh wrote was *The Sikh Revolution* which brought into focus the main features of Sikh revolution comparing with other revolutions of the world. He emphasised the plebeian character of the Sikh revolution. It has rightly been stated that Guru Gobind Singh established Khalsa “with the deliberate plan that the downtrodden including the outcasts should capture political power. During the first thrust of French Revolution (1789-1792), the middle class became a privileged oligarchy in place of the hitherto privileged feudal aristocracy. When Khalsa wielded political power for the first time (1710-1716), the lowest of the low in Indian societal estimation were equal co-sharers of that authority.”

The book in hand, his last work, is a treatise entitled *Dynamics of Sikh Revolution*. He has written in the preface, “I completed ninety two years of my life on Feb. 12, 1996..... This is virtually the last flicker of an humble attempt to understand the Sikh Revolution in the light of studies relevant to our purpose.”

*Dynamics of Sikh Revolution* brings to focus the revolutionary ideology and its application to the social structure of the Sikh movement. Explaining the revolutionary character of the Sikh Panth, he writes, “All the untouchables whose very presence was supposed to pollute the air in the caste society became equal participants in the *sangats* and how the *rangrettas* patronised as equals in the Khalsa. This phenomenon was the product of religious experience and not of environmental factors. Because secular movements, as seen, have not produced such a qualitative fraternisation among such desperate and inimical elements and without social cohesion neither the egalitarianism in the Sikh Panth would have come into being nor the *Jats* (peasants), *Ramgarhias* (artisans) and *Abluwalias* (near outcasts) would have become political rulers.”

From the scrutiny of the manuscript of this book it appears that Sardar Jagjit Singh was still working on it, but providence did not allow him to complete this work. The reader will, therefore, find at the end of some chapters blank space left for references, which could not be completed.

We are grateful to the family of Sardar Jagjit Singh, especially his elder daughter who handed over the manuscript to the Institute for publication. We are sure that its publication will be of immense value to the scholars and readers in general, particularly those seeking to understand the revolution of Guru Nanak.

October 15, 1999

Kirpal Singh  
President

## PREFACE

I completed ninety-two years of my life on February 12, 1996; hence this is virtually the last flicker of my amateurish urge to interpret the Sikh Movement in the historical revolutionary perspective.

This is virtually the last flicker of an humble attempt to understand the Sikh Revolution in the light of the studies, relevant to our purpose, of revolutionary movements carried out by some eminent scholars.

I seek the indulgence of the readers for not having been able to put my best effort due to limitations of advanced age.

*Chandigarh, 1997*

Jagjit Singh

## INTRODUCTION

In our previous two publications, *The Sikh Revolution* and *In The Caravan of Revolution*, we attempted to establish the historical validity of the Sikh revolutionary movement. The present attempt, in the main, revolves around the same theme, but here we are not bound down within the confines of any particular discipline. Life is too complex, if not a mystery, to be fathomed through a compartmentalized approach, hence, should be explored from as many angles as possible.

The scholars of social sciences do recognize the limitations of their disciplines. In the first place, they have not been able to define even basic social concepts such as freedom, progress, justice, ideology, etcetera. Another kind of incompleteness in the study of social sciences stems from employing “imperfect knowledge” and “imperfect laws”. There is a serious debate among historians as to whether the validity of so-called historical facts can be established at all,<sup>1</sup> and the study of so-called general laws or universal hypotheses has raised doubts as to whether there are any “laws” in history and human behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

This fluid state of its knowledge, in which social science finds itself at present, has certain important implications. It is not possible to expect scientific standards in the study of social sciences, especially due to the human factor involved, comparable to those of the natural sciences. It is men, after all, who make history; and, “in addition to being a political and economic animal, man is also an ideological animal — this is nowhere clearer than in the revolutionary situation.”<sup>3</sup> Besides his mundane interests, he is also a bundle of instincts, sentiments, emotions, urges, aspirations, ideas, ideals, biases, prejudices, etc., which, in varied combinations, constitute the motive force of his actions. No ideas, ideals and emotions, no revolutions. This makes the task of interpreting historical and social movements highly complex and difficult.

Therefore, “as a complex macro-event, revolution would seem to suggest multiple rather than a monistic approach to the question of its causes.”<sup>4</sup> They are produced by a multiplicity of interdependent causes, and a sufficient account of which all is probably out of the question.<sup>5</sup> This is why certain economic interpretations of revolution, or even Pareto’s preoccupation with circulation of elites, invariably incur the charge of gross oversimplification.<sup>6</sup> Max Weber, who has contributed more than anyone else to the sociology of religion, is the first to protest against the one-sided assumptions of social and economic materialism; and he emphatically rejected the interpretation that, “the characteristic feature of a religious attitude can be simply the function of the social stratum, appearing as its ‘ideological’ expression, or a flex of its material or ideal interests.”<sup>7</sup>

This complexity of revolution makes it obvious, “that only a broadly based interdisciplinary approach can begin to grapple with the multilateral totality of the revolutionary process.”<sup>8</sup> “In the final analysis it may be that revolutions are too complex to lend themselves to anything stronger than probabilistic explanations.”<sup>9</sup>

We hope, therefore, that it would not be out of place, in this arena of ‘probability-improbability’ relationship, to venture an interpretation of the Sikh movement in the light of the well-known role which “Prophetic Mandate or Mission” has played in human affairs. We are aware of the view that, “Religion is the experience of the Holy”, and that this experience will ultimately

defy any attempt to describe, analyse, and comprehend its meaning scientifically.<sup>10</sup> But, one cannot ignore how the religious creative energy released by the Prophetic Missions of Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and other prophets changed the entire cultural content of civilizations, and, even otherwise, led to tremendous social, political, and historical development. Hence, it is not necessary for a scientific study of the Sikh movement to probe into the rationale of the revelation Guru Nanak received. What matters is the depth of the certitude of faith and commitment to his mandate it generated, as also the implicit faith and the magnitude of commitment to his mission it inspired among the Sikhs.

We have introduced a chapter just to show that there is a rational way of looking at faith as “ultimate concern”. Anyway, Gustave le Bon has shown, that “among the most important factors of history, one was preponderant...the factor of belief”<sup>11</sup>, and, “if a great number of historical events are often uncomprehended, it is because we seek to interpret them in the light of a logic which really has very little influence upon their genesis”<sup>12</sup>. This is exactly what we find happening regarding the interpretation of the Sikh movement, as we have not come across satisfactory conventional explanations for some vital issues related to it. For example, more than a dozen Bhaktas comprised the medieval radical *Bhagti* movement, which was, broadly speaking, not wedded to the old Hindu tradition and was anti-caste in its outlook. But, not in a single case was an organized and sustained effort made to found and develop a society outside the Hindu fold and the caste society in the manner it was done by the Sikh Gurus. Why not? And, what was the inspiration and the directive force that coordinated the development of the anti-caste character of the Sikh *Panth* over a long period of about 200 years during the Guru period? Similarly, why has the Sikh movement been the only movement of Indian origin which inspired and led the downtrodden to capture political power in their own interests? In fact, it is a land-mark even on the world map, for, the Khalsa, as an instrument of the Sikh plebeian political revolution, was created 90 years before the French Revolution. These vital issues, and some allied ones, cannot be brushed aside and have to be tackled. We have attempted here, in a humble way, to answer these questions, but it has to be made clear that this attempt is of an exploratory nature.

It is revolutionary ideology which inspires a revolution, and it is the men inspired by that ideology who carry it out. In fact, it is the hallmark of ideology which distinguished revolutionary movements from other armed upheavals. As it is attempted to interpret the Sikh movement while ignoring or underplaying in it the role of Sikh ideology, we have added a chapter on the significance of revolutionary ideology.

Another hurdle in understanding the Sikh movement is this prejudice that religion has played an altogether native role in history, and for that reason is an “opium for the masses”. We have devoted some space to remove this prejudice and to show that religion has also been the biggest integrating force in history. It has a great revolutionary potential and has factually given birth to two political revolutions — the Islamic and the Sikh.

Finally, we wish to add that in addition to the historical data we have relied heavily, for substantiating the viewpoint presented here, on the findings of or expositions by eminent scholars of political science, as this discipline is no less scientific or rational than that of history. We have quoted or referred to these scholars very extensively, and in order to convey the sense (if their writing correctly, we have tried to keep as close to their own language as possible.

The discipline of Sociology is mainly a descriptive science, and is not much concerned with the ‘how and why’ of social phenomena. But, it has the scientific merit of investigating and studying facts without bias — “*sine ira ac studio*”<sup>13</sup>. Hence it is very authentic for the *de facto* recognition of social phenomena or facts. For this reason, we have also quoted or referred extensively to the scholarly works of Max Weber and Joachim Wach, who have studied the sociology of religion in depth and detail, particularly for the purpose of authenticating, in so far it is possible, the phenomenon of Prophetic revelation and its implications.

We submit again that ours is a humble exploratory effort, and this work is published in the hope that it might draw the attention of those competent scholars who are in a position to study and develop this subject thoroughly.

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## REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

Revolution is by definition an extraordinary phenomenon<sup>2</sup> in history; mainly because it runs counter to the doctrine of political realism, which has been designated by Thucydides as almost an established law of normal human behaviour over the ages. “For of the Gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a law of nature wherever they can rule they will. This law was not made by us, and we are not the first who have acted upon it; we did but inherit it, and shall bequeath to all time; and we know that you and all mankind, if you are as strong as we are, would do as we do.”<sup>3</sup> Revolution is an extraordinary historical event mainly because its goal of altering a system of stratification in favour of the poor and the downtrodden is the antithesis of the said law of political realism. And, as recent events in Russia have confirmed, it is not possible to maintain the momentum of even established revolutions, much less to usher one in under adverse conditions, without substituting the common run of human motives based on self-interest and self-aggrandisement, by humanitarian motivation.

### 1. *The Role of Ideology*

Revolutionary ideology is, thus, the very soul of revolution. “Realism as a general theory of politics has greater relevance for those non-revolutionary periods and contexts wherein an unwritten, though imperfect, ideological consensus allows men to play the game of unabashed power politics.”<sup>4</sup> “Revolutions manifest all the features of ideological politics in their purest and most extreme form.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, they stem from deep-seated social and ideological differences.<sup>6</sup> A revolution has all the marks of being highly doctrinaire; and is an extraordinarily energetic ideological period.<sup>7</sup> All the four major revolutions in the post-medieval Western world (the English, American, French, and Russian) were “popular” revolutions “carried out in the name of ‘freedom’ for a majority against a privileged minority.”<sup>8</sup> The English Revolution came so much to be identified with the Puritan ideology that it came to be popularly known as the Puritan Revolution. Although the American War of Independence was fought mainly for liberation from colonial rule, but “Sam Adams, Tom Paine, Jefferson himself were trying to do more than just cut us off from the British Crown; they were trying to make us a more perfect society according to the ideals of the Enlightenment.”<sup>9</sup> And, we need only mention that the ideals of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” symbolized the French Revolution, and that the Bolshevik Revolution was born in the womb of Marxist ideology.

Revolutionary ideology fixes the humanitarian goals of a revolutionary movement, and infuses a sense of purpose to achieve these goals. In this way, it gives a direction as well as a momentum to the movement. “It provides an indictment of the old regime by spelling out what is wrong with it and why; (and) it conveys the idea that a future, or possible society is enormously superior to the existing one.”<sup>10</sup> “Ideology serves to elaborate and apply value judgements to a political phenomenon.”<sup>11</sup> “Revolution is the bearer of liberty and justice to the oppressed peoples...”<sup>12</sup> “Freedom, ‘that terrible word inscribed on the chariot of the storm’, is the motivating principle of all revolutions. Without it, justice seems inconceivable to the rebel’s mind.”<sup>13</sup> “Revolutions cannot do without the word ‘justice’ and the sentiments it arouses.”<sup>14</sup> Pure ideology establishes values or general “moral and ethical conceptions about right and wrong.”<sup>15</sup>

These are not merely theoretical postulates, because without pure ideology the ideas of practical ideology have no legitimation. It is the ideological goal that provides legitimation to the revolution. At the heart of a revolution must be a cause, the justness of which is recognized by everybody.<sup>16</sup> And how important legitimation is for the success of a cause is indicated by the fact that its need is felt even by established groups exercising political power; because the use of power without caring for legitimation is possible only in the very short run.<sup>17</sup>

The role of ideology in revolutions becomes clearer when we consider the distinction it leads to between revolutionary movement on the one hand, and non-revolutionary armed upheavals like revolts, rebellions, etc., on the other. We quote Camus and Ellul at some length as they have made valuable contributions to emphasize this distinction.

“In every act of rebellion, the man concerned experiences not only a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights, but also a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself. Thus, he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being wrong that he is willing to preserve them at all costs.”<sup>18</sup>

If both revolution and revolt are value oriented, then what leads to the distinction between the two in this respect? “The rebel is incensed by the way society, or his corner of it, is operating. But this indictment of it is highly personalistic; he is a devotee of the ‘devil’ theory of politics, which holds that certain ‘bad men’ are responsible for the evils plaguing them. The implication is that destruction, or at least removal, of them will end the time of trouble.”<sup>19</sup>

“The Revolt cannot be appeased either by sociological analysis or by abstract objects held accountable for deprivation (by the state)... In the final analysis, the important point here is the following; the state is an abstraction. And if (the state) is the true core of revolt, the crux of the problem, the rebel, owing to his need for a scapegoat, cannot react to it in this form. He then attacks the agents of the state...”<sup>20</sup> In other words, “Revolt lives in the immediate; it is in the immediate that it needs someone accountable...”<sup>21</sup> “It is the very concreteness and specificity of revolt that prevent it from calling the whole social order in question. It is concerned with men and measures, not with fundamental institutions. That is what separates it from revolution.”<sup>22</sup> “Revolt, therefore, has a clearly conservative or even retrograde character. As it does not make the linkage between felt misery or alienation and the institutional set-up of society, its horizons are limited to bringing it back to an equilibrium which is thought to have existed before things went wrong.”<sup>23</sup> The limited stakes and backward glance of revolt are associated with its low level of ideology.<sup>24</sup>

Ellul clinches the issue in these words. “What are then, the distinctions between revolt and revolution? It seems to me that there are two completely new elements — the theory and the institution. Revolt at its source is void of thought; it is visceral, physical. Revolution implies a doctrine, a plan, a programme, a theory of some kind, though the term ‘theory’ need not have a very precise meaning. At any rate, it is my impression that the existence of this preliminary thought is what identifies revolution. An idea may be expressed occasionally in the course of a revolt, but it is always incidental and emerges from the developing revolt itself.”<sup>25</sup> “Revolution begins with an idea. It is, specifically, the infusion of an idea into a historical experience, whereas revolt is simply a movement leading from individual experience to an idea.”<sup>26</sup>

## *2. Ideology in Relation to Other Factors*

There is a multiplicity of factors involved in revolution, which co-exist and interact at all stages of the movement. When we discuss the inter-relationship between ideology and environmental factors in such movements, all that we mean is that ideology dominates over environmental factors and determinates the course of the movement in the revolutionary period. Otherwise, the environmental factors are so powerful that their pulls have always succeeded, in the long run, in dragging down all revolutions to their pre-revolutionary levels, or very near that. There is not one exception. Revolutionary movements may be compared to the rise of tide in the ocean. The tide lasts only as long as the gravitational pull of the moon overrides that of the earth. The revolutionary character of a movement is retained to the extent its ideology predominates over its environmental factors. All the same, revolutionary movements, though rare and short-lived, deserve a separate attention, because they are a qualitatively distinct phenomenon from other armed mass upheavals as well as because these are the torch-bearers of human progress.

There are other interacting environmental factors too, but we will take notice here only of two, namely, (a) social and economic tensions, and (b) the class interests of the constituents of a movement, because these have been emphasized in the recent interpretation of the Sikh movement.

#### (A) SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TENSIONS

“This illustrates a general principle which can be ignored only at great risk in the study of revolution, indeed in the study of politics in general; speaking of a political or social movement in the singular should not blind us to the fact that every movement is the resultant of political, social, economic, and psychological factors which are often discrete, disharmonious, and sometimes contradictory.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, neither ideology nor social and economic tensions can, exclusively by themselves, cause revolution. Trotsky writes: “In reality, the mere existence of privations is not enough to cause an insurrection; if it were, the masses would always be in revolt.”<sup>28</sup> Brinton, after studying in depth the typical English, American, French, and Russian Revolutions, comes to the conclusion that these, “clearly were not born in societies economically retrograde; on the contrary, they took place in societies economically progressive, in spite of short term cyclic variations.”<sup>29</sup> France in 1789 was a striking example of a rich society with an impoverished government.<sup>30</sup> Even in Russia of 1917, the productive capacity of society as a whole was certainly greater than at any other time in Russian history.<sup>31</sup> Of course, there were always in these, sub-marginally poor people, however, the important thing to note is that French history and Russian history are filled with famines, plagues, bad harvests, many of which were accompanied by sporadic rioting, but in each case only by one revolution.<sup>32</sup> In other words, extreme discontent based on economic or social tensions, is not enough to produce revolution. What is missing is some extra push of a revolutionary ideology: “A dynamic of a genuinely spiritual and religious kind.”<sup>33</sup>

“Revolution is bound to embody a journey to the absolute in the hearts of those who take part in it. They are bound to see it as the absolute solution to history, so that before they make it, they believe in it. It is a cult object, whereas revolt provides none. Revolt ‘rumbles’: it is wrath, a sudden gust, an explosion immediate. Revolution is an idol; it is the Holy Revolution, venerated and cherished before being set in motion. It absorbs all the religious emotion that disappears from surrounding society. It is the solemn bearer of man’s hope. From the outset, it is not a random adventure. It is the exposure and expression of mental images cherished by a social group, the ripening consciousness of the collective unconscious, the recovery of a historical memory projected into the future. And that is why, in order to ascertain whether a society is likely to enter revolutionary action, it is not enough to examine merely the power structure, economic institutions,

class conflicts, etc,... there can be no pure spontaneity in revolution, in which there is always forethought and hence an inspiration.”<sup>34</sup>

There is also some element in human nature which runs counter to political realism, as revolutionary inspiration sometimes evokes a universal response, cutting across class interests and regional loyalties. Wordsworth was moved to sing:

“France standing on the top of golden hours,  
And human nature seeming born again.”

Far away in unenlightened Russia, noblemen illuminated their homes in honour of the fall of the Bastille.<sup>35</sup> In fact, it is this inspiration which stamps revolutionary movements, despite their failures, as the lighthouses on the path towards human freedom and equality. The French Revolution is a shining example; it has continued to inspire generation after generation to this day.

## (B) ECONOMIC INTERESTS

The role of economics in history is no doubt very important, but “the Marxist concept of revolution as an economic cataclysm suffers from an excessive preoccupation with class struggle as an economic phenomenon. Economic stratification is emphasized to the point of neglecting or confusing the role of other forms of stratification”.<sup>36</sup>

“Revolutions are too complex and too unique to be reducible to a facile formula such as bourgeois or proletarian revolution.”<sup>37</sup> Then, we have the clear case of the Indian caste system in which political and economic status was subordinated to the socio-religious status of the Brahmin priestly caste. A Chaturpati king was lower in ‘caste-status’ than his own priest (purohita), who was economically dependent on the king,<sup>38</sup> and “the Visas (Vaisyas) bow spontaneously to the chief (rajan), who is preceded by a Brahmin”.<sup>39</sup> It is even more important to note that this caste system continued to prevail in India as a stable system for more than a couple of millennia.

What clinches the issue is Brinton’s factual analysis of the social and economic status of the revolutionists who participated in the four important modern revolutions studied by him. From the membership of Jacobin clubs, which served as centres of revolutionary action, and resemble the English Independents, the Russian Soviets, and the American corresponding committees, he comes to the conclusion that the Jacobin was neither a nobleman nor a beggar, but almost anything in between. The Jacobins represent a complete cross-section of their communities.<sup>40</sup> In England, “the merchants of London, Bristol, and other towns, great lords, small land owning gentry, all rose in sedition against the King”.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, “the poorer peasants, especially in the North and West, actually sided with the King and against the revolutionists”.<sup>42</sup> The strength of the revolutionary movement in America in the long run lay with the plain people, but it was truly aristocratic in its commencement.<sup>43</sup> And, the February Revolution in Russia seems to have been welcomed by all classes, save the most conservative of conservatives — a few army officers, some members of the court and the old nobility.<sup>44</sup> So, it is not sound to reduce the genesis, or growth of revolutionary movements exclusively in terms of their economics.

It is true that people are normally preoccupied with their mundane requirements and desires, and any disturbances in their fulfilment cause discontentment. “Now one might quite justifiably argue a priori that a wholly contented man could not possibly be a revolutionist. But the trouble is that there are so many ways of being discontented as well as contented on this earth. Indeed, the

cruder Marxists, and the cruder classical economists, make an almost identical error; they both assume that economics deals exclusively with whatever makes men happy or miserable. Men have many incentives to action which the economist, limited to the study of men's rational actions, simply cannot include in his work. They observably do a great deal that simply makes no sense at all, if we assume them to be guided wholly by any conceivable economic motive: nearly starving in the British Museum to write *Das Kapital*, for instance, ..."<sup>45</sup>

### 3. *Implications and Comments*

The discussion we have had so far has, as will be elaborated later, very important bearing on the understanding of the Sikh movement. Unless it is contended that the discipline of political science does not measure up to the scientific standards of history, or that the scholars we have cited are not authoritative enough, it should be clear that any interpretation of the Sikh revolutionary movement by excluding the role of its ideology, i.e., the inspiration of Sikh religion, is unwarranted and arbitrary. And so is the attempt to trace the genesis and development of the movement exclusively to social and economic tensions, if any, between the different constituents of the Panth.

Thus, the main issues, to which answers have to be found on a priority basis, are:

As there can be no revolutionary movements without substituting, may be for a short-lived period, motivation based on self-interest and self-aggrandisement by humanitarian motivation, what was the source of the idealistic motive force that inspired the Sikh movement? And, as revolutions do not just happen but have to be made by men surcharged by such an ideology, who played the leading role in this respect?

The answers to these questions should be found within the historical perspective that the Sikh movement not only won a political state, but that it was won by the downtrodden; and it was just one aspect of the movement which strove to further human equality on all planes — spiritual, social, and political.

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10. Hagopian, p. 2.
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19. Hagopian, p. 11.
20. Ellul, op. cit. p. 17.
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45. Ibid., p. 116.

## THE ELEMENT OF FAITH

The Sikh movement was conceived in a spiritual faith and was reared upon the basis of this faith. It is difficult to grasp what faith really is, but one cannot run away from this abstruse problem either, because it is very important to understand, in so far as it is possible, in rational terms the dynamics of faith in order to understand the dynamics of the Sikh movement.

### 1. *Faith as Ultimate Concern*

Paul Tillich in his book *Dynamics of Faith*, made an important contribution towards tackling rationally the enigma of faith, and in this chapter, we would take his help for elaborating, at an empirical level, some of the premises we need for the amplification of our main subject.

Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned; the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man's ultimate concern. Man, like every living being, is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his very existence, such as food and shelter. But man, in contrast to other living beings, has spiritual concerns — cognitive, aesthetic, social, political. Some of them are urgent, often extremely urgent, and each as well as the vital concerns can claim ultimacy for a human life or the life of a social group. If it claims ultimacy, it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfilment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name. If a national group makes the life and growth of the nation its ultimate concern, it demands that all other concerns — economic well-being, health and life, family, aesthetic and cognitive truth, justice and humanity, be sacrificed.

“But, it is not only the unconditional demand made by that which is one's ultimate concern, it is also the promise of ultimate fulfilment which is accepted in the act of faith...it is exclusion from such fulfilment which is threatened if the unconditional demand is not obeyed.”<sup>1</sup>

The faith manifest in the religion of the Old Testament is a glaring example, if only because of the tenacity of purpose and endurance it has revealed in the history of the Jewish people. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deut 6:5). This is what ultimate concern means.

“Another example, almost a counter-example, yet nevertheless equally revealing, is the ultimate concern with ‘success’ and with social standing and economic power. It is the god of many people in the highly competitive Western culture and it does what every ultimate concern must do; it demands unconditional surrender to its laws even if the price is the sacrifice of genuine human relations, personal conviction, and creative *eros*.”<sup>2</sup>

The content of faith given in the two examples differs materially, but in both cases it matters infinitely for the life of the believer. Here we are concerned not with the content of faith, but only with its formal definition.

### 2. *Faith as a Centred Act*

“Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It happens in the centre of the personal life and includes all its elements... They all are united in the act of faith, but faith is not the sum total of their impacts. It transcends every special impact as well as the totality of them and it has itself a decisive impact on each of them...

“Faith as an act of the total personality is not imaginable without the participation of the unconscious centres in the personality structure. They are always present and decide largely about the content of faith. But, on the other hand, faith is a conscious act and the unconscious elements participate in the creation of faith only if they are taken into the personal centre which transcends each of them...

“Faith as the embracing and centred act of the personality is ‘ecstatic’. It transcends both the drives of the non-rational unconscious and the structures of the rational conscious. It transcends them but does not destroy them. The ecstatic character of faith does not exclude its rational character although it is not identical to it, and it includes non-rational strivings without being identical with them. In the ecstasy of faith, there is an awareness of truth and ethical values; there are also past loves and hates, conflicts and reunions, individual and collective influences. ‘Ecstasy’ means ‘standing outside of oneself — without ceasing to be oneself — with all the elements which are united in the personal centre...

“There is certainly affirmation by the will of what concerns one ultimately, but faith is not a creation of the will. In the ecstasy of faith, the will to accept and surrender is an element, but not the cause. And this is also true of feeling. Faith is not an emotional outburst; this is not the meaning of ecstasy. Certainly, emotion is in it, as in every act of man’s spiritual life. But emotion does not produce faith. Faith has a cognitive content and is an act of the will. It is the unity of every element in the centred self. Of course the unity of all elements in the act of faith does not prevent one or the other element from dominating in a special form of faith. It dominates the character of faith but it does not create the act of faith.”

There is a presupposition that fear or something else from which faith is derived is more original and basic than faith. But this presupposition cannot be proved. Faith precedes all attempts to derive it from something else, because these attempts are themselves based on faith.<sup>3</sup>

### *3. The Source of Faith*

“The reality of man’s ultimate concern reveals something about his being, namely, that he is able to transcend the flux of relative and transitory experiences of his ordinary life. Man’s experiences, feelings, thoughts are conditioned and finite. They not only come and go, but their content is of finite and conditional concern — unless they are elevated to unconditional validity. But this presupposes the general possibility of doing so; it presupposes the element of infinity in man. Man is able to understand in an immediate personal and central act the meaning of the ultimate, the unconditional, the absolute, the infinite. This alone makes faith a human potentiality.

“Human potentialities are powers that drive towards actualisation. Man is driven towards faith by his awareness of the infinite to which he belongs, but which he does not own like a possession. This is in abstract terms what concretely appears as the ‘restlessness of the heart’ within the flux of life...

“The unconditional concern, which is faith, is the concern about the unconditional. The infinite passion, as faith has been described, is the passion for the infinite. Or, to use our first term, the ultimate concern is concern about what is experienced as ultimate. In this way, we have turned from the subjective meaning of faith as a centred act of the personality to the objective meaning, to what is meant in the act of faith. It would not help at this point of our analysis to call that which is meant in the act of faith ‘God’ or ‘a god.’ For at this step we ask: What in the idea of God constitutes divinity? The answer is: it is the element of the unconditional and of ultimacy. This carries the quality of divinity. If this is seen, one can understand why almost everything ‘in heaven and on earth’ has received ultimacy in the history of human religion. But we also can understand that a critical principle was and is at work in man’s religious consciousness, namely, that which is really ultimate over against what claims to be ultimate but is only preliminary, transitory, finite.

“The term ‘ultimate concern’ unites the subjective and the objective side of the act of faith — the *fides qua creditur* (the faith through which one believes) and the *fides quae creditor* (the faith which is believed). The first is the classical term for the centred act of the personality, the ultimate concern. The second is the classical term for that to which this act is directed, the ultimate itself, expressed in symbols of the divine. This distinction is very important, but not ultimately so, for the one side cannot be without the other. There is no faith without a content towards which it is directed. There is always something meant in the act of faith. And there is no way of having the content of faith except in the act of faith. All speaking of divine matters which is not done in the state of ultimate concern is meaningless. Because that which is meant in the act of faith cannot be approached in any other way than through an act of faith.

“In terms like ultimate, unconditional, infinite, absolute, the difference between subjectivity and objectivity is overcome. The ultimate of the act of faith and the ultimate that is meant in the act of faith are one and the same. This is symbolically expressed by the mystics when they say that their knowledge of God, is the knowledge God has of himself; and it is expressed by Paul when he says (1 Cor. 13) that he will know as he is known, namely, by God. God never can be object without being at the same time subject. Even a successful prayer is, according to Paul (Rom. 8) not possible without God as spirit praying within us. The same experience expressed in abstract language is the disappearance of the ordinary subject-object scheme in the experience of the ultimate, the unconditional. In the act of faith, that which is the source of this act is present beyond the cleavage of subject and object. It is present as both and beyond both.

“This character of faith gives an additional criterion for distinguishing true and false ultimacy. The finite which claims infinity without having it (as, e.g., a notion of success) is not able to transcend the subject-object scheme. It remains an object which the believer looks at as a subject. He can approach it with ordinary knowledge and subject it to ordinary handling... Nationalistic ecstasy can produce a state in which the subject is almost swallowed by the object. But after a period the subject emerges again, disappointed radically and totally, and by looking at the nation in a sceptical and calculating way does injustice even to its justified claims. The more idolatrous a faith, the less it is able to overcome the cleavage between the subject and object. For that is the difference between true and idolatrous faith. In true faith the ultimate concern is a concern about the truly ultimate, while in idolatrous faith preliminary, finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy. The inescapable consequence of an idolatrous faith is ‘existential disappointment’, a disappointment which penetrates into the very existence of man. This is the dynamic of idolatrous faith; that it is faith, and as such, the centred act of a personality; that the centring point is something which is more or less on the periphery; and that, therefore, the act of faith leads to a loss of the centre and to

disruption of the personality. The ecstatic character of even an idolatrous faith can hide this consequence only for a certain time. But finally it breaks into the open.”<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. *Faith and Reason*

If faith is understood as the state of being ultimately concerned, no conflict between faith and reason need exist. In order to show their actual relationship, namely, the way in which they lie within each other, one must ask first, is the word “reason” used when confronted with faith? Is it meant in the sense of scientific method, logical strictness, and technical calculating? Or is the word “reason” used in the sense of the source of meaning, of structure, of norms, and of principles? “In the first case, reason gives the tools for recognizing and controlling reality, and faith gives the direction in which this control may be exercised. One could call this kind of reason technical reason, providing for means and not for ends. Reason in this sense concerns the daily life of everybody and is the power which determines the technical civilization of our times. In the second case, reason is identical with the humanity of man in contrast to all other beings. It is involved in the search for knowledge, the experience of art, the actualisation of moral commands; it makes a centred personal life and participation in community possible. If faith were the opposite of reason, it would tend to dehumanise man. This consequence has been drawn, theoretically and practically, in religious and political authoritarian systems. A faith which destroys reason destroys itself and the humanity of man. For only a man who has the structure of reason is able to be ultimately concerned, to distinguish ultimate and preliminary concerns, to understand the unconditional commands of the ethical imperative, and to be aware of the presence of the holy. All this is valid only if the second meaning of reason is presupposed — reason as the meaningful structure of mind and reality, and not the first meaning — reason as a technical tool.

“Reason is the precondition of faith; faith is the act in which reason reaches ecstatically beyond itself. This is the opposite side of their being within each other. Man’s reason is finite; it moves within finite relations when dealing with the universe and with man himself... But reason is not bound to its own finitude. It is aware of it and, in so doing, rises above it. Man experiences a belonging to the infinite which, however, is neither a part of himself nor something in his power. It must grasp him, and if it does, it is a matter of infinite concern. Man is finite, man’s reason lives in preliminary concerns, but man is also aware of his potential infinity, and this awareness appears as his ultimate concern, as faith. If reason is grasped by an ultimate concern, it is driven beyond itself; but it does not cease to be reason, finite reason. The ecstatic experience of an ultimate concern does not destroy the structure of reason. Ecstasy is fulfilled, not denied, rationally. Reason can be fulfilled only if it is driven beyond the limits of its finitude, and experiences the presence of the ultimate, the holy. Without such an experience, reason exhausts itself and its finite contents. Finally, it becomes filled with irrational or demonic contents and is destroyed by them. The road leads from reason fulfilled in faith, through reason without faith, to reason filled with demonic-destructive faith. The second stage is only a point of transition, since there is no vacuum in the spiritual life, as there is none in nature. Reason is the presupposition of faith, and faith is the fulfilment of reason. Faith as the state of ultimate concern is reason in ecstasy. There is no conflict between the nature of faith and the nature of reason; they are within each other.”<sup>5</sup>

#### 5. *The Truth of Faith and Historical Truth*

“Historical truth has a character quite different from that of scientific truth. History reports unique events, not repetitious processes which can be tested again and again. Historical events are not subject to experiment... History describes, explains, and understands. And understanding presupposes participation. This is the difference between historical and scientific truth. In historical

truth, the interpreting subject is involved; in scientific truth it is detached. Since the truth of faith means total involvement, historical truth has often been compared with the truth of faith. However, in a genuine historical work, detached and controlled observation is as much used as in the observation of physical or biological processes. Historical truth is first of all factual truth; in this it is distinguished from the poetic truth of epics or from mythical truth of legends. This difference is decisive for the relation of the truth of faith to the truth of history. Faith cannot guarantee factual truth. But faith can and must interpret the meaning of facts from the point of view of man's ultimate concern. In doing so it transfers historical truth into the dimension of the truth of faith...

“The truth of faith cannot be made dependent on the historical truth of stories and legends in which faith has expressed itself. It is a disastrous distortion of the meaning of faith to identify it with the belief in the historical validity of the Biblical stories. The search for the degree of probability or improbability of a Biblical story has to be made with all the tools of a solid philological and historical method. It is not a matter of faith to decide if the presently used edition of the Moslemic Koran is identical with the original text, although this is the fervent belief of most of the adherents of Mohammed; it is not a matter of faith to decide how much legendary, mythological and historical material is amalgamated in the stories about the birth and the resurrection of Christ... They are questions of historical truth, not of the truth of faith. Faith can say that something of ultimate concern has happened in history because the question of the ultimate in being and meaning is involved. Faith can say that the Old Testament law which is given as the law of Moses has unconditional validity for those who are grasped by it, no matter how much or how little can be traced to a historical figure of that name. Faith can ascertain its own foundation — the Mosaic law, or Jesus as the Christ, Mohammed the prophet, or Buddha the illuminated. But faith cannot ascertain the historical conditions which made it possible for these men to become matters of ultimate concern for large sections of humanity. Faith includes certitude for its own foundation — for example, an event in history which has transformed history — for the faithful. But faith does not include historical knowledge about the way this event took place. Therefore, faith cannot be shaken by historical research even if its results are critical of the traditions in which the event is reported. This independence of historical truth is one of the most important consequences of the understanding of faith as the state of ultimate concern. It liberates the faithful from a burden they cannot carry after the demands of scholarly honesty have shaped their conscience.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *6. The Truth of Faith and Philosophical Truth*

Philosophy, in its genuine meaning, is carried on by people in whom the passion of an ultimate concern is united with a clear and detached observation of the way ultimate reality manifests itself in the process of the universe. It is this element of ultimate concern behind philosophical ideas which supplies the element of faith in them. Their vision of the universe and of man's predicament within it unites faith and conceptual work. Philosophy is not only the mother's womb out of which science and history have come, it is also an ever-present element in actual scientific and historical work. The frame of reference within which the great physicists have seen and are seeing the universe of their inquiries is philosophical, even if their actual inquiries verify it. In no case is it a result of their discoveries. It is always a vision of the totality of being which consciously or unconsciously determines the frame of their thought.

In the same way, the historian is consciously or unconsciously a philosopher. It is quite obvious that every task of the historian beyond the finding of facts is dependent on evaluation of historical factors, especially the nature of man, his freedom, his determination, his development out of nature, etc. It is less obvious but also true that even in the act of finding historical facts

philosophical presuppositions are involved. This is especially true in deciding, out of the infinite number of happenings in every infinitely small moment of time, which facts shall be called historically relevant facts. The historian is further forced to give his evaluation of sources and their reliability, a task which is not independent of his interpretation of human nature. Finally, in the moment in which a historical work gives implicit or explicit assertions about the meaning of historical events for human existence, the philosophical presuppositions of history are evident. Where there is philosophy, there is expression of an ultimate concern; there is an element of faith, however hidden it may be by the passion of the historian for pure facts.<sup>7</sup>

### 7. *Implications and Comments*

The exercise in this chapter aims at drawing the attention of some historians, who dismiss the historical validity of faith as an irrational phantom, that there is a rational way of looking at it. Anyhow, the fact that the might of a strong belief, whatever its origin and character, as an irresistible historical factor can in no way be ignored. That the French Revolution defended itself victoriously against a Europe up in arms was due to the fact that it had founded, not a new system of government, but a new religion. Invincible Rome herself had to bow before the armies of nomad shepherds illuminated by the faith of Mohammed. For the same reason, the kings of Europe could not resist the tatterdemalion soldiers of the Convention. Like all apostles, they were ready to immolate themselves, the sole end of propagating their beliefs, which according to their dream, were to renew the world.<sup>8</sup>

A political or religious belief constitutes an act of faith elaborated in the unconsciousness over which, in spite of all appearances, reason has no hold. The man hypnotised by his faith becomes an apostle, ready to sacrifice his interests, his happiness, and even his life for the triumph of his faith. The absurdity of his belief matters little. The chief characteristic of the mystic temperament consists in the attribution of a mysterious power not only to superior beings, but also to forces which are incarnated in the form of ideas, ideals, formulae, or slogans. The mystic spirit is at the bottom of all the religious and most political beliefs. Grafted on the sentiments and passionate impulses which it directs, mystic logic constitutes the might of the great popular movements. Certitudes of mystic origin possess the marvellous power of entire domination over thought, and can only be affected by time.<sup>9</sup> The force of the political and religious beliefs which have moved the world resides precisely in the fact that, being born of affective and mystic elements, they are neither created nor directed by reason. Political or religious beliefs have a common origin and obey the same laws. They are formed not with the aid of reason, but more often contrary to all reason. Buddhism, Islam, the Reformation, Jacobinism, Socialism, etc. , seem very different forms of thought. Yet, they have identical affective and mystic bases, and obey a logic that has no affinity with rational logic.<sup>10</sup>

Also, we must not forget that, although the origin of a revolution may be perfectly rational, the reasons invoked in preparing for it do not influence the crowd until they have been transformed into sentiments. Rational logic can point to the abuses to be destroyed, but to move the multitude, its hopes must be awakened. This can only be effected by the action of the affective and mystic element which gives man the power to act. At the time of the French Revolution for example, rational logic, in the hands of the philosophers, demonstrated the inconveniences of the *ancien regime*, and excited the desire to change it. Mystic logic inspired belief in the virtues of a society created in all its members according to certain principles (of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity). Affective logic unchained the passions confined by the bonds of ages and led to the worst excesses. Whatever its origin, a revolution is not productive of results until it has sunk into the soul of the multitude.<sup>11</sup>

Given the silent power of reason over mystic beliefs, it is quite useless to discuss, as is so often done, the rational value of revolutionary or political ideas. Only their influence can interest us.<sup>12</sup>

Passion supports convictions, but hardly ever creates them. Now, the true Jacobin (i.e., any staunch secular revolutionist) has forcible convictions. What is to sustain them? Here the mystic elements come into play. The Jacobin is a mystic who has replaced the old divinities by new gods. Imbued with the power of words and formulae (of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity), he attributes to these a mysterious power. So that, although the Jacobin is a great reasoner, this does not mean that he is in the least guided by reason. When he imagines he is being led by reason, it is really his passions and his mysticism that lead him. Like all those who are convinced and hemmed in by the walls of faith, he can never escape therefrom.<sup>13</sup> In other words, there is no escape from the element of faith or the mystic and affective logic involved therein, whether it is a religious revolution or a purely secular revolution.

Yet, the Sikh revolutionary movement is sought to be interpreted by some scholars by underplaying, even ignoring or excluding, its very basis — the Sikh faith, its ideology, and the mystic and affective elements involved therein, under the mistaken false notion that in so doing they are strictly adhering to a rational logic. What is needed is not the exclusion of faith and its concomitants, but the demarcation, as done by Paul Tillich, between the sphere of genuine faith, on the one hand, and the spheres of idolatrous faith and irrational belief, on the other.

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5. Ibid., pp. 74-77.
6. Ibid., pp. 85-89.
7. Ibid., pp. 89-95.
8. Gustave Le Bon: *The Psychology of Revolution*, p. 18.
9. Ibid., pp. 26-27, 87.
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## RELIGIONS: FAITH AND REVOLUTION

When we talk of religion in this chapter, we are only concerned with the essence of religion.

### 1. *The Essence of Religion*

Wach writes: “However, the mistake must be avoided of defining ‘religion’ in arbitrary fashion, in identifying it exclusively with ideas, rites, or institutions, which are subject to change and transformation, instead of conceiving it as that profoundest source from which all human existence is nourished and upon which it depends in all its aspects: man’s communion with God. Let us end with the witness Carlyle has borne. ‘It is well said, in every sense, that a man’s religion is the chief fact with regard to him. A man’s or a nation of men’s. By religion I do not mean here the Church creed, which he professes, the articles of faith which he will sign, and, in words and otherwise, assert; not this wholly, in many cases not at all... But the thing a man does practically believe, and this often enough without asserting it even to himself, much less to others; the thing a man does practically lay to heart, and know for certain, concerning his vital relations to the mysterious Universe; and his duty and destiny there; that is in all cases the primary thing for him, and creatively determines all the rest.’”<sup>1</sup>

### 2. *Positive and Negative Roles*

Religion has played both a positive and a negative role in history, and on an extensive scale. It sanctioned hereditary rights, hierarchy, oppression, slavery, caste system, and what not. One fact stands out for everyone who reviews the history of society under the viewpoint of its interrelation and interaction with religion. Religious motives may work positively and negatively. They ‘build up’ and they ‘pull down’.<sup>2</sup> “But to accuse religion in general of siding under all circumstances with the existing order of society — sound or sick — means to fail to distinguish between its nature and its forms.”<sup>3</sup>

The important thing about a religious belief as pin-pointed by Brinton, is “that under its influence men work very hard and excitedly in common to achieve here or somewhere an ideal, a pattern of life not at the moment universally — or even largely — achieved. Religion attempts to close in favour of human hopes the gap between what men are and what men would like to be; at least in its youthful, fresh, and active phase, it will not for a moment admit that such a gap can long exist”.<sup>4</sup>

Any way, we are by no means attempting a dissertation on the subject of ‘Religion and Revolution’. We are interested only in those contributions of religion to the revolutionary cause which would help us understand the Sikh movement.

### 3. *Humanitarian Values*

The most significant item shared by religion and revolution, which makes them sail in the same boat, are the humanitarian values. It has been seen that the very *raison d’être* of a revolution is the abolition or radical reconstruction of a *de facto* system of stratification in favour of the *downtrodden and the oppressed*. A revolution, thus, aims at closing the gap between what their actual condition is, and what it should be. This is what makes revolution idealistic, and its concern for the poor and the weak makes it humanitarian.

Now, humanitarian values are the very life-blood of religion. It is Judaism that gave birth to humanitarianism,<sup>5</sup> and most of the great religions that followed were deeply concerned with the fate of the sick, the weak, and the oppressed. “Wherever patriarchal relationship of power and coercion determined the social stratification, but especially in the Orient, the prophetic religions were able, in connection with the aforementioned purely practical situation, to create a protectorate of the weak, i.e., women, children, slaves, etc.”<sup>6</sup> Even the later Jewish prophets hurled their ‘Woe be unto you’ against those who oppressed and enslaved the poor, those who joined field to field and those who deflected justice by bribes. These were the typical actions leading to class-stratification in the ancient world, and were intensified by the development of the city-state (*polis*).<sup>7</sup> “Jesus nowhere explicitly states that pre-occupation with wealth leads to unbrotherliness, but this notion is at the heart of the matter, for the prescribed injunctions definitely contain the primordial ethic of mutual help which is characteristic of neighbourhood association of poorer people. The chief difference is that in Jesus’ message, acts of mutual help have been systematized into an ethic with a religious mood and a fraternalistic sentiment of love. The injunction of mutual help was also construed universally, extended to everyone. The ‘neighbour’ is the one nearest at hand.”<sup>8</sup>

In fact, “Prophets systematized religion with a view to simplifying the relationship of man to the world, by reference to an ultimate and integrated value position”.<sup>9</sup> And more often than not, the injunctions of the prophets included, directly or by implication, exemptions from further compliance with the moral and legal precepts of the traditional order, since obedience is now to the rules of an infinitely higher one. This road leads to confrontation with the *status quo*, i.e., with established systems of stratification in their different forms. Buddha did not attack the caste system directly; but, by substituting merit for birth as the basis of society, he had shaken the ideological base of the Brahminical society. The Bible is full of good revolutionary doctrines.<sup>10</sup> The political implications of Protestantism had much to do with the overthrow of the old concept of hierarchy in the secular field as well. Where Calvinistic Protestantism was powerful, hereditary aristocracy and kingship were either greatly weakened or abandoned. In fact, the Reformation is part of the general process of social change in which the four-class system of peasant societies began to break up in Europe.” In Max Weber’s opinion, no other religion had influenced the course of human development in quite such a revolutionary manner as had puritanical religiosity.<sup>12</sup> About Islam, there is no doubt, that it did not hesitate to carry the mission of the *Milat* (essentially that of human equality and brotherhood) as far as Spain with the help of arms.

#### 4. *Liberty and Equality*

Human liberty and equality are either humanitarian values, or basic human urges, or both. In any case, these deserve separate mention, because these urges have played such an important role in revolutions.

“Equality and inequality of conditions are among the regulative principles most often stressed by Tocqueville. Any given society must be dominated by one, and only one such principle.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, any inequality is bound to lead to strain and tension within a society.

Whatever other causes of revolution in general might or might not be there, the basic urges of liberty (shared even by animals) and of equality were always found to be associated with a revolution. The sum and substance of Hannah’s thesis is that revolution in its most enthusiastic form is to be understood as the quest for freedom.<sup>14</sup> “Freedom, that terrible word inscribed on the

chariot of the storm, is the motivating principle of all revolutions.”<sup>15</sup> “Revolutionaries have always believed that they have risen against oppression.”<sup>16</sup>

Gorky perceived in religion a spirit of human brotherhood.<sup>17</sup> Socialism shared with religion a thirst for justice and equality out of religio-social tradition going back to Moses.<sup>18</sup> “Religion is an integral part of human psychology; striving for the brotherhood of man; denying of self-interest.”<sup>19</sup> Religion cannot exist without a strange form of love. Not to calculate; to give everything for the sake of life and living man.<sup>20</sup>

##### 5. Behavioural Similarities

In addition to humanitarian values, there are many other important features common to religion and revolution. Brinton finds many similarities in the behaviour patterns of men inspired by religion and those of secular revolutionists. “Now this insider, it would seem, finds in his devoted service to the revolution most of the psychological satisfaction commonly supplied by what we call religion... Since both Jacobins and Bolsheviks were violently hostile to Christianity and boasted themselves atheists or at least deists, this analogy has given a great deal of offence both to Christians and their enemies. For the Marxist in particular, this assertion that his behaviour has similarities with the behaviour of men under the acknowledged influence of religion, is like a red rag to a bull. Actually, to judge from past experience, it would seem that large numbers of men can be brought to do certain very important things, of the kind the communists want to have done, under the influence of what we call religion, that is, some pattern of more or less similar sentiments, moral aspirations and ritualistic practices. Marxism as a religion has already got a great deal done; Marxism as a ‘scientific theory’ alone would hardly have got beyond the covers of *Das Kapital* and the learned journals.”<sup>21</sup>

To discern the element of religion in the behaviour of ardent extremists is not to deny the existence of economic motives. “The whole point, indeed, of the three revolutions we are about to analyse, is that religious enthusiasm, organization, ritual, and ideas appear inextricably bound up with economic and political aims, with a program to change *things*, not just to convert *people*.”

The insiders in all three of our complete revolutions, and indeed to a certain extent in the fourth, the American Revolution, seem to have wished to put into life here on earth some of the order, the discipline, the contempt for the easy vices, which the Calvinists sought to put there.”<sup>22</sup>

The Jacobins were in principle against gambling, drunkenness, sexual irregularities of all sorts, ostentatious display of poverty, idleness, thieving, and of course in general all sorts of crimes.<sup>23</sup> That the Bolshevik leaders were almost all ascetics is perhaps common place. Lenin was notably austere, and contemptuous of ordinary comforts. Indeed, the general tone among the high command of Bolshevism was in those early years that of a consecrated and almost monastic group. They felt, as the Puritans had felt, that the ordinary vices and weaknesses of human beings are disgusting, that a good life cannot be had until these weaknesses are eliminated. Early, the Bolsheviks prohibited the national drink, vodka, and almost all the first Soviets took steps against prostitution, gambling, nightlife, and so on.<sup>24</sup>

Our orthodox and successful extremists, then, are crusaders, fanatics, ascetics, men who seek to bring heaven to earth. For the Jacobins, this heaven was the Republic of Virtue, which was Robespierre’s ideal. After the dictatorship of the revolutionary government, this perfect republic was to appear; and Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, would be more than a slogan. The Russian heaven

is the classless society, to be attained after the purgatory of the dictatorship of the proletariat has slowly put an end to the worldly miseries of the class struggle.<sup>25</sup>

The religious parallel may be pushed a bit further, “Our revolutionists are convinced that they are the elect, destined to carry out the will of God, nature, or science... The opponents of these revolutionists are not just political enemies, not just mistaken men, grafters, logrollers, or damned fools; they are sinners, and must not merely be beaten — they must be wiped out. Hence the justification of the guillotine and the firing squad. For our revolutionists display that vigorous intolerance which in the logic of emotions, as well as in that of the intellect, follows perfectly on the conviction of being absolutely, eternally, monopolistically, right.”<sup>26</sup>

#### 6. *Universalist*

Perhaps the most important uniformity in our four revolutions is that as gospels, as forms of religion, they are universalist in aspiration, and nationalist, exclusive, in ultimate effect. They end up with a God meant indeed for all mankind, but brought to mankind, usually a not altogether willing mankind, by a chosen people.<sup>27</sup> The atrophy of patriotism is a marked feature of revolutionary periods. A Christian Roman loved a Christian barbarian more than a pagan Roman and shed few tears when in its later days the Empire was invaded by Christianized barbarians. In the wars of religion during the Reformation, French Protestants welcomed the invasion of France by German Protestants, and French Catholics betrayed their country to the armies of Catholic Spain. The same thing was true in the other countries invaded in the religious wars.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, a marked feature of revolution is that revolutionary ideology transcends sectionalism and regionalism, and is universal in character.<sup>29</sup> The Russian Revolution, as is well known, was universal in principle. Tocqueville writes: “Usually men become committed, with all the ardour, energy and staying power they are capable of, to only those causes that have aroused passions connected to their self-interest. But, however intense these passions, their effect will be limited unless the cause is made legitimate by joining to some cause that serves all mankind.

“It is honour to human nature that we need such a stimulant. Do you want to see what man can achieve? Then join to the passions originating in personal interest the goals of changing the face of the world and regenerating human species.

“This is the history of the French Revolution.”<sup>30</sup>

It is again to Judaism that the birth of Universalism is traced;<sup>31</sup> and relative to earlier forms, the historic religions are all universalistic. “From the point of these religions, a man is no longer defined chiefly in terms of what tribe or clan he comes from or what particular god he serves, but rather as a being capable of salvation. That is to say that it is for the first time possible to conceive of man as such.”<sup>32</sup> It is significant that the loftiest and most comprehensive concepts of community, those of a universal character, have become possible only through the widening and deepening of religious experience, much as the secularisation of these ideas and ideals may have obscured the story of their emergence and evolution to modern man.<sup>33</sup>

#### 7. *As Integrating Force*

Religion has been the greatest single factor in the integration of society.<sup>34</sup> Religious experience, being fundamental, constitutes the basis of communion of a most intimate character, boring deep into the beds of impulses, emotions, and thoughts which are common to all men. The

subjective religion has at all times proved potent enough to unite or integrate people who are otherwise widely separated by differences in descent, profession, wealth, or rank. A study of the social status of those who followed the prophets, teachers, and founders will reveal the surprising social heterogeneity of the motley groups, who became one when in a common religious experience. It is not necessary that the objectification and formulation of this experience will lessen division and separation, but undeniably greater leeway for such inferences is offered by an articulation of the expression of religious experience.<sup>35</sup> Religion can produce vertical cleavages in society cutting across, as in sixteenth-century France, more normal bases of stratification: "Religious belief alone, no matter whether it was held with fanatic conviction or for political expediency, could bring together the divergent interests of nobles, burghers, and peasants over areas as wide as the whole of France."<sup>36</sup>

It has already been seen that religious motives may work positively and negatively. But, "It is our thesis that the constructive force of religion surpasses its destructive influences. Fundamentally and ultimately, religion makes for social integration though it should definitely not be identified with its effect. We have tried to show that social integration is not the 'aim' or 'purpose' of religion. Religion is sound and true to its nature only as long as it has no aim or purpose except the worship of God. Yet, wherever genuine religious experience as the concentration and direction of the best that is in man sparks, nuclei are formed which are integrated into a close unit primarily what they consider holy. These nuclei tend to grow. In the process of this growth they will absorb, modify and destroy what opposes the realisation of complete integration of a particular or universal religious community... Our thesis of the pre-eminently constructive force of religion is confirmed by repeated attempts, movements, and processes aimed at a reintegration of the religious fellowship, illustrations of which we found in abundance when reviewing the history of the great founded religions."<sup>37</sup>

There is no way of verifying such generalities but all the same there is a strong impression that the degree of social equality and human brotherhood achieved by Islamic *Milat*, taking into consideration the diversity of races and climates as well as the period of time covered, remains virtually unsurpassed. This social integration went hand in hand with the political expansion of Islam. "Religion, then", writes Bellah, "provided the ideology and social cohesion for many rebellion and reform movements in the historic civilizations, and consequently played a more dynamic and especially a more purposive role in social change, than had previously been possible."<sup>38</sup> And, we hope to show later that the Sikh revolutionary movement would have been inconceivable without the social cohesion brought about by the Sikh religion among the disparate and hostile castes.

#### 8. *Comment*

Revolutionary ideals and goals are based on humanitarian values, and the historic role of religion in giving birth to these values cannot be denied. Judaism is the first humane and universal religion, and thirst for justice and equality goes back to Moses. It is religion which first affirmed faith in human destiny, human dignity, human equality, and human freedom. Again, it is religion which first raised its voice against oppression, exploitation and slavery.

It has also been seen that there is so much in common between revolutionary motivation and a truly religious approach. Values such as devotion to a universal humanitarian cause, concern for the downtrodden and the poor, self-denial, selflessness and self-sacrifice in pursuit of a humanitarian goal, etc, are as much indispensable to revolution as to religion.

These significant coincidences, which have survived the vicissitudes of ages, are unlikely to be just accidental. Despite many divergences, there appears to have been some basic unity of approach, at least in two respects, which somehow overrules the differences. To repeat, as Brinton has put it, “The important thing about a religious belief is that under its influence men work very hard and excitedly in common to achieve here or somewhere an ideal, a pattern of life, not at the moment universally — or even largely — achieved. Religion attempts to close in favour of human hopes the gap between what men are and what men would like to be.”<sup>39</sup> The same can be said, more or less, of revolution in its own sphere.

Secondly, religion and revolution are both universalistic. Universalism has a transformative vision. It uplifts men, who come under its spell, above the narrow grooves of self-interest, or sectional and regional interests, may be for a short duration.

In any case, the predominant and significant features of both religion and revolution are their ideological pulls. Mass movements, which so long they come under their spell, are a class apart from those governed by environmental factors, whose human fulcrum is the hard-boiled, self-centred, and aggressive being described by Thucydides.

In the background of the discussion we have had so far, we can now proceed to examine a rare historical phenomenon, where the religious and revolutionary streams blended into one — the Sikh Revolutionary Movement.

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35. Ibid., p. 234.
36. H. C. Koenigsberger: *Estates and Revolution*, pp. 225-26 (Quoted by Hagopian, p. 38).
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## PROPHETIC MISSION

Max Weber has expressed the view that: “A distinctive concern with social reform is characteristic of Israelite prophets. This concern is all the more notable, because such a trait is lacking in Hindu prophecy of the same period, although the conditions in India at the time of Buddha have been described as relatively similar to those in Greece during the sixth century.”<sup>1</sup> Further, he divides prophets into two types: “One represented most clearly by Buddha, the other with especial clarity by Zoroaster and Muhammed. The prophet may be primarily, as in the case just noted, an instrument for the proclamation of a god and his will, be this a concrete command or an abstract norm. Preaching as one who has received a mission from god, he demands obedience as an ethical duty. This type we shall term the ‘ethical prophet’. On the other hand, the prophet may be an exemplary man, who, by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation, as in the case of Buddha. The preaching of this type of prophet says nothing about a divine mission or an ethical duty of obedience, but rather directs itself to the self-interest of those who crave salvation, recommending to them the same path as he himself traversed. Our designation for the second type of prophecy is ‘exemplary’.”<sup>2</sup> On these premises, Max Weber proceeds to formulate that: “the exemplary type is particularly characteristic in India, although there have been a few manifestations of it in China (e.g., Lao Tzu) and the Near East. On the other hand, the ethical type is confined to the Near East, regardless of racial differences there. For neither the Vedas nor the classical books of the Chinese... make it appear at all probable that prophecy of the ethical type, such as developed in the Near East or Iran, could ever have arisen in India or China. The decisive reason for this is the absence of a personal, transcendental, ethical god. In India this concept was found only in a sacramental and magical form, and then only in the later and popular faiths. But in the religion of those social classes within which the decisive conceptions of Mahavira and Buddha were developed, ethical prophecy appeared only intermittently and was constantly subjected to reinterpretations in the direction of pantheism.”<sup>3</sup>

What makes it difficult to accept that part of Weber’s ‘formulation which links the absence of the ethical type to the absence of “a personal, transcendental, ethical God”, is the puzzling fact that the radical Bhagtas like Namdeva, Kabir, Ravidas, and many more, all believed in a personal, transcendent, and ethical God, as also did the Sikh Gurus. The radical Bhagtas and the Gurus were, moreover, near contemporaries, that is subject to more or less similar social, political, and economic environmental influences and conditions. Therefore, a very relevant and significant question has to be answered. Why, of all these Bhagti schools, who were also anti-caste, only the Sikh Gurus pursued a systematic, sustained course, over a long period, to create the Sikh *Panth*, as a distinct social entity outside the anti-humanitarian and anti-ethical caste society? Also, why did the Sikh *Panth* (the Khalsa) alone capture political power for the plebeian masses? A thing which no other Indian religion or movement had ever conceived of, much less aspired to.

It is obvious that mere faith in a “personal, transcendental, ethical god” was not enough. Something more than that was needed. We hope we might come across some clues in our search for answers to these questions if we pursue some aspects of the distinction drawn by Weber and Wach between prophetic religions and other religions.

### 1. *The Prophet*

“It is generally agreed that the emergence of a great new religious faith is one of the inexplicable mysteries which have accompanied the ascent of man and bears the most convincing testimony to the contingency and spontaneity of his spiritual history. We have reviewed the origin of the founded religions from this point of view and have stressed the fact that no prior preparation and pathbreaking could alone explain the emergence of the new inspiration and its effect.”<sup>4</sup> This applies with greater force to the emergence of prophets.

Max Weber defines “prophet”, from the perspective of sociology, to mean a purely individual bearer of charisma, who, by virtue of his mission, proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.<sup>5</sup> It is characteristic of the prophets that they do not receive their mission from any human agency, but seize it, as it were. Their mission is a consequence of divine revelation and their charisma is a divine gift.<sup>6</sup> Rather, “the personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claims to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet’s claim is based on personal revelation and charisma.”<sup>7</sup>

The charisma of the prophet also stands differentiated likewise. Though the prophet, like the magician, exerts his power simply by virtue of his personal gifts, unlike the magician he, however, claims definite revelation and the core of his mission is doctrine or commandment not magic.<sup>8</sup>

Max Weber considered the “prophecy” a special category in his systematic outline of types of religious authorities. “What, then, is the characteristic of a prophet? The prophetic charisma seems to be the chief gift. It implies immediate communion with the deity the intensity of which is more characteristic than its continuance. It was only under very unusual circumstances that a prophet succeeded in establishing his authority without charismatic authentication. It must not be forgotten that the entire basis of Jesus’ own legitimation, as well as his claim that he and only he knew the Father, and the way to God led through faith in him alone, was the magical charisma he felt within himself. It was doubtless this consciousness of power, more than anything else, that enabled him to traverse the road of prophets... There was always required of such prophets a proof of their possession of particular gifts of the spirit, of special magical or ecstatic abilities.”<sup>9</sup>

“The manner in which the prophet receives his mandate is essential; usually there is a distinct ‘call’... The consciousness of being the organ, instrument, or mouthpiece of the divine-will is characteristic of the self-interpretation of the prophet. The prophetic authority is distinctly mandatory... It is characteristic of prophetic revelations that they are usually not induced by methodical or casual manipulation, but arise spontaneously and are received passively... Frequently, the prophet appears as a renewer of lost contacts with the hidden power of life... The prophet illuminates and interprets the past, but he also anticipates the future. The *kairos* (moment) is interpreted by the prophet in this dual light.”<sup>10</sup>

“It is interesting to note that prophets do not usually come from the aristocracy, the learned, or the refined; they frequently emerge from the simple folk and remain true to their origin even in a changed environment. Frugality and simplicity mark the life of the prophet, and these features link him with the ascetic and the ‘saint’ (cf. the Russian *Staretz*). Since his inspiration means the revelation of hidden truth, the prophet may also be regarded as one who ‘knows’. As one who possesses knowledge and information as to the most essential that man wants to know — the nature, will, and manifestations of God — the prophet has features in common with the teacher, philosopher, and theologian.”<sup>11</sup> However, in spite of sharing some common features, both Weber

and Wach have differentiated prophets as a special category apart from all other religious authorities — the reformer, the seer, the saint, etc. We need not enter into such details, as we have to concentrate on the social and historical significance of the prophetic mandate.

## 2. *Social and Historical Significance of the Mandate*

It is true that the prophet “is never to be found where the proclamation of a religious truth through personal revelation is lacking. In our view, this qualification must be regarded as the decisive hallmark of prophecy”.<sup>12</sup> But, this “religious truth through personal revelation” included, directly or by implication, features which led to momentous social, political, and historical consequences, at least in the case of some prophets.

“The political, national, and social activities of prophets have always attracted the attention of the students of prophecy. In these fields, they played so outstanding a part in old Hebrew history (Balaam, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and most of the great prophets) that some scholars are inclined to regard this side of the prophetic activity as the central one. That is not correct, because his moral, social, and political ideas, the prophet’s function as the ‘conscience’ of the group, tribe, nation, or state, are caused, conditioned, and determined by his basic religious experience. Owing to his contact with the deepest sources of life, the prophet reacts vigorously against all disturbance or perversion of the civil or moral order which is meant to reflect the divine-will. He feels danger and seizes crucial moments to interpret present situations in the light of the past and the future... The blunt expression of moral judgement which we are accustomed with prophetic activity, particularly with the messages of Nathan, Amos, Micah, and Jeremiah, is not inspired by personal resentment, but is a result of the strong emotion and the profound intuition evoked by basic religious experiences. Such pronouncements and judgements confirm the prophet’s charisma.”<sup>13</sup>

The political, national, and social activities of prophets may or may not be central to prophecy, but the very fact that these are born of the prophet’s direct contact with the deepest sources of life serves to reinforce their potential rather than weaken it or sidetrack it. The prophet himself embodies a certitude about the mission he is charged with which is not assailed by the least doubt and which does not waver at the cross. He loves it with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might.

“The mandate which the prophet receives is essential; usually there is a distinct call... The consciousness of being the organ, instrument, or mouthpiece of the divine-will is characteristic of the self-interpretation of the prophet.”<sup>14</sup> This “mandate”, “call”, “mission”, by whatever name it is called, takes complete hold of the prophet, and he cannot but devote his entire energy towards spreading and fulfilling his mission. In analysing the various activities of the founders, we find in nearly every case preaching and teaching. To convey to others the message of salvation and perfection and to lead them to the acceptance of the truth revealed to them in their basic experience are primary concerns of the founder... The awareness of his mission comes to the chosen one upon the occasion of his “call”. Characteristic of such a mission is the close association of the message with the personality of its promulgator and the permanent endowment with power. The idea of a mission implies consciousness of its mandatory character.<sup>15</sup>

## 3. *Implications and Comment*

A student of history is free to accept or not accept any of the formulations cited in this chapter, but he can in no way ignore the exceptional social, political, and historical driving-forces generated by prophets, the consequences of which are there in history for all to see. “... should a

doubt remain as to the decisive role played by leading religious personalities, a study of the great founded religions will remove it. The changes here effected through personal initiative are tremendous; and even if we allow for the embellishment of the lives of the founders in legend and tradition, their influence on the great communities which they called into being must be termed prodigious.”<sup>16</sup>

“As is well known, none of the great founders intended to ‘found a religion’. They were, each in his own way, deeply concerned with following out an experience which became decisive in their lives and which determined their own attitude towards God, towards the world, and towards men. From the psychological and historical stand-point, the Jesus who wandered about in Galilee was a revolutionary, a teacher, a reformer, and a prophet. Many of his contemporaries considered him a magician. Seen from the sociological point of view, he was the head of a school or the leader of a religious group, as many before and after him; but this description does not do justice to his significance — even not the sociological — if it leaves out the events after his death which brought a considerable part of the human race into communion with him. Thus, Jesus of Nazareth, or, in theological terms, Christ, is even sociologically defined like something more than a teacher, a prophet, or a reformer, for he founded Christianity. From a theological point of view, the number of his followers is immaterial, but it is sociologically significant that he, Buddha, Mohammed, and Zoroaster became the founders of large religious bodies by the influence which their personalities and activities had on their followers. The historian is interested in the transformation which the leadership of great religious personalities produced in the world; the sociologist concentrates his attention on the direct and indirect sociological effect of his appearance on the organization and stratification of society.”<sup>17</sup>

#### **REFERENCES NOT AVAILABLE**

## GURU NANAK — THE PROPHET

We find in Guru Nanak all the essentials of prophethood delineated by Max Weber and Wach. A prophet does not receive his mission from any human agency; personal “call”, or direct communion with deity (i.e., God, in the case of Guru Nanak) is the hallmark of prophethood; this personal “call” is usually connected with a particular moment (*kairos*) of the prophet’s life. The prophet’s mission is a consequence of divine revelation and his charisma is a divine gift; and, most important of all, the prophet’s mission is *mandatory*.

There is no mention in Sikh tradition and history of Guru Nanak having been initiated into the mystic path by a known person; i.e., he had no human being as his *guru*, *murshid*, or teacher. The yogis asked him pointedly: “Who is your Guru, and whose disciple are you?” To this question Guru Nanak gave a categorical answer: “*Sabad* (‘Word’ or Immanent God) is my Guru, and the mind attuned to the ‘Word’ (*Surat*) is the disciple.”

“*Tera kawan gurujis ka tu chela*

... ..

*Sabad guru surat dbun chela.*”<sup>1</sup>

Again, “The transcendent Lord, God, is the Guru whom Nanak has met.”<sup>2</sup>

Guru Nanak himself claims direct communion with God, and that his mission is a consequence of divine revelation. “O Lalo, as I receive the word of the Lord, so do I utter.”<sup>3</sup>

The accounts of Guru Nanak’s life (*Janam-sakhis*)<sup>4</sup> record that he received his revelation as a gift from God. “Then God said: ‘I have blessed you and bless the world for your sake.’ Then God bade goodbye to Nanak. He sent him after blessing him with His devotion, ‘Nam’, and Praise.”<sup>5</sup> Bhai Gurdas confirms this: “First Baba (Guru Nanak) received (God’s) blessings (*Bakshdar*); and put in strenuous effort afterwards.”<sup>6</sup> Guru Nanak himself says in one of his hymns:

“What sort of gift is that which is earned by one’s own effort?

Nanak, that is *Kramat* (i.e., miracle or charisma)

What is received (as a gift) by Lord’s blessing.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Janam-sakhis* also record that Guru Nanak received his revelation at a particular moment of his life (*kairos*) when he disappeared for some time at the bank of a rivulet called Waieen.<sup>8</sup> There is a gurdwara built of old at this place to commemorate this event.

The most important aspects of Guru Nanak’s prophethood for the purpose of our study, however, are the essence of his prophecy and the mandatory character of his revelation.

### 1. *The Prophecy*

The *Janam-sakhis* mention three important features of Guru Nanak’s revelation, and their version is supported by other evidence and considerations.

#### (a) *Nam*

“O, Nanak! you make people in *Kaliyug* (the dark age) utter or remember (*Japavana*) My *Nam*; Drive home (*Dirrawna*) *Nam*, *Dan* (charity) and *Isnan* (bathing) to the world; praise (Me) and make others praise. Establish noble Dharma (*sudharm*), spread (it) so that the world is benefited and becomes *Mukat*.”<sup>9</sup>

Bhai Gurdas confirms this *Janam-sakhi* version:

“The Benevolent God heard the cry of anguish and deputed Guru Nanak to the world;  
(He) made (people) in the *Kaliyug* see one Absolute God;  
He made *Dharm* (*Dharma*) perfect by fusing the four castes into one;  
He put the prince and the pauper on equal footing...;  
Baba (Guru Nanak) salvaged *Kaliyug* through the *mantra* of True Nam;  
Guru Nanak came to save *Kaliyug*.”<sup>10</sup>

(b) *The Panth*

The second prominent feature of Guru Nanak’s prophetic mandate is that, “The Great God granted (Nanak) leave for the purpose of creating the *Panth*.”<sup>11</sup> Bhai Gurdas has referred, to this mandate Guru Nanak received, at a number of places. “Nanak struck a (new) coin in the world and initiated the immaculate (*nirmal*) *Panth*,<sup>12</sup> and enrolled disciples from the four castes and established the pure *Panth*.”<sup>13</sup>

(c) *No Hindu, No Mussulman*

The third feature recorded by the *Janam-sakhis* is that the very first words Guru Nanak uttered after receiving his revelation were: “There is no Hindu, no Mussalman.”<sup>14</sup> Then, common folk began to say: “Nanak! Now you are a changed person; previously you were different. Now you are expressing different ideas. One path is that of Hindus, the other that of Mussalmans. Which of these is your path?” Then Guru Baba Nanak said: “No one is Hindu; no one is Mussalman. Whose path I should follow? I follow God’s path. God is neither Hindu, nor Mussalman.”<sup>15</sup> Here, again, Bhai Gurdas not only confirms this feature of Guru Nanak’s mandate, but also elaborates it, in a way:

“There are four castes and four religions (sects) in the world — the Hindus and Muslims; ... (They) utter Ram and Rahim, and misguide themselves into two (separate) paths in the name of one God (*Nam*); ... By-passing the Truth, the Brahmins and Maulvis are locked into (inconsequential) disputations.”<sup>16</sup>

When asked as to who is better, Hindu or Muslim, Guru Nanak replied: “Without good deeds, both lament; ... Ram and Rahim are equal (or the same), and people hate one another (in their names for nothing).”<sup>17</sup>

Elaborating Guru Nanak’s mission further, Bhai Gurdas writes:

“(Guru Nanak) welded the four *dharm*s (i.e., the four different codes of conduct set up for the four castes) and the four castes into one;  
(He) put the prince and the pauper on equal footing and propagated the rule of humility in the world; ...  
Baba (Guru Nanak) emancipated *Kaliyug*  
Through the *mantra* of the True Nam (*Sat Nam*)”<sup>18</sup>

In fact, the aforesaid three features of Guru Nanak's revelation or prophecy need no outside verification or substantiation. These laid the ideological foundations of the Sikh movement; and were, as such, its basic constituents to such an extent that these are reflected all around in its development. The quotations given from the *Janam-sakbis* and Bhai Gurdas serve just to show that these features can be traced to the earliest roots of Sikh tradition.

Moreover, in the discussion that follows, we are not concentrating on establishing the historical validity of the Sikh movement, which has been attempted in earlier works, or tracing its serial development. Here, in this work, our main concern is to probe the salient characteristics of the movement from the angle of some disciplines, other than that of history, to show that:

- (a) Guru Nanak's revelation was of a mandatory character, and its mandatory potential and momentum provided the driving, compulsive force which distinguished the Sikh Movement from other Indian reform movements, in its development and consequences.
- (b) That the three features noted above were interwoven and interdependent, and constituted, as integral parts, one composite whole of Guru Nanak's prophecy or revelation. It is in their integrated form that these features provided the ideological inspiration, direction, and strength to the Sikh revolutionary movement.

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2. Ibid., p. 599.
3. Ibid., p. 722.
4. The *Janam-sakbis* are, no doubt, written in hagiographical idiom, but so are the life-accounts of most of other prophets. Also, the *Janam-sakbis* reduced to writing the oral traditions current then approximately sixty years after the death of Guru Nanak; and so were the life-accounts of Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammed recorded after their deaths even after a longer lapse of time.
5. *Janam-sakbi* of Meharban, p. 89.
6. Varan Bhai Gurdas, Var One, Pauri 24.
7. Guru Granth Sahib, pp. 474-75.
8. God's name was revealed in the early hours of Bhadon Sudi 15 Punnyan, Sammat 1564 (AD 1507). God met Baba Nanak face to face in the midst of the stream (*Janam-sakbi* of Meharban, p. 89).
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## SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NAM

It has been seen that, according to the earliest Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak received a two-fold, simultaneous mandate of propagating *Nam* and of creating the *Panth*, not for sectarian ends “There is no Hindu, no Mussalman”), but for the fulfilment of a humanitarian purpose. Yet, there are some scholars who see a dichotomy between their own perceptions of *Nam* and the development of the Sikh *Panth*, at least at the stage when Guru Hargobind took up arms. And, there need not be any doubt of such a dichotomy if Guru Nanak’s religion is to be lumped together with world-rejecting religions, or with religions whose sole aim is the single-minded pursuit of *mukti*, *shanti* (peace), or spiritual bliss. Max Weber’s thesis might be very helpful in sifting such issues in his chapter.

### 1. Max Weber’s Thesis

#### (a) *World-rejecting Asceticism and Inner-worldly Asceticism*

“Concentration upon the actual pursuit of salvation may entail a formal withdrawal from the ‘World’, from social and psychological ties with the family, from the possession of worldly goods, and from political, economic, artistic, and erotic activities, in short from all creaturely interests. One with such an attitude lay regard any participation in these affairs as an acceptance of the world, leading to alienation from God. This is ‘world-rejection asceticism’ (*Waltablebnede Askese*).

On the other hand, the unique concentration of human behaviour on activities leading to salvation may require the participation within the world (or more precisely, within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them) of the religious individual’s idiosyncratically sacred religious mood and his qualifications as the elect instrument of God. This is ‘inner-worldly asceticism’ (*innerweltliche Askese*). In this case, the world is presented to the religious virtuoso as his responsibility. He may have the obligation to transform the world in accordance with his ascetic ideals, in which case the ascetic will become a rational reformer or revolutionary on the basis of a theory of natural rights...”<sup>1</sup>

#### (b) *A Tool of God*

“Salvation may be viewed as the distinctive gift of active ethical behaviour performed in the awareness that God directs this behaviour, i.e., the actor is an instrument of God. We shall designate this type of attitude toward salvation, which is characterized by a methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation, as ‘ascetic’. This designation is for our purpose here, and we do not in any way deny this term may be and has been used in another and wider sense.”<sup>2</sup>

“Nevertheless, the world as a creation of God, who comes to expression in it, despite its creatureliness, provides the only medium through which one’s unique religious charisma may prove itself by means of rational ethical conduct, so that one may become and remain certain of one’s own state of grace.

“Hence, as the field provided for this active certification, the order of the world in which the (inner-worldly) ascetic is situated, becomes for him a vocation which he must fulfil rationally.”<sup>3</sup>

“In contrast to asceticism, contemplation is primarily the quest to achieve rest in God and in Him alone. It entails inactivity, and in its most consistent form it entails the cessation of thought, the nemesis of everything that in any way reminds one of the world, and of course the absolute minimization of all outer and inner activity.”<sup>4</sup>

“For the (inner-worldly) ascetic too, the perception of the divine through emotion and intellect is of central importance, only in his case it is of a ‘motor’ type, so to speak. The ascetic’s assurance of grace is achieved when he is conscious that he has succeeded in becoming a tool of his God, through rationalized ethical action completely oriented to God. But for the contemplative mystic, who does not desire to be God’s ‘instrument’, but desires only to become God’s ‘vessel’, the ascetic’s ethical struggle, whether of a positive or a negative type, appears to be a perpetual externalisation of the divine in the direction of some peripheral function. For this reason, ancient Buddhism recommended inaction as the precondition for the maintenance of the state of grace, and in any case Buddhism enjoined the avoidance of every type of rational, purposive activity, which it regarded as the most dangerous form of secularisation. On the other hand, the contemplation of the mystic appears to the (inner-worldly) mystic as indolent, religiously sterile, and ascetically reprehensible self-indulgence — a wallowing in self-created emotions prompted by the deification of the creaturely.”<sup>5</sup>

“For the Buddhist monk, agriculture is the most reprehensible, of all occupations... Yet the alms he collects consist principally of agricultural products.”<sup>6</sup>

“In any case, the typical mystic is never a man of conspicuous social activity, nor is he at all prone to accomplish any rational transformation of the mundane order on the basis of a methodical pattern of life directed towards external success.”<sup>7</sup>

### *(c) Social and Historical Implications*

“The decisive historical difference between the predominantly Oriental and Asiatic types of salvation religion and those found primarily in the Occident is that the former usually culminate in contemplation and the latter in (inner-worldly) asceticism.”<sup>8</sup>

“Moreover, only in the Occident was the additional step taken — by ascetic Protestantism — of translating rational asceticism into the life of the world. The inner-worldly order of dervishes in Islam cultivated a planned procedure for achieving salvation, but this procedure, for all its variations, was oriented ultimately to the mystical quest for salvation of the Sufis... The asceticism of the dervishes is not, like that of (inner-worldly) ascetic Protestants, a religious ethic of vocation, for the religious actions of the dervishes have very little relationship with their secular occupations, and in their scheme secular vocations have at best a purely external relationship to the planned procedure of salvation.”<sup>9</sup>

“But an unbroken unity integrating in systematic fashion an ethic of vocation in the world with assurance of religious salvation was the unique creation of ascetic Protestantism alone. Furthermore, only in the Protestant ethic of vocation does the world, despite all its creaturely imperfections, possess unique and religious significance as the object through which one fulfils his duties by rational behaviour according to the will of an absolutely transcendental God. When success crowns rational, sober purposive behaviour of the sort not oriented exclusively to worldly acquisition, such success is construed as a sign that God’s blessing rests upon such behaviour. This inner-worldly asceticism had a number of distinctive consequences not found in any other religion.

This religion demanded of the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of all erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of all idle and exploitive enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth; not the ascetic death-in-life of the cloister, but an alert, rationally controlled patterning of life, and the avoidance of all surrender to the beauty of the world, to art, or to one's own moods and emotions. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was the disciplining and methodical organization of the whole pattern of life. Its typical representative was the 'man of a vocation', and its unique result was the rational organization and institutionalisation of social relationship."<sup>10</sup>

"To Max Weber the example among such religious movements that 'change the world' was Puritan... none in his opinion had influenced in such a revolutionary manner as had Puritanical religiosity."<sup>11</sup>

## 2. *The Sikh Concept of Nam*

*Nam* is a very comprehensive concept in Sikhism.<sup>12</sup> "*Nam* sustains the whole animal life... *Nam* sustains the entire creation."<sup>13</sup> We restrict ourselves here, for our purpose, to only those aspects of *Nam* which are related to the main points covered by the excerpts given in the previous section, and which are amply vouchsafed by the hymns of the Gurus and their life-accounts.

### (a) *Not World-rejecting*<sup>14</sup>

For the Gurus, the world is true and not a thing to be rejected or to be escaped from.

"True are Thy worlds, and Thy universes, true are the forms Thou Greatest."<sup>15</sup>

"True is He; True is His creation."<sup>16</sup>

"Deride not the world, as it is the creation of God."<sup>17</sup>

The Gurus have explicitly condemned all ascetic or escapist practices. "One reaches not Truth by remaining motionless like trees and stones, nor by being sawn alive."<sup>18</sup> "O yogi, you are sitting in a trance, but you discriminate and have a sense of duality. You beg from door to door, are you not ashamed of it."<sup>19</sup> "Jainic asceticism, or even if the body were cut into bits, would not efface the dirt of ego."<sup>20</sup>

All the Sikh Gurus, excepting the eighth, who passed away at an early age, were married householders. In selecting his successor Guru, Guru Nanak passed over his son Baba Sri Chand, who was a renowned ascetic, and the third Guru issued an injunction that no recluse or ascetic could be a Sikh.<sup>21</sup>

### (b) *Nam and Mukti*

In Sikhism, the object of *Nam* is not to secure release from life, but to attune oneself to the Will of God, i.e., God-oriented activity, and not salvation is the goal. Guru Nanak's mission was also distinctly different from that of the religions whose sole "aim was to achieve a state of ecstatic Godly possession through orgiastic means, in contrast to everyday life, in which God was not felt as a living power... Or the aim was the achievement of apathetic- ecstatic Godly possession of gnosis in opposition to everyday life as the abode of transient and meaningless drives."<sup>22</sup>

In the first place, the traditional idea of *mukti* or salvation from life is not given that importance. "He who is fond of God, what has he to do with *mukti* or heaven."<sup>23</sup> "Crores of heavens cannot equal God's *Nam*. The God-conscious man has no desire for *mukti*."<sup>24</sup> "I seek not power, nor *mukti*; grant me the love of God."<sup>25</sup> "*Mukti* techniques and many a comfort and felicity

cannot equal love of God.”<sup>26</sup> Guru Gobind Singh changed the title of Nand Lal’s composition from *Bandginama* (meditational path) to *Zindiginama* (the way to live).<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the concept of *mukti* was given a new content. It meant getting immersed in the love of God and His creation; it meant release from self-centredness, selfishness, and individualism, and not from the world or life. *Mukti* was linked to the service of humanity: “By service in the world alone one finds a place in God’s court.”<sup>28</sup> The Sikh Gurus made the service of humanity a prerequisite to spiritual development. “He who performs disinterested service meets God.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, service of humanity is an essential component of the Sikh way of life, even after the highest spiritual attainment,<sup>30</sup> as the service of humanity is meant to reflect the Will of God.<sup>31</sup>

“Not only do the prophets of ethical salvation not need orgiastic intoxication, but it actually stands in the way of the systematic ethical patterning of life they require.”<sup>32</sup> “The exceptional nature of the experiences characteristic of all orgiastic cults, and certainly of all erotic ones, accounts for their having exerted no influence at all on everyday behaviour, or at least no influence in the direction of increased rationalization or systematisation — as seen clearly in the fact that the Hindu and dervish religiosities produced no methodology that aimed at the control of everyday living.”<sup>33</sup>

### (c) *A Tool of God*

To abide by God’s Will’ is the *summum bonum* of Sikhism, as this is the ultimate goal to which all spiritual or religious aspirations and strivings must converge. As seen, *Mukti* and heaven (in the traditional sense) are not the Sikh ideal. After negating certain current paths followed for attaining salvation. Guru Nanak clinches the issue by first posing the question: “How to become True, and how to tear the veil of falsehood?”, and then by answering it: “By abiding by (God’s) Will”.<sup>34</sup> In fact, ‘abiding by God’s Will’ is so central to Sikhism that this theme is emphasized again and again in Guru Granth Sahib. Secondly, in Sikhism no methodology has in it an in-built compulsive force to achieve salvation in its own right. It all depends on God’s Grace. The very opening line of Guru Granth Sahib, enumerating the attributes of God, ends with the stipulation that He is attained through ‘*Gur-parsad*’ (i.e., Guru’s or God’s Grace). Guru Arjan, in one of his hymns, gives a long list of methods for God-realisation (including ascetic practices of yoga) tried and found wanting: “I tried many methods of meeting God and failed. Frustrated, I surrendered myself to God and begged to be granted enlightenment”<sup>35</sup> “*Nam*, the immaculate, is unfathomable, how can it be known? *Nam* is within us, how to get to it?... The perfect Guru awakens your heart to the vision of God. It is by the Grace of God that one meets Guru.”<sup>36</sup> “By His Grace alone is He ever remembered (*Simryajaye*).” And to become “a tool of God” is the way to earn God’s Grace and *Nam*. “Service in the world leads to approval in the Court of God.”<sup>37</sup> “He who serves God gets bliss and is absorbed in *Nam*, without straining himself unduly (*sehje*).”<sup>38</sup>

The Sikh Gurus conceive of God as a God of Will, who is creative and whose Will is operative in the world with a direction and purpose. For man, therefore, the ideal is to carry out His Will by doing creative activity in the universe as God’s instrument. The ideal is not blissful union as an end in itself, but union with a view to knowing His Will and carrying it out. Accordingly, to be linked to *Nam* means “to become God’s instrument” and to share the responsibility of a creative and virtuous development in the world.<sup>39</sup> “May I have millions of hands to serve Thee. Service is the way to cross the hurdles of life.”<sup>40</sup> “Serve God every moment and relax not.”<sup>41</sup>

It has been seen that Guru Nanak’s very mandate from God at the moment of his enlightenment was two fold — to propagate *Nam* (*Nam japana*) and to establish a new *Panth*.<sup>42</sup> In

other words, in Guru Nanak's mission, *Nam Simran* was inextricably joined to sharing responsibility of "a creative and virtuous development in the world." This does not mean pitting *Nam Simran* or spiritual bliss versus God-orientated worldly responsibility, or excluding one at the cost of the other. What it means is striking the right balance between the two for the purpose of transforming the world in accordance with the God's purpose. In Sikhism, '*Sewa-Simran*' (i.e., social service and *Nam Simran*) became a joint watch-word, as complementary components and not as mutually exclusive of each other.

### 3. A Parallel Development

One should not expect an exact parallelism between two different social and historical developments, especially between those separated by considerable time or space. What we want to emphasize, by putting the Sikh view of *Nam* in juxtaposition with the excerpts from Max Weber's thesis given in the previous section, is that "to become God's instrument in carrying out His Will and purpose in this world" is a distinct religious ideal as well as a means of securing spiritual bliss or salvation; and this ideal was shared both by Protestant Christianity and Sikhism. It is striking, indeed, how the practice of this ideal led, in both cases, to far-reaching social and historical developments.

### 4. *Nam* and the Historical Challenges

Inequality and aggression are in-built foci of tension in society; hence, any stratification based on inequality and aggression is a permanent source of social conflict. In other words, this problem poses ever-recurring historical challenges to the *Nam*-oriented approach to life. "Prophets systematized religion with a view to simplifying the relationship of man to the world, by reference to an ultimate and integrated value position."<sup>43</sup> As an essential part of this "integrated value position", most of the prophets (at least Jesus, Muhammed, and Nanak) laid great stress on humanitarian values of equality, freedom, and brotherhood. Therefore, it goes without saying that any religious movement organized around these humanitarian values is bound to stand in a state of high tension in relation to *de facto* social or political orders.

Now, there are two alternatives open to a religious approach for meeting this tension, either by turning a blind eye to the compulsions of humanitarian values and accepting the status quo, or by actively attempting to change the social order so as to bring it into accord with these values. "Owing to his contact with the deepest sources of life, the prophet reacts vigorously against all disturbances or perversions of the civic or moral order which is meant to reflect the divine will."<sup>44</sup>

There were two outstanding historical challenges in India at the time Guru Nanak appeared on the scene, the caste order of the Hindu society and the foreign religio-political domination. He reacted vigorously against both.

The motivative power behind the caste system was the upholding of the caste-status of the Brahmin and, to a lesser extent, that of the other *Dvij* (twice-born) castes. As already seen, economic-status and political-status were made lower than caste-status. Legitimation of political power was a powerful lever in the hands of the Brahmins, because it was they alone who could do it. The political upstarts hankered after the legitimation of their status in the caste hierarchy, because this legitimation secured for them a superiority over their subjects "with an efficiency unsurpassed by any other religion."<sup>45</sup> This is how the barbarian warrior castes and the Rajputs accepted the hegemony of non-martial Brahmins.

Guru Nanak attacked the caste ideology which sanctified caste-status, and called it perverse. “According to the Hindus, foul is the ablution of the *chandal*, and vain are his religious ceremonies and decorations. False is the wisdom of the *perverse*; their acts produce strife. In the impure man is pride; he obtaineth not the flavour of the Lord.”<sup>46</sup> Further, he aligned himself with the lowest of low castes,<sup>47</sup> whose very touch, or even sight in some cases, was believed to pollute a member of the high castes.

Guru’s reaction was not born of social, political, or economic considerations or compulsions, because the moral, social, and political ideas of the prophets are caused, conditioned, and determined by their basic religious experience. “The moral and social *restitutio in integrum* here and now, in this world, will have only a preliminary and preparatory value in the eyes of the prophet. Helped by his deeper perception and surer anticipation of the future, the prophet views the things of the world in the light of its final destiny.”<sup>48</sup> Guru Nanak condemned the caste order not because he was primarily a social reformer and looked at it only as a social evil. He did it because his deeper perception, born of his experience of *Nam*, found that “the flavour of the Lord” was bestowed only on those who cared for the lowliest and the lost. His condemnation of caste-status was only a part-expression of his spiritual perception whereby he viewed things in the light of their final destiny, because Sikhism is opposed to status consciousness in all its forms. In fact, it is opposed to pride (which the Guru said was the root-cause of caste discrimination) in all its manifestations.

“He alone is supreme among beings,  
Whose ego goeth in the society of the Holy.  
He, who thinks himself to be the lowliest of the lowly,  
Yea, he alone is the highest of the high.  
He, whose mind is the dust of all,  
O, he alone worshipeth the Lord in his heart.”<sup>49</sup>

And, according to Guru Nanak:

“*Haumein* (ego, pride) is a deep malady. The remedy is to attune to *Nam* by God’s Grace.”<sup>50</sup>

This is how he viewed the problem of caste, or for that matter the problem of ego, “in the light of its final destiny”.

The second major historical challenge in India was that of foreign political domination, which India had been suffering for about 500 years at Guru Nanak’s time. It was not only ruthless political domination and economic exploitation; it was compounded by extreme religious hatred and dictation. Non-Muslims were *Kafirs*, who were offered the alternatives of either conversion to Islam or to become *zimnis* (i.e., second class subjects), failing which they had to accept death. This was a typical political situation which ran counter to the value-position of the prophets.

An epoch in religious history is marked by the rise and growth of founded religions. Prior to them, no opposition was created in principle to the established powers which were sanctioned by tradition. “The founders, on the other hand, were forced to begin completely *de nouveau*, guided by their own creative religious experience. They had to rethink the very principles to which they and their followers were to be oriented. The inevitable result was that they or their followers (Jesus, Zoroaster, Muhammed, Gautama, Vardhamana) found themselves in irreconcilable opposition to certain principles, to statutes, institutions, or representatives of the state.”<sup>51</sup>

Guru Nanak declared:

“This age is a knife, kings are butchers;  
Justice has taken wings and fled.  
In this completely dark night of falsehood  
the moon of truth is never seen to rise.”<sup>52</sup>

How the Sikh movement met this political challenge, and how it affected the destiny of the *Panth*, we will discuss later. Let us first compare the social and historical manifestations of two allied Indian movements, because this comparison is very revealing. Both the medieval Bhagti movement and the Sikh movement professed to follow the Bhagti or *Nam Marg*, but these led to different far-reaching social and historical consequences, mainly because their perceptions about the Bhagti *Marg* or *Nam Simran* were not the same.

## REFERENCES

1. Max Weber: *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 166.
2. Ibid., p. 164. As this is likely to cause confusion, we are adding, within brackets, the word “inner-worldly” to the term “asceticism” used by Weber in his restricted sense, in order to distinguish it from world-rejecting or contemplative asceticism.
3. Ibid., p. 167.
4. Ibid., p. 169.
5. Ibid., p. 171.
6. Ibid., p. 172.
7. Ibid., p. 176.
8. Ibid., p. 177.
9. Ibid., p. 182.
10. Ibid., pp. 182-83.
11. Mommsen (p. 311) cited by S. N. Eisenstadt: *Sociology of Religion*, edited by Roland Robertson, p. 305.
12. Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, pp. 186-87; *The Doctrine of Nam*, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, August, 1975.
13. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 284.
14. Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, Chapter 15.
15. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 463.
16. Ibid., p. 294.
17. Ibid., p. 611.
18. Ibid., p. 952.
19. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 886.
20. Ibid., p. 265.
21. Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, p. 270.
22. Max Weber: *The Religions of India*, p. 337.
23. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 360.
24. Ibid., p. 1078.
25. Ibid., p. 534.
26. Ibid., p. 1323.
27. Macauliffe, Vol. V, p. 103; *Mehma Parkash*, ii. p. 775.
28. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 26.
29. Ibid., pp. 286-87.

30. Ibid., p. 273.
31. Wach, p. 348.
32. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 158.
33. Ibid., p. 160.
34. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1.
35. Ibid., pp. 641-42.
36. Ibid., p. 1242.
37. Ibid., p. 26.
38. Ibid., p. 11.
39. Daljeet Singh: *Sikhism*, pp. 215-16.
40. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 781.
41. Ibid., p. 77.
42. *Janam Sakhi of Meharbanwali*, edited by Kirpal Singh, p. 89.
43. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 69.
44. Wach. p. 348.
45. Max Weber: *The Religions of India*, p. 16.
46. Macauliffe, i, p. 379.
47. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 15.
48. Wach. p. 349.
49. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 266.
50. Ibid., p. 466.
51. Wach. p. 297.
52. Macauliffe, i, p. xliv.

## RADICAL BHAGTI SECTS AND THE SIKH PANTH

Sikhism became the vehicle of the Sikh movement whose salient features as well as the manner in which these developed, fully reflect the mandatory twin-relationship between the Sikh view of *Nam Simran* and the sharing of God-oriented worldly responsibility.

### 1. Not a 'Sampradaya'

The Sikh Panth developed on lines different from those followed by the Hindu *sampradayas* because the *raison d'être* of its development was different. "Hinduism presents the sociologist with a difficult task. It is questioned: how we should classify the type of specifically religious organization presented in India by certain large groups such as Vaishnava, who worship mainly Vishnu, or the Shaiva, who worship largely the mighty Shiva. The composition of Hinduism is affected by many factors, not the least of which is religion. No definition of a set of religious conceptions or practices exists to define membership in this complex body. In general, religions in India are traditionally defined under two heads — orthodox and heterodox, the outstanding of the latter being Buddhism and Jainism. A belief is heterodox which does not acknowledge the authority of the Veda and the sacred tradition, but there is within its frame ample room for an enormous variety of 'orthodox' conception, rites, and communities. The majority of the Hindus do not belong to any distinctive group with theological and ritual unity. They are syncretistic in their ideas and actions. Even the various Vaishnavite *sampradayas* are not as exclusive for example as are the Christian denominations. The reason, of course, is the absence of any unifying conception, similar to that of the Christian Church...

"*Sampradaya* is not translatable by the term 'sect' or 'denomination' because that implies secession from a larger body (church). The Indian term does not have so much a negative as a positive connotation, implying a group with special concepts, forms of worship, and adherence to exclusive leadership exercised by an outstanding religious personality or by his physical or spiritual descendent."<sup>1</sup>

Max Weber comes to a similar conclusion. "In Hinduism a teaching may be orthodox without being bindingly valid... And indeed the doctrinal fluidity of Hinduism is not incidental but rather the central issue of 'religion' as we conceive it."<sup>2</sup>

"Nor does affiliation with a sect bring about excommunication... In fact, the truly devout Hindu is not merely a Hindu, but a member of a Hindu sect as well. And it may even happen that while the father is a Shivaist, the son may be a Vishnuist."<sup>3</sup> Broader religious tolerance than this in a single religion is hardly conceivable.<sup>4</sup>

As against all this doctrinal catholicity, "caste, that is, the ritualistic rights and duties it gives and imposes, and the position of the Brahmins, is the fundamental institution of Hinduism. Before everything else, without caste there is no Hindu."<sup>5</sup> "In contrast to the orthodox sects, the heresy of the *Theophatries* consists in the fact that they tear the individual away from his ritualistic duties, hence from the duties of the caste of his birth, and thus ignore or destroy his *dharmā*. When this occurs, the Hindu loses caste. And since only through caste can one belong to the Hindu community, he is lost to it. *Dharma*, that is, ritualistic duty, is the central criterion of Hinduism.

“Hinduism is primarily ritualism, a fact implied when modern authors state that *mata* (doctrine) and *marg* (holy end) are transitory and ‘ephemeral’ — they mean freely elected — while *dharmā* is ‘eternal’ — that is, unconditionally valid.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, the practice of Hindu *dharmā*, ritualism, ceremonialism and custom, all converge towards entrenching the caste order. Mutual exclusiveness was predominantly caused not by social but by ritualistic factors.<sup>7</sup> “The caste order is orientated religiously and ritually to a degree not even partially attained elsewhere.”<sup>8</sup> The caste rules interfere “with all the relations and events of life, and with what precedes and follows life.....”<sup>9</sup>

It is not necessary to dilate that Sikhism owes no allegiance to Hindu scriptures or Brahmins, and that the Sikh Panth tears the proselytes from the Hindu fold away from the Hindu *dharmā* and from the Hindu society.

## 2. Organization and Social Concern of Bhagti Sects

The contrast between the doctrinal fluidity and the social rigidity of Hinduism, to which we have drawn attention above, is relevant for comprehending the developmental pattern of the Sikh Panth.

Of all the persons usually classified as Radical Bhagats or saints, Kabir had the most widespread influence on the state of popular belief.<sup>10</sup> Yet, what one can glean about him from *Bhakta Mala* or Wilson, relevant to our discussion, is scanty little. Wilson writes: “The Kabir Panthis in consequence of their Master having been the reputed disciple of Ramanand, and of their paying more respect to Vishnu than the other Members of the Hindu triad, are always included among the Vaishnava sects, and maintain with most of them, the Ramavats especially, a friendly intercourse and political alliance;...”<sup>11</sup> It shows that the Kabir Panth, whatever the original intentions of the Master, did not develop as a distinct social or religious entity outside the Hindu society. “From this authority it appears that although the Kabir Panthis have withdrawn, in such a very essential point as worship, from the Hindu communion, they still preserve abundant vestiges of their primitive source; and that their notions are in substance the same as those of the Puranic sects especially of the Vaishnava division.”<sup>12</sup>

From the organizational standpoint, the sect is split into a variety of subdivisions. It has a few establishments spread mainly over Northern India, of which the Kabir Chaura at Benaras (Varanasi) is pre-eminent in dignity. The only activity of note mentioned about Kabir Chaura is that it is constantly visited by wandering members of the sect, as well as by those of other kindred heresies; and that the *Mahant* receives and feeds these visitors whilst they stay.<sup>13</sup>

Among the Radical *Bhagti* sects, next to Kabir Panthis, the followers of Rav Das or Ravi Dasa are probably the most numerous. But this sect is confined to Rav Das’s own caste, “the Chamars, or workers in hides and in leather, and amongst the very lowest of Hindu mixed tribes. This circumstance renders it difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain whether the sect still exists;... there appears to be but little known of him [Rav Das] of any authentic character”.<sup>14</sup> And, Wilson dismisses Sena Panthis with the remark that the name of the founder [Sena] is probably all that now remains of it,<sup>15</sup> and does not take into account Nam Dev or his followers. However, Rose has this to say, that the Namdev Panthis can scarcely be said to constitute a sect, and that the followers of Namdeo are almost entirely, if not entirely, chhimbas or dhobis by caste, as the founder himself was.<sup>16</sup>

For the purpose of the argument that we want to initiate here, we have to caution again that we have perforce to rely on the meagre data given above, as we are unable to extract any more relevant information from the accounts of other Radical Bhagti sects or sampradayas as well.

The first point that strikes is that these sampradayas or sects were, even as religious bodies, very loosely bound associations. The followers of Rav Das and Nam Deo, as seen, are hardly recognizable as a sect and are confined almost to the castes of their respective founders. Kabir “is generally looked on as having been a weaver by caste, and the weavers of the country by a process well known in eastern ethnology are fond of calling themselves the descendants of this celebrated member of their caste. Many of the *Julahas* in the Punjab return their caste as Kabirbansi, and many of those who return their sect as Kabirbansi or Kabir Panthi, are probably little more than ordinary weavers who have no idea of distinguishing themselves from other Hindu weavers in matters of doctrine.”<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny the wide appeal Kabir’s hymns had even outside the circle who claimed to be his followers, but here we are concerned with Kabir Panth as an organization.

This looseness of cohesion is reflected on the doctrinal plane as well. Whereas, Allah and Ram were the same to Kabir, and he was even claimed to have been a Muslim at the time of his death, and whereas he condemned caste unequivocally, the Kabir Panthis “are always included amongst the Vaishnava sects”<sup>18</sup> who avowedly adhere to the caste system. And what is more significant, this deviation is not acknowledged, much less condemned or checked, as a digression even at the highest level.

The second important point to be noted is that the only item having some social import that we have been able to trace is a ‘love-feast’ held sometimes by Kabir Panthis as well as by some other sects of the Radical Bhagats. As such, we give it here in detail. “A common feature of many of these sects (i.e., Bhagti-sects) is the mahaparsada or ceremonial meal. On the evening of the appointed day, the worshippers assemble and the mahant, or leading celebrant, reads a brief address, and then allows a short interval for prayer and meditation. All who feel themselves unworthy to proceed further then withdraw to a distance. Those that remain approach the senior celebrant in turn, and placing their hands together receive into the palm of the right hand, which is uppermost, a small consecrated wafer and two other articles of consecrated food. They then approach another celebrant, who pours into the palm of the right hand a few drops of water, which they drink. This food and water are regarded as Kabir’s special gift, and it is said that all who receive it worthily will have eternal life. Part of the sacramental food is ‘reserved’ and is carefully kept from pollution for administration to the sick. After the sacrament, there is a substantial meal which all attend, and which in its character closely resembles the early Christian love-feasts. It is possible that this rite was borrowed from the Jesuit missionaries at Agra, but the head-quarters of the Kabir Panthi sect are at Benaras, and the rite is now likely to be a survival of historical influences.”<sup>19</sup>

### 3. A *Watershed*

The Brahmaputra and the Indus originate on opposite sides of the same watershed, but, while one takes a long course to the east, the other flows a still longer way to the west. The Radical Bhagtas and the Sikh Gurus have a number of theological doctrines in common. The Radical Bhagtas as well as the Sikh Gurus profess to follow the devotional path, i.e. the Bhagti Marg or the Nam Marg, disown Hindu scriptures and avtaras, ridicule Brahmins and Brahminism, and condemn idol-worship and caste. To Kabir, Ram and Ali are the same,<sup>20</sup> and for Guru Nanak ‘there is no Hindu, no Muslim’. If Nam Deo calls Muslims blind, he calls the Hindus purblind.<sup>21</sup> And yet, the Bhakti and the Sikh movements steered altogether different courses, both socially and historically.

Whereas the Sikh Panth established a distinct entity of its own outside Hinduism and the caste society, the Bhagti sects have merged into Hinduism all but in name; and, beyond assailing some aspects of the caste ideology, the Bhagti sects at no stage made a serious attempt to erode the caste society. Further, whereas the Sikh movement captured political power for the downtrodden masses, the Bhagti sects never even aspired to it. This historical panorama was not, as will be seen, a fortuitous development, and it lends itself to certain important inferences.

#### 4. *Ideology and System*

The caste ideology (i.e., the religious sanctification by the Hindu scriptures, Hindu dharma, the Brahminical ritualism, and the theory of pollution, etc., of the caste status of the twice-born castes) is without doubt an important pillar of the caste system, but it is not the whole of it. More than the caste ideology, it is the social organization of the caste society and its socio-religious sanctions, which made the caste system rigid and all powerful. Although Nam Deo and Kabir condemned the caste ideology vigorously, we find no evidence of anyone of the Radical Bhagtas having ever attempted seriously to tackle the social structure of the caste society in as systematic and persistent a manner as done by the Sikh Gurus. This point of divergence is very important, almost a watershed, which led to far-reaching social and historical consequences; because institutions can be replaced by institutions and systems by systems, but not by mere ideologies as such, unless these are shaped into institutions or systems.

#### 5. *Institutionalisation of Ideology*

“Religion as an inner state or as a subjective experience can have no effect upon reality until it has objectified into a concrete mood, atmosphere, attitude or form. Purely personal religion cannot succeed in transcending subjectivity... Religious experience itself stimulates the development of characteristic attitudes... It is in this attitude that we find the ‘spirit’ of the religion, creating, determining, and correlating the application of the principles, ideas, norms, and rules to actual behaviour.”<sup>22</sup> This passage would be equally appropriate if the word ‘unconcretised ideology’ is substituted for “inner state and subjective experience”. How the ‘spirit’ of the Sikh religion created, determined, and correlated the application of the principles, norms, and rules for moulding the behaviour of the Sikhs should be an interesting subject for exploration, but here we have to concentrate on those features which show how the Sikh ideology was concretised into an anti-caste institution, the Sikh Panth, outside the caste order.

According to Max Weber, Hindu religion has no ‘congregation’,<sup>23</sup> but wherever Guru Nanak went on his missionary tours, he established local congregations of Sikhs (*sangats*), *dharmshalas* (centres for congregational worship and social activity of the Sikhs) and ‘*manjis*’ (centres responsible for the propagation of the mission).<sup>24</sup> Also, the Gurus made God-orientated social service (*sewa*) an obligatory part of congregational worship.<sup>25</sup> In this way, steps were taken from the very beginning for the communalisation and socialization of the Sikh movement.

Two further vital steps, initiated also by Guru Nanak himself, had a direct bearing on the creation and consolidation of the Sikh Panth as an anti-caste institution. People from all castes, high and low, from all walks of life, rich and poor from Hindus as well as Muslims, became Nanak Panthis.<sup>26</sup> And, as the units from which the Sikh Panth was welded were Sikh congregations (*sangats*), and not castes or sub-castes, as such, the Sikh Panth was built up as an anti-caste social organization, parallel to the caste-based society at its grass-roots as well as at all other levels. *Mehma Parkash* records that those who observed caste distinctions kept away from Guru Angad’s

congregation,<sup>27</sup> and Bhai Gurdas writes a number of times that the Panth was created by blending the four castes and the high and low, into one.<sup>28</sup>

The second vital and effective step taken was the establishment of the institution of communal dining (*langar*). It was not done once in a while like a 'love-feast', but was a regular feature of the congregational activity of the Sikhs.<sup>29</sup> Whereas, "it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be at least ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes"<sup>30</sup> Sikhs dined together at the *langars* attached to the *dharamsalas* or gurdwaras without any discrimination based on caste or creed. Guru Amardas made dining at the *langar* a precondition for all those who wanted to see him.<sup>31</sup> This single step alone was determinative in cutting the proselytes away from the caste order, because the violation of commensal barriers was not a breach of an ordinary principle of caste, but, as noted by Weber, of a constitutive part of it. In fact, Hutton regards commensal taboos as the cornerstone of the caste organization.<sup>32</sup> The Santhals, a very low caste in Bengal, have been known to die of hunger in times of famine rather than touch food prepared even by Brahmins.<sup>33</sup>

#### 6. *Fraternization*

Institutions are a prerequisite framework for the consolidation and preservation of social changes, but the spirit that permeates their working is no less important. Common experiences, attitudes and ideals tend to draw people together. At first a parallelism of religious spontaneity may suffice, but it is the first step to a closer association of those united in their protest against the *status quo* and in their common desire to renew and intensify the central religious experience.<sup>34</sup>

Wach deduces, from his study of the development of the early Christian Church, of the Buddhist and the Jain Sangha, or of the Mohammedan and Zoroastrian communities, that the integration of disparate groups is brought about as a new faith creates a new world in which old concepts and institutions lose their meaning and *raison d'être*. Norms are set up which define for each religion the idea of a world or society permeated by the spirit of that religion. "A new type of grouping appears which, though current throughout the history of civilization, has not always been adequately recognised. The feeling of solidarity developing in these new units is to a certain extent revolutionary. The consciousness of this solidarity will vary; and will increase and decrease with the development of the new unit. The new form of grouping is characterized by the concept of relationship of spiritual fatherhood and spiritual brotherhood. The new community will differ from the natural groups not only in the type of organization, in rites, and in beliefs, but primarily in a new spirit of unity. We have found that it is not so much organic growth which makes for the emergence of this spirit as it is a definite break with the past and with the ties of nature which characterize its rise. The more pronounced this break the more definitely we can call the new unit a specifically religious group. Symbols of the break which is consciously experienced even at the level of primitive culture are such concepts as regeneration, rebirth, conversion, and corresponding rites. Those who undergo this experience either collectively, or more frequently, individually, are stimulated to join in close company. The intimacy of the new religious experience makes for intimacy of the new fellowship. At first it may consist merely in the exchange of the new knowledge between a few; later of more followers and companions; then may grow into a lasting association, binding itself to the pursuit of a definite way of life and welding its members into a strongly knit community."<sup>35</sup>

The widespread institution of *langar* was a very important step in furthering the spirit of unity and fraternization among the Sikhs proselytised from mutually exclusive and even hostile castes. In

drawing the distinction between guild and caste, Weber writes: “As a rule the fraternization of the citizenry was carried through by the fraternization of the guilds, just as the ancient polis in its innermost being rested upon the fraternization of military associations and sibs. Note that the base was ‘fraternization’... Fraternization at all times presupposes commensalism.”<sup>36</sup>

We will restrict ourselves to referring only to the non-Sikh historical sources which attest that a spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization prevailed amongst the Sikhs even as late as 1783 AD. Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din, the author of *Fatubat Namah-i-Samdi* (1722-23), was a contemporary of Banda. He writes that low-caste Hindus, termed *khas-o-khasbak-i-hamid-i-jabanmi majud* (i.e., the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus) swelled the ranks of Banda, and everyone in his army would address the other as the adopted son of the oppressed Guru (Guru Gobind Singh) and would publicise themselves with the title of *sahibzada* (“*Yaki rab tarhib-i-digranpigar-i-khada-i-guru-i-maqbur gufta b laqub-i-shahzadgi mashur kardab*”).<sup>37</sup> A contemporary historian of Aurangzeb writes, “If a stranger knocks at their door (i.e., the door of Sikhs) at midnight and utters the name of Nanak, though he may be a thief, robber or wretch, he is considered a friend and brother, and is properly looked after.”<sup>38</sup> Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan writes (1783 AD) about the Khalsa Panth, “When a person is once admitted into that fraternity, they make no scruple of associating with him, of whatever tribe, clan, or race he may have been hitherto; nor do they betray any of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.”<sup>39</sup> Commenting on the last part of the statement, the editor says, “This alludes to the touching or eating with persons of impure castes, in regard to which the Hindus are so tenacious.”<sup>40</sup> The author of *Haqiqat* also writes about the same time that “the Sikhs were told: ‘Whoever might join you from whichever tribe, don’t have any prejudice against him and without any superstition eat together with him.’ Now this is their custom.”<sup>41</sup> Here we have very good independent testimony from two sources that upto 1783, at least, the Sikhs drawn from all castes dined freely with one another. *Haqiqat* clearly states that Khatris, Jats, carpenters, blacksmiths, and grain grocers all joined the Khalsa<sup>42</sup> and ‘now this is their custom’.

### 7. Break with the Past

We have already referred to Wach’s view that the emergence of the spirit of unity and solidarity among new groups characterized by spiritual fatherhood and spiritual brotherhood is not so much an organic growth as it is a definite break with the past. This assessment is particularly correct in the Indian context where humanitarian values and liberal trends could survive only to the extent these broke away from the caste society.<sup>43</sup> To give two illustrations: from the purely theological point of view, Jainism was no less heretic than Buddhism but, while Buddhism kept intact its heterodox identity, Jainism did not to the same extent. It was because, whereas Buddhism did not compromise with Hinduism even at the cost of having had to look for habitation outside India, Jainism was not unwilling, if the necessity arose, to admit a god of popular Hinduism, and it was also not opposed to the theory of caste.<sup>44</sup>

Another example is that of the Radical Bhagtas. Nam Dev and Kabir were much more vocal against Hinduism and caste than Baswa, but the sects of Nam Dev and Kabir were more readily absorbed into Hinduism and the caste society than the Lingayats, because Baswa had made such practical departures from the caste rules and regulations which were difficult to tone down.<sup>45</sup>

Hinduism was an almost irresistible social force: “Once established, the assimilative power of Hinduism is so great that it tends to integrate social forms considered beyond its religious borders. Thus, religious movements of expressly anti-Brahminical and anti-caste character, that is,

contrary to one of the fundamentals of Hinduism, have been in all essentials returned to caste order.”<sup>46</sup>

The fact is that pre-eminence given to caste-status catered to the common human failing of status consciousness. Another fact is that the Hindu *dharmā* (*varna ashram dharmā*), the caste ideology, the king-pin role of the Brahmin priestly caste in upholding the caste order, and the structural framework itself of the caste society, all these blended into one another to constitute one inexorable complex. Although each of the constituents of this complex had also developed an independent propelling force of its own; but, being interlinked, these forces reinforced one another, and, acting together to serve the same purpose, they formed one formidable resultant power. Even if one, or a few, of the component strands of this complex were weakened or eliminated, its forward thrust still possessed a mighty momentum. A mere condemnation of one or another facet of the caste ideology was not enough. What was needed was to tackle all the three pillars of the caste system, i.e., the caste ideology, the Levite Brahmin caste, and the structural social framework of the caste society. There are no signs of the Radical Bhagti sects having worked persistently to break away from both Hinduism and the caste society. What happened was inevitable; they got imperceptibly dissolved into the assimilative power of Hinduism and caste. Whatever the reasons might be, there is no running away from this consistent lesson of Indian history that the survival of humanitarian values, liberal trends, and anti-caste movements has depended almost in direct measure to the breach they made and maintained with not only the caste ideology but also with the caste society.

It is unnecessary to detail here how the Sikh Gurus demolished all the three pillars of the caste system among the Sikhs, as this subject has been dealt with in *Perspectives On Sikh Studies* (pp. 14-60). Sufficient to say that, if all that the Gurus rejected of Hindu ideology is taken out of Hinduism, little of substance is left as residue which Hinduism can claim as being exclusively its own. In the Census of 1881, of the total number of Brahmins only about 7000 were Sikhs.<sup>47</sup> This figure corroborates a recognized fact that the Sikhs have no priestly class, much less a hereditary Levite class, having a vested interest in maintaining a hierarchical structure of society based on religious sanction. And of all the anti-caste movements of Indian origin, only the Buddhists and the Sikhs succeeded in establishing a separate identity from the caste society, and both did it by founding a separate church and a separate socio-religious organization (e.g., the Sikh Panth).

#### 8. *Implications*

We do not mean at all to compare religious savants, as individuals, who are all great in their own ways. What we have attempted is to contrast two important movements of Indian history, which started with close theological affinity but led to divergent historical consequences, in order to indicate two important implications.

All the experts who have commented on the caste system are agreed that it is one of the most, if not *the* most, intractable systems of social exclusiveness and discrimination. To create the egalitarian Sikh Panth in the medieval era out of the proselytes drawn from mutually exclusive, even hostile, elements of the caste society was a Herculean task indeed. What was the propelling force which enabled the Sikh movement to work persistently, over a long period of about two centuries, for the abolition of caste against such heavy odds, but which was lacking in the medieval Radical Bhagti movement? What made the Sikh proselytes from the twice-born castes to fraternize with the Sudras?

The primary question to be faced by history is not of believing or not believing in prophecy. Call it prophetic mandate, inspiration, impulse, or by whatever other name one chooses, what other compulsive or driving motivational urge it was, operating in one case and not in the other, that made the difference? The greater is the obstacle to be overcome, the greater is the force that overcomes it.

Another allied implication is also important. It is true that many of the saints of the medieval *Bhagti* movement and the Sikh Gurus profess to follow the *Nam* or *Bhagti Marg*. But there are fundamental differences in their approaches towards such vital issues as the doctrine of *ahimsa* and the status of women in society.<sup>48</sup> Within the *Bhagti* schools of the so-called reformation itself, there were ideological variations from one Bhagta (saint) to another. The objects of devotion of some of them (e.g., of Mirabai) were Hindu *avtaras*, while others rejected these *avtaras* and preached unalloyed monotheism. Apart from these theological distinctions, the differences in the social approach of some of these Bhagtas were real and basic. Whereas, many of the *Bhagti* saints suggested reforms here and there in the ideology of the caste order, but did not venture to assail its framework in unequivocal terms; Kabir challenged the very ideological basis of the caste system. Hence, it would be very misleading to regard *Bhagti* or *Nam Marg* as a uniform school of thought, practice, or experience, at least in its social manifestations. The relevance of this implication will be clear when we come to deal with the doctrine of *Meeri-Peeri* and its historical consequences.

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## RATIONAL LOGIC, AFFECTIVE LOGIC, AND MYSTIC LOGIC

The genesis and development of the Sikh revolutionary movement revolved round the Sikh religious faith; but some scholars try to interpret its history exclusively in terms of rational logic and environmental factors. They either turn a blind eye towards the role of other factors, such as religious and affective, in its historical or social development, or dismiss the examination of the contributions thereof by any approach other than their own as being unscientific. For understanding the Sikh movement, we would, therefore, first of all attempt to point out the lop-sidedness of the premises of such scholarship with the help of the related findings of eminent scholars of social sciences, which cannot be dubbed as less scientific than the methodology followed by them.

### 1. *Other Factors Also*

“Among the most important factors of history, one was preponderant — the factor of beliefs... So long as psychology regards beliefs as voluntary and rational, they will remain inexplicable. Having proved that they are usually irrational and always involuntary, I was able to propound the solution of this important problem; how it was that beliefs which no reason could justify were admitted without difficulty by the most enlightened spirits of all ages.

“The solution of the historical difficulties which had so long been sought was thenceforth obvious. I arrived at the conclusion that besides the rational logic which conditions thought, and was formerly regarded as our sole guide, there exist very different forms of logic: affective logic, collective logic, and mystic logic, which usually overrule the reason and engender the generative impulses of our conduct.

“This fact well established, it seemed to me evident that if a great number of historical events are often uncomprehended, it is because we seek to interpret them in the light of a logic which in reality has very little influence upon their genesis.”<sup>1</sup>

### 2. *Affective Logic and Reason*

Mere rational conviction is unable to propel vast human masses into movement or to evoke heroic sentiments and great deeds.<sup>2</sup> It is strong emotions allied to a revolutionary ideology which are the propelling force of a revolution, which in turn is the locomotive force of history.<sup>3</sup> It is enthusiasm that drives men’s minds off the beaten tracks and produces the great revolutions both in thought and politics.<sup>4</sup> The French Revolution was an explosive release of energy.<sup>5</sup> This view is hardly contested, but the significant point is that affective logic, which is such a potent force in revolutionary movements, is not born of or governed by, rational logic. “Although in its beginnings a religious or political revolution may very well be supported by rational elements, it is developed only by the aid of mystic and affective elements which are absolutely foreign to reason.

“The historians who have judged the events of the French Revolution in the name of rational logic could not comprehend them, since this form of logic did not dictate them.

“The power of the Revolution did not reside in the principles... which it sought to propagate, nor in the institutions which it sought to found. The people care very little for institutions and even

less for doctrines. That the Revolution was potent indeed... was due to the fact that it had founded not a new system of government, but a new religion. Now history shows us how irresistible is the might of a strong belief. Invincible Rome herself had to bow before the armies of nomad shepherds illuminated by the faith of Mohammed. For the same reason, the kings of Europe could not resist the tatterdemalion soldiers of the Convention. Like all apostles, they were ready to immolate themselves with the sole end of propagating their beliefs, which according to their dream, were to renew the world.

“The religion thus founded had the force of other religions, if not their duration. Yet it did not perish without leaving indelible traces, and its influence is active still.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the origin of a revolution may be perfectly rational, we must not forget that the reasons invoked in preparing for it do not influence the crowd until they have been transformed into sentiments. Rational logic can point to the abuses to be destroyed, but to move the multitude its hopes must be aroused. This can only be effected by the action of affective and mystic elements which give man the power to act. At the time of the French Revolution, for example, rational logic, in the hands of the philosophers, demonstrated the inconveniences of the *ancien regime*, and excited the desire to change it. Mystic logic inspired belief in the virtues of a society created in all its members according to certain principles. Affective logic unchained the passions confined by the bonds of ages and led to the worst excesses. Collective logic ruled the clubs and the assemblies and impelled their members to actions which neither rational nor affective nor mystic logic would ever have caused them to commit.”<sup>7</sup>

Hagopian supports Gustave substantially on the role played by beliefs in revolutions. “By myths we mean the value-impregnated beliefs and notions that men hold, that they live by or live for. Every society is held together by a myth-system, a complex of dominating thought forms that determinates and sustains all its activities. ... Since myth is essentially a stimulus to immediate action, any attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally as further history is devoid of sense. An Utopia’s appeal to reason is a fatal weakness from the standpoint of revolution, because mere rational conviction is unable to propel vast human masses into movement or to evoke heroic sentiments and great deeds... A myth... arouses the sub-rational level of sentiment and passion; it alone can endow the masses with the bellicosity required for a revolutionary showdown.”<sup>8</sup>

### 3. *Belief and Reason*

“While scientific revolutions derive solely from rational elements, political and religious beliefs are sustained exclusively by affective and mystic forces, reason plays only a feeble part in their genesis... a political or religious belief constitutes an act of faith elaborated in unconsciousness, over which, in spite of all appearances, reason has no hold. I also showed that belief often reaches such a degree of intensity that nothing can be opposed to it. The man hypnotised by his faith becomes an apostle, ready to sacrifice his interests, his happiness, and even his life for the triumph of his faith. The absurdity of his belief matters little; for him it is a burning reality. Certitude of mystic origin possesses the marvellous power of entire domination over thought, and can only be effected by time.”<sup>9</sup>

“The force of the political and religious beliefs which have moved the world resides primarily in the fact that, being born of affective and mystic elements, they are neither created nor affected by reason.

“Political or religious beliefs have a common origin and obey the same laws. They are formed not with the aid of reason, but more often contrary to all reason. Buddhism, Islam, the Reformation, Jacobinism, Socialism, etc., seem very different forms of thought. Yet they have identical affective and mystic bases, and obey a logic that has no affinity with rational logic.”<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. *Belief and Modern Revolutions*

The Enlightenment embodied the sway of rational logic in the West, and the Jacobins were its standard-bearers in the French Revolution. Hence, the study of Jacobin mind by Gustave assumes importance, as an illustration, for understanding the great role of belief, faith, or mystic logic in modern revolutions, which are otherwise supposed to be mainly governed by rational logic.

“The chief characteristic of the mystic temperament consists in the attribution of a mysterious power to superior beings or forces, which are incarnated in the form of idols, fetishes, words, or formulae.

“The mystic spirit is at the bottom of all the religious and most political beliefs...

“Grafted on the sentiments and passionate impulses which it directs, mystic logic constitutes the might of the great popular movements. Men who would be by no means ready to allow themselves to be killed for the best of reasons will readily sacrifice their lives to a mystic ideal which has become an object of adoration.

“The principles of the Revolution (i.e., the French Revolution) speedily inspired a wave of mystic enthusiasm analogous to those provoked by the various religious beliefs which had preceded it. All they did was to change the orientation of a mental ancestry which the centuries had solidified.”<sup>11</sup>

“The mystic aspect of all revolutions has escaped the majority of historians. They will persist for a long time yet in trying to explain by means of rational logic a host of phenomena which have nothing to do with reason.”<sup>12</sup>

Given the silent power of reason over mystic beliefs, it is quite useless to seek to discuss, as is so often done, the rational value of revolutionary or political ideas. Only their influence can interest us.

The mystic mentality is an essential factor of the Jacobin mind. The Jacobins do not in the least suspect their mysticism. On the contrary, they profess to be guided solely by pure reason. During the Revolution they invoked reason incessantly, and considered it as their only guide to conduct. But they did not suspect for a moment that after all their personal views were only hypotheses, and that they were all the more laughable for claiming a Divine right for them precisely because they deny divinity.<sup>13</sup>

“This analysis will show in the first place that the Jacobin is not a rationalist, but a believer. Far from building his belief on reason, he moulds reason to his belief.. the Jacobin is never influenced by reasoning, however just, and it is precisely here that his strength resides.

“And why is he not accessible to reason. Simply because his vision of things, always extremely limited, does not permit of his resisting the powerful and passionate impulses which guide him.

“These two elements, feeble reason and strong passions, would not of themselves constitute the Jacobin mind. There is another.

“Passion supports convictions, but hardly ever creates them. Now, the true Jacobin has forcible convictions. What is to sustain them? Here the mystic elements whose actions we have already studied come into play. The Jacobin is a mystic who has replaced the old divinities by new gods. Imbued with the power of words and formulae, he attributes to them a mysterious power...

“With these three elements — a very weak reasoning power, very strong passions, and an intense mysticism — we have the true psychological components of the mind of a Jacobin.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Eliade, the Marxian vision of a classless society is no more than a refurbishment of the myth of the Golden Age, which comes at the end instead of the beginning of history.<sup>15</sup> Parts of other revolutionary ideologies are also considered to be infused with ancient mythical motifs. Only, “the old religious idiom has been replaced by a secular one, and this tends to obscure what otherwise would be obvious.”<sup>16</sup>

#### 5. *Comment*

The object of this exercise is to bring home that in interpreting revolutionary movements, the validity of rational logic is circumscribed by some other logics like affective logic and mystic logic. Therefore, it would be irrational to close one’s eyes to these logics and judge the Sikh revolutionary movement exclusively in the name of rational logic and environmental factors. “Given the silent power of reason over mystic beliefs”, it is useless to discuss the rational value of revolutionary religious faith. What matters is the influence it has exercised on the historical development of the movement.

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## THE SIKH PANTH

The Sikh Panth was not meant to be just another religious sect for emphasizing a particular religious dogma or a method of salvation. It was meant to be an instrument or vehicle for giving practical shape to Guru Nanak's prophetic unitary view of life. To put it pithily, it was to pursue the twin purpose of the transformation of man and the transformation of society. Not only these two objectives were interlinked, these were rather the two sides of the same coin. We will trace in broad outline the main trends of the development of the Panth.

### 1. *Transformation of Man Linked to Transformation of Society*

Guru Nanak wanted men to be transformed into angels. "Who changed men into angels in no time."<sup>1</sup> Apart from its religious import, this transformation of men (i.e., changing their motivation from self-centredness to God-centeredness) was a prerequisite for building the society based on God-oriented values he had in mind. One of the constantly recurring themes in the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib urges men not to be self-centred (*manmukh*) but to become God-oriented (*gurmukh*). And it needs no elaboration on our part to prove that self-centredness of man (his self-interest and propensity for aggression) is the root-cause of social discriminations and social conflicts. But, in deciding how far the transformation of man was linked practically to the transformation of society, one cannot depend entirely upon the hymns. These indicate the ultimate ethical principles on which life is to be organized, but how far it was organized on these lines can be determined only with the help of historical evidence.

### 2. *Sangat, Gurdwaras, and Congregational Worship*

The organization of *sangats*, gurdwaras, and congregational worship were important steps for building the Sikh Panth. *Sangats* were local religious congregations composed of Sikhs who were drawn to the Guru's ideals and mission, and included proselytes from all castes, inclusive of untouchables.<sup>2</sup> *Dharamsalas*, later came to be called gurdwaras, were the centres where the *sangats* met regularly or occasionally for the purpose of congregational worship or discussing their social problems. "In India, the religious caste taboo rendered difficult the rise, or limited the importance, of any stereological congregational religion in quasi-urban settlements, as well as in the country."<sup>3</sup> So, congregational worship has a social significance of its own. It served to integrate emotionally the Sikh proselytes from heterogeneous castes within the *sangat*, as loyalty to higher values helps men rise above their narrow loyalties. "All social functioning which serves in any way to integrate the group may be regarded as expressions of loyalty to higher values and thus take on a semi-religious meaning. From here it is natural to engage in acts of worship as the deepest and most effective way of strengthening the existing bonds... In the case of religion, individual relations are secondary; communion with the *naman* is primary and is basic in achieving religious integration."<sup>4</sup> As religious sanction was a primary factor in consolidating the caste system, religious integration on anti-caste basis within the *sangats* made a major contribution to strengthening the anti-caste character of the Sikh Panth, as the *sangats* were the organizational units of which the *Panth* was made of.<sup>5</sup>

Congregational worship, which consisted mainly of singing Guru's hymns, also served to emphasize the inculcation of those ultimate values which *Nam* embodies and which the hymns stress. Of these, the important ones which have a direct bearing on the social process are those

relating to Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, human equality, disinterested service to others, merging of the individual in the *sangat*, and devotion to the Guru.

### 3. *Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man*

The Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man is a cardinal principle of the Sikh faith. "There is One Father, and we are His children."<sup>6</sup> "A new type of grouping appears which, though current throughout the history of civilization, has not always been adequately recognized. The feeling of solidarity developing in these new units is to a certain extent revolutionary. The consciousness of this solidarity will vary; it will increase and decrease with the development of the new unit. The new form of grouping is characterized by the concept of relationship of spiritual fatherhood and spiritual brotherhood. The new community will differ from the natural groups not only in the type of organization, in rites and in beliefs, but primarily in a new spirit of unity. We have found that it is not so much organic growth which makes for the emergence of the spirit as it is a definite break with the past and with the ties of nature which characterize its rise. The more pronounced this break, the more definitely can we call the new cult a specifically religious group. Symbol of the break which is consciously experienced even at the level of primitive culture are such concepts as regeneration, rebirth, conversion, and certain corresponding rites. Those who undergo this experience, collectively or, more frequently, individually, are stimulated to join in close company. The intimacy of the new religious experience makes for intimacy of the new fellowship. At first it may consist merely in the exchange of the new knowledge between a few; later, of more followers and companions; then may grow into a lasting association, binding itself to the pursuit of a definite way of life and welding its members into a strongly knit community. The various differences which prevailed in the old world, now left behind, are meant to be extinguished. They are implicitly or explicitly repudiated, though with the growth of the new community they may reappear."<sup>7</sup>

This passage reflects, in a way, the growth of the Sikh Panth. Certain individuals or groups are attracted by the Guru's message of Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man (and by other components of the Sikh ideology also which we need not stress here). They are stimulated by this ideology to meet together in the *sangats* and a sense of spiritual fellowship develops among them. This new spirit of unity leads to a definite break with the past, and this break becomes very pronounced in the case of Sikhs because the Guru's message is diametrically opposed to the caste ideology and the surrounding caste society. The intimacy of the new religious experience makes for intimacy of the new fellowship. The solidarity of the new fellowship and break with the past combine to grow into a lasting association, binding itself to the pursuit of a definite new way of life and welding its members into a strongly knit community. Originally, the *sangats* were like tiny specks dispersed in the matrix of the caste society. These far-flung *sangats* were painstakingly and gradually organized over a long period into the Sikh Panth by the Gurus themselves.

### 4. *Break with the Past*

As Wach has put it, it is not so much organic growth which makes for the emergence of the new spirit (which leads to the formation of a new religious community), as it is a definite break with the past. We need not apportion the contribution of these two factors, as both of them were working to the same end. What matters is the magnitude of the separation achieved from the caste society and its social consequences. This question has already been discussed at some length.<sup>8</sup> In a nutshell, the separation of the Sikh Panth from the caste society was accomplished by repudiating the four pillars of caste-status, scriptural sanction, Hindu *Dharma*, and the concept of pollution on which the ideological structure of the caste system rested; and by destroying of the caste

organization by eliminating its linchpin, i.e., the Brahmin caste; by building the Sikh Panth as a separate society from the Hindu society; and by founding a new socio-political order. A measure of the break of the Sikh movement with the past is provided by the fact that of all the anti-caste movements of Indian origin, the Sikh Panth is the only one which has survived, as a distinct separate entity, the assimilative power of Hinduism.<sup>9</sup>

### 5. Equality and Fraternity

Brotherhood presupposes equality and fraternization; but since 'equality' proved to be a strong revolutionary motivative force even where 'fraternization' had not struck roots, we consider 'equality' as a potent revolutionary force on its own. In the French Revolution, the words 'liberty' and 'equality' became common at the same time, but 'fraternity' was "only to join them later and never acquired their popularity".<sup>10</sup> "Fraternity was never practised and the peoples have never cared much for liberty."<sup>11</sup>

The quality of and the extent to which the spirit of equality prevailed in the Sikh society has also been discussed in an earlier work.<sup>12</sup> But here we have to reproduce in some detail the salient items in order to impress the point we want to in this regard. The idea of human equality was inherent in the Sikh faith and in the Sikh movement so long as it retained its pristine purity. Guru Nanak bowed at the feet of Angad when he anointed him as his successor Guru, and the same custom was adhered to by the later Gurus.<sup>13</sup> Bhai Gurdas repeatedly makes it clear that there was no status gap between the Guru and the Sikh who had imbibed his spirit (*Gur Chela, Chela Guru*).<sup>14</sup> Guru Hargobind, out of reverence for Baba Bhudha, a devout Sikh, touched his feet.<sup>15</sup> The Sikhs addressed each other as brother (*Bhai*), thus showing a perfect level of equality among them. In all the available letters written by the Gurus, the Sikhs have been addressed as brothers (*Bhai*).<sup>16</sup> It was in continuation of this tradition that Guru Gobind Singh requested with clasped hands 'the Beloved Ones' to initiate him.<sup>17</sup> This shows that he regarded them not only his equals, but made them symbolically his Guru. This was the utmost limit to which a religious head could conceive or practice human equality. Bhangu records: "If any Sikh got or brought any eatables, it was never used alone; it was partaken by all the Sikhs... All eatables were shared by all members of the Khalsa... Singhs addressed each other with great love."<sup>18</sup> "Guru's Sikh was the brother of each Sikh."<sup>19</sup>

The prevalence of this spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization among the Sikhs is confirmed by evidence from non-Sikh historical sources. Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din, the author of *Fatubat Namah-i-Samadi* (1722-23), was a contemporary of Banda. He writes that low-caste Hindus, termed *khas-o-khashak-i-hamid-i-jahanni wajud* (i.e., the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus) swelled the ranks of Banda; and everyone in his army would address the other as the adopted son of the oppressed Guru (Guru Gobind Singh), and would publicise themselves with the title of *sabibzada* ("Yaki rab targhib-i-digran pisar-i-khanda-i-guru-i-maqbur gufta b' laqub-i-shahzadgi mashur kardah").<sup>20</sup> A contemporary historian of Aurangzeb writes, "If a stranger knocks at their door (i.e., the door of Sikhs) at midnight and utters the name of Nanak, though he may be a thief, robber, or wretch, he is considered as friend and brother, and is properly looked after."<sup>21</sup> Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan writes (1783 AD) about the Khalsa Panth: "When a person is once admitted into that fraternity, they make no scruple of associating with him, of whatever tribe, clan, or race he may have been hitherto; nor do they betray any of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind."<sup>22</sup> Commenting on the last part of the statement, the editor says, "This alludes to the touching or eating with persons of impure castes, in regard to which the Hindus are so tenacious."<sup>23</sup> The author of Haqiqat also writes about the same time that the Sikhs were told: "Whoever might join you from

whichever tribe, don't have any prejudice against him and without any superstition eat together with him. Now this is their custom."<sup>24</sup> Here we have very good independent testimony from two sources that up to 1783, at least, the Sikhs drawn from all castes dined freely with each other. The Haqiqat clearly states that Khattris, Jats, carpenters, blacksmiths and, grain grocers all joined the Khalsa<sup>25</sup> and "now this is their custom".

The significance of the spirit of equality, brotherhood, and fraternization achieved by the Sikh movement can be realised only if it is contrasted with the caste background in which the change was brought about. Bougie observes: "The spirit of caste unites these three tendencies, repulsion, hierarchy, and hereditary specialization... We say that a society is characterized by such a system if it is divided into a large number of mutually opposed groups which are hereditary, specialised and hierarchically arranged — if, on principle, it tolerates neither the parvenu, nor miscegenation, nor a change of profession."<sup>26</sup> "From the social and political point of view, caste is division, hatred, jealousy and distrust between neighbours."<sup>27</sup> Nesafield also comes to the conclusion that the caste system leads to a degree of social disunion to which no parallel can be found in human history. All authorities on caste are agreed that mutual repulsion and disunity, besides inequality and hierarchism, are the in-built constituents of the caste system.

We have quoted here in some detail, as we need solid ground for impressing an important point. Purely secular movements have succeeded remarkably in propagating and establishing political liberty, but have not effectuated social equality to the extent done by Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. It is true that political liberty helps the process of social egalitarianism, but whatever social equality there is in the West, it is more the heritage of Christian faith than that of political freedom. We do not hear much about fraternization either in secular movements.

The degree of social equality and fraternization achieved by the Sikh movement during its revolutionary phase was indeed remarkable. Not only the Sikhs regarded each other as brothers (*Bhai*), the Gurus, also, in their letters to the Sikhs (*Hukamname*), addressed them in the same manner. This feature of the movement is so prominent that it has come to the notice of Toynbee, who writes: "Like all converts to Islam, all converts to Sikhism became one another's brothers and peers in virtue of their having all alike given their allegiance to one Lord, whom they had been taught to worship as the sole true Living Lord."<sup>28</sup>

Except the Islamic society, whose record in this respect is praiseworthy, the Sikh revolutionary movement compares favourably with other similar movements. Considering the caste milieu in which it had to work, its achievements are all the more remarkable. In the case of Islam too it was lucky that it was born and had its teething troubles in a society which was very near the level of primitive communism.<sup>29</sup> The abolition of slavery by the American Revolution was no mean achievement, but the Blacks are prohibited, or at least prevented, from using the same public amenities as are available to white men.<sup>30</sup> This social gulf between Black and White citizens of the U.S.A. has remained despite the enlightening and liberalizing influences of Christianity, the Western culture and the capitalist economy. In the U.S.A., it is only the colour and racial prejudices against the Blacks that had to be overcome. The Sikh movement had to surmount the stigmas of the caste ideology, which, it was postulated, even god Indra himself was helpless to erase, as in the case of the story of Matanga in the Epic.

The revolutionary France did not have to face, within France, the like of the racial problem met in the U.S.A., or the like of the knotty social problem which the caste society posed in India.

Slavery in French colonies was maintained by the Constituents and was abolished by the Jacobins only in 1794,<sup>31</sup> to be restored again afterwards. The French Revolution did not envisage female liberation. “Women who attempted to find a place in the sansculotte ranks, which went beyond rhetorical expressions of solidarity, or the traditional roles of women in giving a special fervour to public demonstrations and attending to the warrior’s repose at other times, received short shrift. They were for a time to be seen at some club and section meetings, but did not lead them. The sansculotte by no means envisaged the total overturning of the social order attributed to him by the most alarmed of the reactionaries.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, the French Revolution was more of a political revolution rather than a social revolution. The slogan of ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ had great inspirational value, but the content of ‘Liberty’ and ‘Equality’ was determined by class interests even at the height of the revolutionary period. “The Declaration of Rights is remarkable in that it neatly balances a statement of universal principles and human rights with an evident concern for the interests of the bourgeoisie... Equality is presented in largely political terms... no mention is made of slavery and slave trade... The Declaration then, for all its nobility of language and its proclamation of universal principles, is essentially a manifesto of the revolutionary bourgeoisie and its clerical and liberal-aristocratic allies.”<sup>35</sup> As the French Revolution, even at its height, was dominated by class interests, there was little of that emotional integration which the Sikh revolutionaries acquired through their long training in the Sikh ideology and through their relentless struggle for its fulfilment. When the sansculottes, who usually led the vanguard in mass demonstrations or insurrections, could not concede equality of status to their own womenfolk, how could they be expected to fraternize with the lower strata of journeymen, wage-earners, house-servants, and the unemployed?

In this background, certain observations of Wach become very pertinent. “The emphasis is here not necessarily upon particular features of this ideal communion of brethren, such as mutual assistance or a readiness for self-sacrifice, martyrdom, etc., as all this might occur to an even greater degree in ‘secular’ life. The important note is struck by the formulation of the concrete values and standards for which the group stands and which are determined by their basic religious experiences. ‘Love of Christ’, ‘giving in the imitation of the Buddha’, and ‘obedience to the will of Allah’ are examples of attitudes characteristic of the ideal community in the Christian, Buddhist, and Mohammedan concepts, respectively... Why should religion be credited with so decisive a role as we attribute to it in defining it as the paramount force of social integration? Are there no other means to achieve this end? Why should a secular society not find ways and means to integrate itself effectively and lastingly? Perhaps it is only a terminological misunderstanding which prevents agreement among supposedly conflicting views. We like to think that the desired agreement among scholars of society could be reached on the basis of the formula that perfect integration of a society never has been nor can be achieved without a religious basis.”<sup>34</sup> Of course, Wach does not identify here religion with ideas, rites, or institutions; but conceives it “as that profound source from which all human existence is nourished and upon which it depends in all its aspects: man’s communion with God”.<sup>35</sup>

We may entirely agree with Wach’s viewpoint, but we need not stake the claim that perfect integration of society cannot be achieved without a religious basis. It is enough for our purpose that historically, so far, it has never been. The explanation for this phenomenon advanced by Wach is more convincing. “Religious experience, being fundamental, constitutes the basis of communion of a most intimate character, boring deep into the beds of impulses, emotions, and thoughts which are common to all men. The subjective religion has at all times proved potent enough to unite and integrate people who are otherwise widely separated by differences of descent, profession, wealth, or

rank: A study of the social status of those who followed the prophets, teachers, and founders of religion will reveal the surprising social heterogeneity of the motley groups who became one when united in a common religious experience.”<sup>36</sup>

It should now be clear how the Khatris came to bow before the Jats in the Sikh Panth;<sup>37</sup> how the untouchables (whose very presence was supposed to pollute the air in the caste society) became equal participants in the *sangats*,<sup>38</sup> and how the Rangrettas fraternized as equals in the Khalsa.<sup>39</sup> This phenomenon was the product of a religious experience and not of environmental factors. Because, secular movements, as seen, have not produced such a qualitative fraternization among such disparate and inimical elements; and, broadly speaking, the same environment impinged on the other infructuous Indian anti-caste movements as well. And, this phenomenon has no ordinary historical significance; because, without social cohesion, neither the egalitarian Sikh Panth would have come into being, nor the Jats (peasants), Ramgarhias (artisans), and Ahluwalias (near outcastes) would have become political rulers.

#### 6. Pollution and Commensality

The notions about pollution, of which the taboo on commensality is just one aspect, played the biggest role in extending the caste system and in projecting it in day-to-day operation. Hutton writes: “Indeed, it seems possible that caste endogamy is more or less incidental to the taboo on taking food cooked by a person of, at any rate a lower if not of any other caste, and in view of the writer this taboo is probably the keystone of the whole system.”<sup>40</sup> Of the offences of which a caste Panchayat took cognisance “the offences against the commensal taboos... are undoubtedly the most important, for the transgression by one member of the caste if unknown and unpunished may effect the whole caste with pollution through his commensality with the rest”.<sup>41</sup> “If the member of a low caste, merely looks at the meal of a Brahmin, it ritually defiles the Brahmin”<sup>42</sup> and “a stranger’s shadow, or even the glance of a man of low caste, falling on the cooking pot may necessitate throwing away the contents”.<sup>43</sup> “A separate lower caste (the Kallars) has arisen in Bengal among people who had infringed the ritual and dietary laws during the famine of 1866, and in consequence been excommunicated.”<sup>44</sup> The Sudras were considered to be impure by their very birth and the inherent impurity in them could not be shaken off by any means whatsoever, as illustrated by the story of Matanga given in the Epic. The mere touch of the outcastes polluted a person of the higher castes, and their very presence defiled the air.

Guru Nanak identified himself with the lowest of low castes;<sup>45</sup> and took a concrete step for abolishing the notion of pollution by starting the institution of *langar* (i.e., community dining), where all dined together irrespective of any considerations of caste or creed. There was no place in Guru Angad’s congregation for any one who observed caste.<sup>46</sup> Sikhs drawn from all castes were treated as equals.<sup>47</sup> Only those who were not afraid of Vedic and caste injunctions came to his congregation, others did not.<sup>48</sup> At the *langar* (free kitchen), all dined at the same platform and partook the same food.<sup>49</sup> Guru Amar Das went a step further — no one who had not partaken food at his *langar* could see him.<sup>50</sup> In *langar*, there were/are no distinctions of caste. Lines of noble *Gurbhais* (disciples of the same Guru) partook food sitting together at the same place.<sup>51</sup> Guru Gobind Singh himself partook *amrit*, prepared at the initiation ceremony by the five Beloved ones, of whom four were Sudras. Koer Singh, a near contemporary of the Guru, records that the Guru made the four castes into a single one, and made the Sudras, the Vaishs, the Khatris, and the Brahmins take meals at the same place.<sup>52</sup> All members of the Khalsa Dal, including the Rangrettas (proselytes from the outcastes) dined together.<sup>53</sup> We have already referred to the independent testimony of Ghulam Hussain Khan (1783) and Haqiqat (1783), which clearly shows that, even in the post-revolutionary

period, when elements of caste had started making inroads into the Sikh society, Sikh proselytes from all castes dined freely with each other, at least upto 1783.

This outline of historical evidence establishes three facts:

- (a) That the Sikh Gurus continued to take concrete, practical, organisational steps for abolishing the caste restrictions connected with the notion of pollution and commensalism, which, according to Hutton, is the keystone of the caste system. "It is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be at least ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes."<sup>54</sup>
- (b) In doing so, they separated the Sikh Panth from the caste society, or obliged the caste society to separate itself from the Panth. Those who observed caste would not join the Gurus' congregation, and Brahmins and Khattris desisted, by and large, from joining the Khalsa.<sup>55</sup> The institution of *langar* destroyed one of the constitutive principles of the caste system among the Sikhs.
- (c) Commensality was a great factor in cementing cohesion among Sikh proselytes from disparate and inimical castes in the Sikh Panth. "Furthermore, highly privileged castes must be shielded from the glances of 'unclean' strangers during cultic repasts or even everyday meals. Conversely, the provision of commensality is frequently a method of producing religious fellowship, which may, on occasion, lead to political and ethnic alliances. Thus, the first great turning point in the history of Christianity was the communal feast arranged at Antioch between Peter and uncircumcised proselytes, to which Paul, in his polemic against Peter, attributed such decisive importance."<sup>56</sup>

#### 7. "Sewa" (Social Service)

The Indian religious tradition laid almost exclusive emphasis on meditational, ascetic or Yogic practices as the means of attaining salvation or spiritual bliss. Social service was rarely made an obligatory part of religious practice. All moral life remained confined within the framework of the caste system, because complete allegiance to the social structure was a part of one's religious obligations. Only Mahayana Buddhism made social service a part of its religion, but it had been hunted out from the land long before Guru Nanak. In this background, people could be led on only step by step to accepting new moral and religious codes. The first step was to make them conscious of their social obligations.

The Sikh Gurus made social service (*sewa*) a prerequisite to spiritual development. "Without service there cannot be any *Bhagti*."<sup>57</sup> "Without service one *never* reaps the fruits, service is a noble deed."<sup>58</sup> "Nobody has reached God without service; otherwise one ever wanders in confusion."<sup>59</sup> Social service is an essential component of the Sikh way of life even after the highest spiritual attainment. "Spontaneous service of others is in the very nature of the *Brahmgyani*."<sup>60</sup> "Service should be regarded as the highest form of *Bhagti*."<sup>61</sup> Service of fellow beings became such a cardinal feature of the Sikh movement that its importance is invariably stressed in the Sikh tradition and all the sources of its history.<sup>62</sup> After his world tours, Guru Nanak himself took to the cultivation of land.<sup>63</sup> The produce from it went to the common kitchen which served the needy and all those who came to visit him. Guru Amardas had given standing instructions that if anybody was in suffering, he should immediately be informed so that he could be of help to him.<sup>64</sup> Guru Arjan established a leper asylum at Tarn Taran, and Guru Gobind Singh refused to accept water from the hands of a person who had not served anybody else earlier.<sup>65</sup> Paro was offered Guruship, but he respectfully declined and requested that instead he might be granted the boon of love for the service of man.<sup>66</sup> Ladha humiliated himself by blackening his face in order to help another person to get out of

trouble. "The Guru praised Ladha in the open assembly and said that Ladha had won him over by his selfless service. Pilgrimages, sacrificial ritual and asceticism do not equal selfless service and Naam."<sup>67</sup>

The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh society insisted on disinterested service of others. "He who performs disinterested service meets God."<sup>68</sup> In the Sikh terminology, the term *sewa* itself meant only selfless service.

In the Christian world, social service was mainly directed toward the care of sick. In the famine-ridden India, the primary concern of the common-man was getting two meals a day. It is in these circumstances that in the Sikh Panth, great stress came to be laid on feeding the poor, for which purpose the establishment of *langars* became a continuing tradition of the Sikh society. Another direction which social service took was service of the *sangats* in the gurdwaras. And as the gurdwaras became the focal points of the Sikh Panth, they became the centres for mobilizing the Sikh potential of social service for any cause, social or political, the Panth stood for. This holds good up to the present-day.

### 9. Supremacy of Ideals and Values

While repudiating claims of others to exclusive religious authority, the Sikh Gurus did not advance any such claim in their own behalf. Guru Nanak calls himself "lowest of the low".<sup>69</sup> Guru Ram Das describes himself to be the "meanest of the whole creation"<sup>70</sup> and Guru Gobind Singh regards himself as "the slave of the Supreme Being"<sup>71</sup>. Of the ten Sikh Gurus, the hymns of six have been recorded in Guru Granth Sahib. In not a single line do they indicate any claim to exclusive religious authority.

The single greatest step that the Sikh Gurus took to establish the supremacy of ideals and values was to detach ideology from the person of the ideologue. In the first place, the very concept of Guru in Sikhism was not anthropomorphic. To a pointed question of the yogis as to who was his Guru, Guru Nanak's categorical reply was, "God (Word, the Immanent God) is my Guru and the mind attuned to Him is the disciple."<sup>72</sup> The same ideological line was followed by the later Gurus. "Guru (God) is Omnipotent and Unfathomable."<sup>73</sup> "Regard the Eternal God as my Guru."<sup>74</sup> Secondly, the eternal spirit, the doctrine, the tenet, or the principle was made supreme over and above the person of the teacher, the Guru, or the prophet. When Guru Nanak nominated Angad as his successor, he (Nanak) laid his head at the feet of Angad as a mark of homage.<sup>75</sup> It is significant that Guru Nanak did not bow before Lehna (i.e., the disciple who was not yet perfect), but bowed before Angad, the same person who had become the head and represented the spirit of the mission. As soon as the same spirit was enshrined in both, the distinction between the Guru and the disciple was obliterated. Satta and Balwand, in their hymns recorded in Guru Granth Sahib, and Bhai Gurdas in his *Vars*, have made this point absolutely clear, "The light was the same, the system was the same, the only change was a change of bodies."<sup>76</sup> "Nanak blended his light with his (Angad's light), (and in this way) Satguru Nanak transformed his form."<sup>77</sup> Not only the distinction between one Guru and the other Guru disappeared, but the distinction between the Guru and all those Sikhs who had imbibed in to the Guru's spirit also disappeared. Guru Hargobind touched the feet of Baba Budha to pay him homage.<sup>78</sup> And by conferring Guruship on Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh emphasised two points. First, that the Guruship was not embodied in any person but in the principle and the spirit the person enshrined; and secondly, that it was the ideology that mattered and not its source. Thirdly, the Gurus, like other prophets, tried "to supplant the traditional ritualistic religious grace of the ecclesiastical type by organizing life on the basis of

Ultimate ethical principles”.<sup>79</sup> Fourthly, “the far-reaching conception that the true religious mood is to be judged by its fruits, by its faithful demonstration,”<sup>80</sup> was enforced. “Our deeds alone bear witness into our life.”<sup>81</sup> “According to their deeds, some are near and some far from God.”<sup>82</sup> “It is the deeds (the way the life is led) that is dear to me, and not the person of the Sikh.”<sup>83</sup> The pages of Sikh history bear witness throughout how this axiom was insisted upon.

#### 10. *Separate Identity and Universality*

The way the Sikh Gurus established and maintained the separate identity of the Sikh Panth, and, at the same time retained its universal spirit, is a very good illustration of how they stuck to their ultimate values while institutionalising them for practical purposes. Mere ideological distinctiveness was not enough. The greatest social hurdle in the way of humanism was the iniquitous caste system. It could not be reformed from within. For, social inequality and hierarchism were in-built in its very constitution and mechanism. The anti-caste movements could survive only if these divorced themselves from the caste society. Buddhism organized a monastic society outside the caste ranks, but it left its laity to remain in the caste fold. The result was that when Brahminism reasserted itself, the lay followers of Buddhism imperceptibly moved into their caste moorings, leaving the order of monks high and dry in its isolation. Kabir was far more vocal than Basava, but the Lingayats established a far more distinct identity than the Kabirpanthis; because their deviations (e.g., widow-remarriage, burying the dead and admission” of all castes) from the caste usages were very radical. Later, the Lingayats tried to tone down their radicalism. But, in spite of this, they are, perhaps, more an appendage of the orthodox society than its integral part, because even the toned down Lingayatism is not wholly adjustable in the caste order.<sup>84</sup> Chaitanya, who was more radical with regard to caste restrictions than the Maharashtra Bhagtas, had both low caste Hindus and Mussalmans as his disciples. In the Kartabhai sect, which branched out of the Chaitanya School, there is no distinction between Hindus, Mussalmans, and Christians. A Mussalman has more than once risen to the rank of a teacher. The members of the sect eat together once or twice in a year.<sup>85</sup> But, the main body of the followers of Chaitanyas reverted to the caste society; and even its Kartabhai section, like the Lingayats, does not assert a distinct identity apart from the caste society. The creed of Kabir attained the stage of only a *mata* (religious path), although of all the denouncers of caste considerations he was the most unequivocal and vocal. The Kabirpanth remained a loose combination of those who were attracted by Kabir’s religious appeal, or were attracted by some other considerations (e.g., *Julahas* (weavers), who constituted a majority of the Kabirpanthis, were attracted to Kabir because he was a *Julaha*).<sup>86</sup>

These instances leave no doubt that anti-caste movements, like those of Kabir and other Bhagtas, whose departure from the caste ideology had been confined only to the ideological plane, remained still-born in the field of social achievement. And, those like the Lingayats and the followers of Chaitanya, who, under the influence of a teacher, did adopt certain anti-caste usages, but either they did not want to break away completely from the caste society or did not pursue their aim consistently enough, remained tagged to the caste order in one form or the other. The Buddhist monks alone could escape being swallowed by the caste society, because they had made a complete break with the caste order, both ideologically and organizationally. Accordingly, in the medieval period, the chances of success of any anti-caste movement were in direct proportion to the separate identity it established outside the caste society, both at the ideological and the organizational levels. And the foremost prerequisite for this purpose was a clear perception of this aim, a determined will and a consistent effort to pursue it.

The separate identity of the Sikh Panth and the Sikh movement is such a patent fact of history that it is hardly questioned. This by itself is a clear indication of the fact that the Sikh Gurus had a definite aim of giving their message a distinct and new organizational form. Otherwise, it is hard to explain why the Sikh movement should not have met the same fate as that of Lingayats and the followers of Kabir and Chaitanya. The Sikh Gurus realised, which the others did not, that in order to give battle to the caste order, it was imperative to build a social system and organize people outside the caste-society. This process of establishing a separate society (the Sikh Panth) started with Guru Nanak himself.

Along with establishing a separate identity of the Sikh Panth, the Gurus also maintained within it a universal spirit. The Sikh tradition is replete with instances showing the cosmopolitan spirit of the Sikh Gurus. "The Hindus reject the Muslims and the Muslims reject the Hindus. God has ordained me (Nanak) to act upon the four Katesbs. The merit does not lie in reading or hearing them, but lies in living them in life."<sup>87</sup> Guru Amardas sent Prema to a Muslim saint for getting cured,<sup>88</sup> and made Alayar, a Muslim, one of his priests, who drew no distinction between Hindus and Muhammadens.<sup>89</sup> Guru Arjan incorporated in Guru Granth the hymns of two Muslim saints, Farid and Bhikhan, thus giving them equal status with the hymns of the Gurus. He got the foundation stone of the premier Sikh temple laid by the famous Sufi saint, Mian Mir. Guru Hargobind, who was the first to raise the standard of armed revolt against the Mughals and fought six battles against them, built on his own, a mosque when he founded the new township of Hargobindpur.<sup>90</sup> It was Guru Gobind Singh who created the Khalsa to wage a relentless struggle against the religious and political tyranny of the Mughal empire, but his hymns leave no doubt about his universal approach: "What is a Hindu or Muslim to him, from whose heart doubt departeth."<sup>91</sup> In a period when Muslim sentiment against the Sikhs had crystallised, many a noble spirit among the Muslims recognized the non-sectarian character of the Guru's mission. Buddhu Shah was a known Muslim divine. He himself, his brother, his four sons, and seven hundred disciples fought for the Guru. During the struggle, two of his sons died fighting,<sup>92</sup> and he himself was tortured to death by Osman Khan for having sided with the Guru.<sup>93</sup> Saiyed Beg, one of Aurangzeb's Generals, who was in command of five thousand men, changed his mind at a critical moment in the course of the battle and "threw in his lot with the Sikhs, and contributed all his wealth towards their struggle against the Muhammadens..."<sup>94</sup> Later, Saiyed Beg died fighting for the Guru in another action.<sup>95</sup> Another General, Saiyed Khan, sent by Emperor Aurangzeb to subdue the Guru, also left the imperial forces and voluntarily submitted himself to the Guru.<sup>96</sup> By far the best instance of the cosmopolitan spirit of the movement is the story of Kanahiya who, during the critical battle at Anandpur, used to offer water and assistance with absolute impartiality to the wounded, both among the Sikhs and the enemy forces. When questioned, Kanahiya quoted the Guru's own instructions that one should look on all men with an equal eye. The Guru complimented him for displaying the true spirit of a Sikh.<sup>97</sup> The author of Haqiqat attested to it in 1783 (i.e., after the Sikhs had passed through the severest persecution at the hands of the Muslim rulers) that, "In his (Nanak's) religion there is very little prejudice against the Muslims, nay, they have practically no prejudice against any nation."<sup>98</sup>

It is important to understand that this cosmopolitan Sikh tradition could not be born either out of Muslim exclusiveness, or the caste ideology. Only the Radical Bhagtas shared this outlook, but they never ventured in the social or organizational field. *Bhagtamala*, the only earlier record of their lives, does not mention the shaping of any such tradition. Therefore, the very existence and persistence of this tradition is a strong indication of the universal character of the Sikh movement.

The really important point to be noted is that for the practice of their universal humanism, the Sikh Gurus established the forum of the Sikh Panth. Their universalism had distinct social aims. This was their major difference with the Radical Bhagtas who never tried to institutionalise their ideology. The Sikh Gurus were deeply committed to achieving practical social good. It was the inner compulsion both of their religion and universalism that prompted them to create a new path and a Panth so as to give practical shape to a programme that directly militated on the one hand, against the caste ideology and, on the other, against the *Shariat* of the ruling Islam in India. Just as in the case of the doctrine of *ahimsa*, they did not make a fetish of universalism so as to allow it to be used as a cover for inaction and for ignoring their avowed social goals. The Gurus never wanted the Hindus to remain as Hindus in a manner which left the caste system and its anti-humanism intact. Similarly, they did not want the Muslims to remain as Muslims in a manner which led to *Shariatic* exclusiveness and, its corollary, the religious dictation of non-Muslims. All that Guru Nanak wanted was that Hindus should be Hindus of his concept, and the Muslims to be Muslims of his concept. His hymns leave no doubt on this issue. For, these clearly commend the acceptance of values and virtues instead of the formalism and ritualism of the old religions. "Make kindness thy mosque, sincerity thy prayer carpet; What is just and lawful thy Quran. Modesty thy circumcision; civility thy fasting; so shall thou be a Musalman."<sup>99</sup> "A Musalman is he who cleaneth his impurity;"<sup>100</sup> "(A Muslim) dwells on the *Shariat*. But, they alone are perfect who surrender their self to see God."<sup>101</sup> "He who instructeth all the four castes in the Lord's Wisdom, Nanak, such a Pandit I salute for ever."<sup>102</sup> "Yoga is neither in the patched coat, nor in the Yogi's staff, nor in besmearing oneself with ashes... If one looketh upon all the creation alike, he is acclaimed as a true Yogi."<sup>103</sup> This meant pure and simple humanism and the abolition of all those institutions which were unjust or aggressive. The creation of parallel institutions to replace the anti-humanistic ones, e.g., the caste society and the tyrannical state, was an indispensable prerequisite. It was for this purpose that the Sikh Gurus organized the Sikh Panth. But, they scrupulously maintained the spirit of humanism and universality in that organization. The universalism of the Sikh Gurus was not-of that hue which is self-satisfied in remaining in an amorphous state and does not aspire to institutionalise for a humanitarian purpose. At the same time, the Sikh Panth was not created just to add another sect. It was established to serve an egalitarian cause.

#### 11. *Devotion to the Guru*

Devotion to religious preceptors is common to all religions. It is a double-edged weapon. When harnessed to serve a noble purpose, it works wonders; otherwise it could lead to aberrations as well. Devotion to Prophet Muhammed contributed a good deal in arousing the zeal which carried his message of human equality to far-flung countries, but it also assumed the form of religious exclusiveness and *Shariatic* bigotry which frustrated the fulfilment of this lofty ideal. In India too, the institution of Guru came to be seriously abused. But the Sikh Gurus steered clear of these dangers by impersonalising the concept of Guru, by placing principles above personalities, and by diverting religious devotion to serve social and political ends. As a final step to abolish the personality cult among the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh abolished altogether the institution of a Guru in person and conferred Guruship on Granth Sahib, the enshrined principles.

The problem of leading men to serve humanistic causes in a society, whose very basis was hierarchical, was in itself very tough to tackle. It was further compounded by the narrowing down and segmentation of social loyalties. In a country, where every human activity was conceived and postulated in religious terms, devotion to a religious head, dedicated to a progressive cause, could be the means, perhaps the only means, to raise people above their divisive values and loyalties and yoke them to achieving social goals. This is what precisely happened in the Sikh movement. Devotion

towards the Sikh Gurus supplanted hierarchical values and narrow individual, caste, and class loyalties. It speaks volumes about the deep commitment of the Gurus to their revolutionary mission that they delinked the devotion directed towards their personalities, and channelized it towards revolutionary objectives. In the battle at Chamkaur, when most of the besieged Sikhs had died and there was no hope left of holding the mud fortress for long, the survivors forced Guru Gobind Singh to leave the place in order to reorganise the movement. Sant Singh dressed himself like the Guru and remained behind in order to deceive the enemy and gain time for the Guru's escape. Finally, when overpowered, "he went on uttering 'Khalsa', 'Khalsa', and had no other desire. Sant Singh expired with Waheguru (God's name) on his lips."<sup>104</sup> The point we want to emphasise is that the devotion to the Guru was transformed into devotion to the revolutionary cause.

"Everywhere the disciple-master relationship is classified among those involving reverence... The obligation of obedience to the Guru... took precedence over loyalty to family..."<sup>105</sup>

"The group which the man of God attracts about him may appear as a loosely connected association or as a closely knit unit, bound together by a common religious experience whose nature is revealed and interpreted by the founder. A growing sense of solidarity both binds the members together and differentiates from any other form of social organization."<sup>106</sup> "The statement of Jesus that those who 'do the Will of God' are truly his brothers, sisters and mothers, and his blood relations (Mark 3, 31 ff; Matt, 12, 17 ff. , Luke 8, 18 ff) is paralleled by the Buddha's, "For some persons even father and mother are no hindrances."<sup>107</sup> "He is disciple, friend, relative or brother, who follows Guru's (God's) Will,"<sup>108</sup> and "serve Guru's Sikhs and regard them as their mother, brother, and friend."<sup>109</sup>

However, religious fellowship may appear either as a loose association (as in the case of Kabirpanth) or as a closely knit unit (as in the case of the Sikh Panth). The successive Gurus organized for that purpose, over a long period, *sangats*, *manji* system, central centres of worship, and a sanctified scripture of their own, in a deliberate and systematic manner. What made the difference was that the Sikh Gurus channelized the religious devotion of their followers towards achieving social and political objectives on a long-term basis (about 200 years). We do not find evidence of this having happened, at least on such a scale, in other anti-caste Indian movements.

## 12. A State Within A State

Dr Gokal Chand writes: "As a matter of fact the Sikhs had made a great advance under the pontificate of Guru Arjan. A state, peaceful and unobtrusive, had been slowly evolved, and with the Guru at its head as *Sachcha Padshah*, the Sikhs 'had already become accustomed to a form of self government within the Empire'<sup>110</sup>. Their power and prestige had increased, and they were fast becoming a factor in the political life of the province."<sup>111</sup>

Toynbee also holds the same view, "There seems to have been an intermediate stage in the evolution of the Sikh military machine out of the Sikh fraternity which had been founded by Nanak about a hundred years before Hargobind's time. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century of the Christian era the Sikh community seems to have assumed a form which was already political though it was not yet warlike."<sup>112</sup>

How far the Sikhs had actually become "a state within a state" is not the question before us. What is relevant to our purpose is whether or not they took to that path? Jahangir's own autobiography points to an affirmative answer:

“At Govindwall situated on the River Beas there lived a Hindu named Arjan in the garb of saints and holy men. He had attracted many Hindus and even some ignorant and low class Mussalmans and ensnared them to follow the practices of his cult. He had been loudly blowing the trumpet of his saintliness and spiritual leadership. He was known as ‘Guru’ and people from all sides resorted to him and made declarations of faith in him. I had been wishing for long time either to abolish this emporium of falsehood or convert him to Islam till Khusrau happened to pass this way. The foolish Prince thought of attaching himself to his cortege. He repaired to the Guru’s residence and had an interview with him. The Guru discussed some old cases with him and with his finger put on the forehead of the Prince a saffron mark which is called ‘*Tilak*’ by the Hindus and is considered an auspicious omen.”<sup>113</sup>

Some points are clear enough and some can be inferred from the above statement. Guru Arjan converted some Mussalmans to his faith, and it irked Jehangir. According to the *Shariat* law such a conversion invited death penalty. The confrontation between the Sikh movement and the Muhammedan power bent upon enforcing the *Shariat* was, therefore, inevitable. It was a clash between two opposed ideologies. It was not a question of mere conversion from one sect to another. Nor was it merely because the state happened to be a Muhammedan state. It was rather an irony of fate that the followers of the two religions, which were so close to each other, at least in their social approach, were to be locked in an unavoidable collision. Had there been a Hindu state at that time, and had it tried to impose caste regulations on the Sikh movement, the conflict between that Hindu state and the Sikh movement would have been as inevitable as it became in the present case. The basic principle of creating a free society was involved. The Sikh Gurus could not remain indifferent when religious freedom was denied.

Secondly, Khusrau visited the Guru as a rebel and was blessed by him. This blessing could have been sought only for his success in his rebellion and not for a religious purpose; because Khusrau was a Muslim and by showing his religious allegiance to a non-Muslim he would have jeopardized his claim to the throne of a Muslim state. In any case, both these instances mean a deliberate confrontation with the state.

### 13. *Comment*

Some scholars see a dichotomy within the movement of the Guru period itself. They think that the taking up of arms, for howsoever a righteous cause, is incompatible with the *marg* (path) of *Nam Simran* (meditation) as they perceive it. The demarcation between “flight from the world” and “worldly asceticism” is very distinct, but there are many variations within the latter category. But, these scholars do not clarify their perception of *Nam Simran*. Where do they draw the line in the lives of the first five Gurus and on what basis? Is the condemnation of kings and administration by Guru Nanak (“*Raje sinh, mukadam kute*”), or being called *sacha padshah* (True king) and holding regal *darbars* (courts) by Guru Arjan, in tune with *Nam Simran* or not? If it is, it all began with Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan, and not with Guru Hargobind. If it is not, then Sikhism was different from such a *Nam Simran marg* from the very beginning.

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## SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCEPT OF MEERI-PEERI AND ITS HISTORICAL IMPACT

The full import of the concept of Meeri-Peeri is not understood if it is viewed, as is usually done, merely as a response to an isolated, particular political situation. Seen in a broader perspective, it was born as a God-orientated solution to an ever-recurring historical problem.

### 1. *The Problem*

The problem has been referred to in the previous chapters as well, but in order to facilitate discussion here, it may be recapitulated and pin-pointed in simple terms as follows:

- a) Firstly, human inequality and human aggression are the root-cause of all social, political, and economic tensions in society.
- b) Secondly, starting from simpler forms in primitive societies, this inequality and aggression has consolidated itself, over the centuries, as systems of stratification of society based on status, power, or class.
- c) Thirdly, the ultimate sanction for creating and maintaining these systems is political-cum-military power.

These are generally accepted axioms of social sciences, including history, and hence there is no need to argue about it or to seek corroboration for them.

### 2. *The Religious Response*

There is no doubt that religion has been misused on an extensive scale to legitimise the inequitable, even inhuman stratification of society. It is religious sanction which helped the caste system to maintain and consolidate itself for thousands of years. But, there is also no doubt that there is another side to this picture as well.

“Every religiously grounded unworldly love and indeed every ethical religion must, in similar measure and for similar reasons, experience tensions within the sphere of political behaviour. The tension appears as soon as religion has progressed to anything like a status of equality with the sphere of political associations.”<sup>1</sup> Again, “The conflict of ascetic ethics, as well as of the mystically oriented temper of brotherly love, with the apparatus of domination which is basic to all political institutions produced the most varied types of tension and compromise.”<sup>2</sup>

What Max Weber postulates clearly, therefore, is that:

- (a) The apparatus of domination is basic to all political institutions.
- (b) Therefore, not only mystically orientated temper of brotherly love, but all ethical systems must experience tension with political set-ups. In other words, only religions which reject the world, or are indifferent to humanitarian values, can escape tension and confrontation with political regimes which maintain an unjust *status quo*. We have no concern with this approach. But religions, which do believe in sharing worldly responsibility and are very much alive to the infringement of humanitarian values, have varied in their approaches towards tackling the problem of the stratification of society. Broadly speaking, these approaches may be divided into two categories, the reformist and the revolutionary.

### 3. *Reform and Revolution*

An important feature of a revolutionary movement, distinguishing revolution from reform, is that it does not limit itself to piecemeal reconstruction of a system of stratification. It aims at the complete, at least a radical, reconstruction of the system concerned and not a part of it. That is what demarcates a revolution from reform movements. This magnitude of change, which a revolution seeks to bring about in the *status quo*, leads to two unavoidable corollaries. A revolutionary movement must aim at capturing political power and it has to depend upon the use of force for achieving that purpose.

#### 4. Political and Violent

A revolution by its very definition, as we have seen, must seek to abolish at least one of the traditional systems of stratification. Any entrenched stratification system might be amenable to reform, but would not surrender without a struggle when its very existence is at stake. And, as all systems get entrenched, in the last analysis, on the basis of political and military sanctions, revolutions have to be political and violent. In other words, there cannot be even a permanent social revolution without a political revolution. "The goals of a revolution are the official objectives for taking up arms, for breaking through the framework of traditional loyalty, or for adopting the anomic course rather than the non-anomic. The significance of the goal lies principally in the way it legitimates the use of violence."<sup>3</sup> The emphasis in our definition upon intensification of political power and recourse to violence illustrates what some concepts of revolution either neglect or underestimate, that revolution is a political phenomenon. Its political dimension figures both with respect to goals and to means. The goal of a revolution in fact may be a new political order, while political methods are unavoidable no matter what the stakes of revolution may be. This double importance of political power gives it some claim to be considered the most important, though not the exclusive, factor involved.<sup>4</sup>

The revolutionary phenomenon is primarily a political event, a fact that has tended to be overlooked by emphasizing socio-economic considerations. "Subordinate relationships universally and for ever pose a political problem. The issue of subordination is more pervasive than that of exploitation, to which Marx tried to limit it."<sup>5</sup> "The revolutionary process itself is in the first instance a struggle for political power. And whatever may be the deeper driving forces of a revolution, the struggle for the state always appears as the immediate content; indeed to such an extent that the transformation of the social order often appears not as the goal of the revolution, but simply as means used by revolutionaries to conquer or to exercise power."<sup>6</sup>

A revolution necessarily involves an armed struggle, especially so when the entrenched system is sought to be abolished within a short time. "Finally, our definition of revolution considers recourse to violence as essential rather than accidental to it. The magnitude and the abruptness of change involved in revolution always produces violence in some form. Revolution must be distinguished from reform, however radical, and from long-term evolutionary development such as the so-called industrial revolution and the growth of certain religious movements. The factor of violence helps to do this."<sup>7</sup>

In each revolution there is a point, or several points, where constituted authority is challenged and ultimately overpowered by the super power of revolutionists. In England, Charles did not have enough good soldiers in the Civil War in comparison with the human resources available to Parliament. Similarly, in America also an important initial failure of the government was its failure to use force adequately and skilfully. In France, Louis and his advisers failed to use the military at the decisive moment, the rioting in Paris in July. And, in Petrograd in 1917, at the critical

moment, the soldiers refused to march against the people, but regiment by regiment came over instead to join the demonstrators. No revolutionists have ever succeeded until they have got a predominance of effective armed forces on their side.<sup>8</sup>

### 5. *The Concept of Meeri-Peeri*

The concept of '*Meeri-Peeri*', as the term itself implies, signifies in its essence the blending of worldly sovereignty and spiritual sovereignty. The seeds of this concept may be traced to the earliest Sikh tradition, as the concepts of '*Sacha Patshab*' and '*Meeri-Peeri*' both connote virtually the blending of worldly authority and spiritual authority. The ideal of *Sacha- Patshab* came to be associated with Guru Nanak himself,<sup>9</sup> and the succeeding Gurus,<sup>10</sup> at a very early period. Mohsin Fani writes: "*Sikhan Guru ha ra Sacha Patshab Yoni Badshab- i-baqiqat midanand.*"<sup>11</sup> It is true that *Sacha Patshab* can also be interpreted to mean 'True King' as an honorific title, but the significant point is that this title was institutionalised and had political ramifications in the Sikh movement.

The way the Gurus stuck to the title of *Sacha-Patshab*, despite the dire consequences it invited, clearly shows that this title was meant to be a deliberate challenge to the ruling authority; and the rulers did, in fact, regard it so. Guru Arjan used to hold assemblies which gave them the look of royal *darbar* (court);<sup>12</sup> and henceforth, the Guru was looked upon by his followers as a worldly lord and ruling sovereign.<sup>13</sup> One of the reasons of Guru Arjan's martyrdom was Jahangir's charge that the Guru "noised himself as a worldly leader"<sup>14</sup>. Ram Rai incited Emperor Aurangzeb with his allegation that Guru Teg Bahadur boasted of *badshahi-karamat*, i.e., of kingship and miracle.<sup>15</sup> According to *Risala-i-Nanakshahi*, Aurangzeb did enquire of Guru Teg Bahadur "Why people address you as *Sacha Patshab*?"<sup>16</sup> Instead of trying to assuage the Emperor's suspicion, the Guru replied that whatever it was, it reflected the Will of the Almighty, and the *faqir* was not concerned with the fame or the ill-fame it brought.<sup>17</sup> Irvine writes: "One of this Guru's (Guru Teg Bahadur's) crimes, in the Emperor's eyes, may have been the style of address adopted by his disciples, who had begun to call their leader *Sacha Patshab* or the 'True King'. This title was readily capable of two-fold interpretation, it might be applied as the occasion served in a spiritual or literal sense. Its use was extremely likely to provoke the mistrust of a ruler even less suspicious by nature than the Alamgir."<sup>18</sup> In fact, Khushwaqt Rai does state that some of the Sikhs, apparently dazzled by the brilliance of the Guru's *darbar*, were prompted to lay claims to sovereignty.<sup>19</sup>

Another concept, indicative of the blending of worldly power and spirituality, and which has also its roots in the earliest Sikh tradition, is that of "*Raj-jog*". Dr McLeod writes: "For some obscure reason Raja Janak held a curious fascination for the early Sikh community. A reference by Kirat the Bard included in the *Adi Granth* identifies Nanak with Janak; the author of *Dabistan-i-Mazabib* was sufficiently impressed by the same popular belief to note it in his account of the Sikhs; and references to it appear at various places in the *Janam-Sakhis*."<sup>20</sup> The likely reason appears to be that Raja Janak was believed, at least by the early Sikhs, to be a reputed Indian mythical figure who combined in his person worldly kingship and a high spiritual status. "Janak, whom scriptures describe as a great *Bhagta*, combined in his person *Raj-jog* (i.e., worldly rule and spirituality)."<sup>21</sup>

In any case, in addition to the inferential allusions given above, we have in Sikh tradition direct references to the combining of *Raj* (worldly power) with spirituality. Guru Nanak told Shivnabh Raja, who wanted to discard his kingship in order to follow the spiritual path: "Your meeting me should not result in your giving up your *raj* (rule) and going about abegging; our meeting would be fruitful if you attain the highest attainment (*parmpad*) in spirituality while retaining your *raj* (rule). *Jog* (spirituality) is attainable within *raj*. Meditate and serve God. I have made you *mukat*

(salvated) within *raj*.”<sup>22</sup> Bhai Gurdas describes Guru Nanak as *Sacha Patshah*, “who achieved complete control (*jīn vas kar*) over *Raj-jog*”<sup>23</sup>. Again, according to Bhai Gurdas, Guru Ram Das was free from malice and enmity and lived a life of *Raj-jog* (“*Raj Jog Varte Vartara*”)<sup>24</sup>; and one of the fruitful achievements (*sukhfaḥ*) of a God-oriented Sikh (*Gurmukh*) is that he enjoys the bliss of *Raj-jog*.<sup>25</sup>

There can be no better interpretation of the Sikh view of *Raj-jog* than the pattern of life led by the Gurus and the direction they gave to the Sikh movement in the light of this ideal. It is Guru Hargobind who made a formal declaration of the concept of *Meeri-Peeri* by donning two separate swords, one of *Meeri* and the other of *Peeri*, by raising side by side two separate flags representing the same two-fold concept, and by establishing the Akal Takhat (i.e., God’s own throne or seat of political power). This is how the Sikh armed struggle for political power was initiated on the basis of an open declaration combining *Meeri* and *Peeri*; but the main issue before us here is whether this development was in harmony with the ideological line followed by the earlier Gurus, or it was a deviation from that ideological line, as alleged by some scholars.

## 6. *Meeri-Peeri and Nam Simran*

### (a) *Factually Incorrect*

Such scholars start with the hypothesis that the Sikh movement was a purely religious movement before it took a political turn with the martyrdom of Guru Arjan. This hypothesis is factually incorrect. It has been seen how the concept of *Sacha Patshah* was institutionalised in the Sikh movement and had political implications before the martyrdom of Guru Arjan; how Guru Arjan himself used to hold assemblies which gave them the look of a royal court; and how the Guru was looked upon by his followers as a “worldly lord and ruling sovereign”. On the basis of the evidence of *Dabistan*, Dr Narang comes to the conclusion that a state, peaceful and unobtrusive, had been slowly evolved, and with the Guru (i.e., Guru Arjan) at its head as *Sacha Patshah*, the Sikhs “had already become accustomed to a form of self-government within the empire”<sup>26</sup>. Toynbee endorses this view that the predecessors of Guru Hargobind had already transformed the Sikh community “from an embryonic church into an embryonic state.”<sup>27</sup> “There seems to have been an intermediate stage in the evolution of the Sikh military machine out of the Sikh religious fraternity which had been founded by Nanak about a hundred years before Hargobind’s time. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century of the Christian Era the Sikh community seems to have assumed a form which was already political though it was not yet warlike.”<sup>28</sup>

Above all, we have the direct evidence of Jahangir, given in his autobiography, that Guru Arjan “noised himself as a worldly leader”, and the glaring historical fact that the Guru blessed, in his enterprise, the rebel prince Khusrau, who contested the throne against his father, Jahangir. “He (Guru Arjan) discussed several matters with him (Khusrau) and made on his forehead a finger-mark in saffron, which in terms of Hindus is called *qushqa* and is considered propitious.”<sup>29</sup> An European contemporary to this event draws the same inference as done by Jahangir: “The Guru congratulated him (Khusrau) for assuming sovereignty and applied three marks on his forehead. Although the Guru was a heathen, and the prince a Mussalman, yet he was glad to put that pagan sign on the prince’s forehead, as a mark of good success in his enterprise...”<sup>30</sup> If blessing Khusrau in his rebellion against the Emperor was not involvement in politics, what else was it?

It was not Guru Arjan’s martyrdom which gave a political turn to the Sikh movement; rather it was the political overtone of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom. And, it was not only Jahangir who regarded the Sikh movement as a challenge to his authority. All those who were

keen to uphold the Muslim *Shariatic* law felt likewise. Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi, the head of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, had raised a standard of the theological revolt against Akbar's religious liberalism, and was, on that account, given the titles of "Reviver of the second millennium" and the "Godly Imam".<sup>31</sup> When he heard the news of Guru Arjan's execution, he was so much overjoyed, that he wrote to the Governor of Lahore: "The execution at this time of the accursed *Kafir* of Goindwal... is an act of the highest grace for the followers of Islam."<sup>32</sup> It is to be noted that the challenge of the Sikh movement was felt, from the *Shariatic* point of view, as a challenge to Islam.

In the *Shariatic* law, religion and politics were intimately entwined with each other; hence any challenge to the *Shariat* even on the purely theological plane, if it was meant to be serious enough, could not avoid running into a political challenge to a *Shariatic* state. If the Sikh movement did not invite state persecution earlier, it was because, either the movement was as yet too insignificant to attract the attention of Babar and Hamayun, or they were too preoccupied in consolidating their power; and Akbar was liberal-minded and was, in his own way, attempting to overcome the *Shariatic* hold. It is significant that Guru Arjan was executed within six months of Akbar's death, when Jahangir ascended the throne.

(b) *Theoretical Plane*

The second part of the plank of those who regard the militarization of the Sikh movement by Guru Hargobind as a deviation from the ideological line of the earlier Gurus, is based on their own perception that the use of force, even for a just and noble cause, is incompatible with the path of *Nam Simran*. Deviation from which view of *Nam Simran*?

*Nam* is essentially an internal spiritual experience which cannot be communicated to others through words. "Says Kabir, a dumb person, on tasting sweet, is unable to express his experience to others."<sup>33</sup> Hence, the experience of *Nam* can be visualized intellectually, if at all, only hazily and partially. Secondly, whereas there is a clear demarcation between religions which reject the world totally and which do not; there are variations, about the religious goals and the associated practical conduct, within what Max Weber calls 'inner-worldly asceticism'. "As we have already stated at a number of points, the specific character of the certification of salvation and of the associated practical conduct is completely different in religions which differently represent the character of the promised salvation, the promise of which ensures blessedness."<sup>34</sup>

It has been seen in the eighth chapter that there is no uniformity of approach, at least towards some social and historical issues, among Nam Dev, Kabir, Ravi Das, Trilochan, and some other Radical Bhagtas, who claim in their hymns to be votaries of *Nam* and are believed by their followers to have experienced *Nam* in their lives. Then, there is a clear difference between the approaches of the Sikh Gurus on one hand, and those of the Bhagtas named above on the other, towards the vital issues of *ahimsa* and the socio-religious status of women.<sup>35</sup> Hence, there is no common criteria for knowing, much less for asserting, what is compatible and what is not compatible with the experience of *Nam* in its social and historical manifestations; excepting, perhaps, that these votaries of *Nam* supported in broad outline humanitarian values and goals. Guru Hargobind told the Maharashtrian saint Ram that he was internally an 'ascetic'.<sup>36</sup> Yet, some scholars presume to know better than the Guru that the taking up of arms, even for a noble cause, was not accordant with *Nam*. Guru Nanak condemned the rulers and the administration of his time for their oppression of their subjects,<sup>37</sup> and was extremely pained to see the suffering caused by Babar's invasion;<sup>38</sup> the Sikh Panth became an 'embryonic state' at least by Guru Arjan's time; and Guru Hargobind took up arms to defend that 'embryonic state'. Where do such scholars draw the line, as

to what is in harmony with *Nam Simran* and what is not? And on what basis? While pondering over these questions, it has to be borne in mind that the conversion of the Sikh Panth into an 'embryonic state' had been accomplished in the last quarter of the sixteenth century; that its political confrontation with the Mughal state took place at Guru Arjan's initiative; and that Sikhism does not swear by the doctrine of '*ahimsa*'.

### 7. *Sikhism and 'Ahimsa'*

It is not our purpose to enter into a discussion of theological or ethical issues connected with the doctrine of *ahimsa*, in their theoretical abstractions, as there can be no end to hair-splitting. What is relevant for us is the stand of Sikhism on the issue of *ahimsa*, as illustrated by the hymns of the Gurus and their life-histories.

Guru Nanak expresses his view about *ahimsa* in a long hymn,<sup>43</sup> wherein he emphasizes that the whole life process has a common source. No animal life is possible without the use of flesh in one form or the other. He ridicules the fallacy of those who make a fetish of the question of eating meat but have no scruples in 'devouring' (exploiting) men. He points out that all distinctions between non-vegetarian food being impure and vegetarian food being pure are arbitrary, because the source of life is the same elements.

Guru Nanak, being guided by his prophetic revelation, took a unitary view of life. As he viewed life as one whole which could not be compartmentalized, and as he did not want religion to be divorced from life but rather wanted it to serve life, he felt that religion, like life, too could not be compartmentalized. His view (i.e., the Sikh view) of religion does not permit any dichotomy of life, or of any divorce of the individual from his society. Nor does it visualize that true religion, or for that matter true ethics, can coexist unconcerned with an unjust social stratification, with religious dictation, or with political slavery. In the Sikh view, religion has to meet all the challenges thrown up by life, and not ignore them or let them take care of themselves. "... prophetic revelation involves, for both the prophet and for his followers... a united view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude towards life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning, the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern... Moreover, it always contains the important religious conception of the world as a Cosmos which is challenged to produce somehow a 'meaningful', ordered totality, the particular manifestations of which are to be measured according to this requirement."<sup>44</sup>

The prohibition against non-vegetarian diet arose as a corollary of the doctrine of *ahimsa*. "The behaviour of his subjects was to be regulated according to the ethical ideals of Buddha, and the king saw that the rule of *ahimsa*, which prohibited killing any living creature, was strictly enforced by imposing a vegetarian diet at court and throughout the realm."<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that such a "universal mood of pity, extending to all creatures, cannot be the carrier of any rational behaviour, and in fact leads away from it".<sup>46</sup>

This doctrine had two important implications. First, the use of non-vegetarian diet was supposed to militate against the spiritual progress of a religious person. Secondly, it debarred the person seeking *moksha* from entering the socio-political field for the objective of undoing social, political, or economic aggression, if necessary by the use of force. Jains and Buddhists were so much overwhelmed by the doctrine of *ahimsa* that they did not even contemplate taking to the

revolutionary path. The Brahmins, although they legitimated the use of force by the kings for the purpose of maintaining the caste order, used the doctrine cleverly to block “the development of the military power of the citizenry, pacifism blocked it in principle and the castes in practice, by hindering the establishment of a *polis* or *commune* in the European sense”.<sup>47</sup>

It is in the Christian world that we find open rumblings here and there, when confronted with the need or the desirability of bringing about a revolutionary change in the established order and the inhibition of pacifism that had come to be associated with the Christian faith. Pere Maillard, the editor of *Fre'res du Monde* admits: “If I thought my faith (i.e., Christianity) alienated me at all from other people and diminished my revolutionary violence, I would not hesitate to renounce my faith.” Commenting on this, Ellul writes: “Are we to believe, with Pere Maillard, that one must choose between Christian faith and revolutionary violence? I think he really means that revolutionary violence is, in a sense, the possible outlet for Christian faith, and that if what I take for faith leads me to curtail that violence, then my understanding of that faith is faulty and consequently I ought to abandon it, for by concentrating on violence I am certain to be on the right Christian path.”<sup>48</sup>

The above passage has been cited not to suggest that the choice is between the Christian faith and revolutionary violence, but to point out that there can be no revolution without resort to violence, at some stage or other, and all those, who have revolutionary objectives and at the same time want to stick to pacifism at all costs, cannot but face a dilemma. Camus clinches the issue and suggests an equitable way out: “Absolute non-violence is the negative basis of slavery and its acts of violence; systematic violence positively destroys the living community and the existence we receive from it; to be fruitful, these two ideas must establish their limits.”<sup>49</sup>

The Sikh Gurus tried to follow this course. Guru Gobind Singh wrote to Aurangzeb: “Recourse to sword is justifiable when all other means to redress the wrong fail.”<sup>50</sup> Guru Hargobind took up arms after the martyrdom of Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa after the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur.

#### 8. *Why Meeri is an Essential Component*

“A change of regulation concerning property without a corresponding change of government is not a revolution, but a reform. There is no kind of economic revolution, whether its methods are violent or pacific, which is not, at the same time, manifestly political. Revolution can already be distinguished, in this way, from rebellion. The warning given to Louis XVI — ‘No, sire, this is not a rebellion, it is a revolution’— accounts the essential difference. It means precisely that ‘it is the absolute certainty of a new form of government’. Rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope. It is no more than incoherent pronouncement. Revolution, on the contrary, originates in the realm of ideas. Specifically, it is the injection of ideas into historic experience, while rebellion is only the movement which leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas. While even the collective history of a movement of rebellion is always that of a fruitless struggle with facts, of an obscure protest which involves neither methods nor means, a revolution is an attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fit the world into a theoretic frame.”<sup>51</sup>

Ellul emphasizes the same ideas, “Revolt at its source is void of thought; it is visceral, physical. Revolution implies a doctrine, a plan, a program, a theory of some kind, though the term ‘theory’ need not have a precise meaning. At any rate, it is my impression that the existence of this preliminary thought is what identifies revolution.”<sup>52</sup>

“Revolutions originate in the realms of ideas”; the Sikh Revolution originated in the concept of *Meeri-Peeri*, which had its roots, as seen, in the earliest Sikh tradition, beginning with Guru Nanak; and the creation of the Khalsa and the continuation of the armed struggle during its revolutionary phase was just an extension of *Meeri-Peeri*. As the Sikh revolution has been discussed in an earlier work, suffice it here to mention that *Meeri* was made an essential part of *Meeri-Peeri*, because no structural change in the *status quo*, as contemplated by the Sikh movement, can be brought about without political power, and political power cannot be captured or retained without military power. The Gurus wanted to establish *Dharm (Dharma)*, if necessary with the help of arms, which, Bhai Gurdas says, Guru Nanak made perfect by “blending the four castes into the noble Panth” and by “abolishing the gap between the rich and the poor”.<sup>53</sup>

The Sikh armed struggle was not a casual, random, or spontaneous development imposed upon the Panth by the force of circumstances. It was born of, and revolved around, as will be seen in the next section, the Sikh view of *dharma*. In fact, the Sikh Panth had been deliberately reared as an ‘embryonic state’ to fulfil that *dharma*, because it could not have been lost upon the Gurus that this development was going to bring them, sooner or later, in confrontation with the established authority, as states cannot ignore, for long, even nascent centres of rival power at their own peril. Not only that, Guru Arjan took the initiative on his own and went a step further in challenging Jahangir’s authority by blessing his rebel son, Khusrau. The Guru could not have been unaware of the consequences. Then he refused to save his life by paying the fine and threatened to excommunicate those of his followers who paid the fine on his behalf.<sup>54</sup> This was in consonance with a set purpose, a plan, a design, or programme, whatever one may like to call it. Had the Guru paid the fine, or allowed it to be paid on his behalf, the Sikh movement would have compromised and not developed as a challenge to the Mughal state. And it was one of the last instructions of Guru Arjan himself: “Let him (Guru Hargobind) sit fully armed on his throne, and maintain an army to the best of his ability.”<sup>55</sup>

Indubhushan Banerjee writes: “Guru Arjan had foreseen and Guru Hargobind also clearly saw that it would no longer be possible to protect the Sikh community and its organization without the aid of arms, and the way he proceeded to secure this end speaks a good deal for his sagacity and his shrewd political sense.”<sup>56</sup> If the supreme purpose was to defend the Panth as such minus its *dharma*, one way out could have been to compromise with the authorities as done by Ram Rai and his followers. If Indubhushan means, what he probably does, that what the Sikh Panth stood for — the Sikh *dharma* — could no longer be defended without the aid of arms, he is perfectly right. But, it was not only a question of defending *dharma*, but that of establishing *dharma*. It was the realisation that the Kingdom of God could not be established on earth without political power which called forth the declaration of *Meeri-Peeri*. It was not in the nature of a limited response to a particular situation. The doctrine of *Meeri-Peeri* laid down a new principle, at least in the Indian context, which was to form the basis of the entire Sikh revolutionary struggle to come. It was in pursuance of this principle that Guru Hargobind named the seat of temporal power he set up parallel to the Mughal state, as God’s throne (Akal Takht), and not his own; and it was in pursuance of the same principle that Guru Gobind Singh called the Khalsa as God’s Khalsa (*Wahiguru jee ka Khalsa*). And the overall posture of the movement was not defensive but offensive, as the initiative for the hostilities came, by and large, from the side of the Gurus.

It has been seen that Guru Arjan took the initiative in blessing the rebel prince, Khusrau. The setting up of Akal Takht, the unfurling of the two flags of *Meeri-Peeri*, wearing of the royal

insignia of plume, and the enrolling of an army were clear challenges to Mughal authority. The initiative for precipitating the hostilities also came from the Guru. It was his men who captured the Emperor's bird (*baj*); and when the Emperor's detachment came to recover it, the Guru not only refused to surrender the bird, but told the Commandant, Mughlin Khan, in clear terms: "I am going to wrest from you all your crowns and birds and distribute these among my own Sikhs. (*Taj baj tumre sabha laine; naj sikhan ko ham sabha daine*)".<sup>57</sup>

"It is easily understandable that with his slender resources it was not possible for the Guru to maintain an attitude of open defiance."<sup>58</sup> Hence, Guru Hargobind's armed conflict with the state was in the nature of a rehearsal, and it was followed by a period of tacit armed truce, which came to an end with the creation of the Khalsa. In a way, this period is very telling regarding the point we want to emphasize.

The Gurus, though conscious that their movement had not yet developed the resources to cope with the armed might of the Mughal Empire, never relaxed in their political objective of subverting the Mughal state. When Dara Shikoh, who had been defeated by Aurangzeb, crossed Sutlej at Ropar, Guru Har Rai joined him at the head of two thousand troops. The Guru accompanied Dara as far as Lahore, encouraging him for about a month to make a military stand; and returned to Kartarpur only when he found that Dara had made up his mind to flee to Multan.<sup>59</sup>

The consequences that followed Guru Arjan's blessing of Khusrau could not have been lost upon Guru Har Rai. Yet, fifty two years later. Guru Har Rai took an even bolder step of joining Dara with his troops and goading him not to give up the fight. There can be no doubt that this was a direct political involvement, and against a party (Aurangzeb) who occupied the throne and had hitherto been successful. The Guru took a calculated risk. It was in the fitness of things that the Guru should have helped Dara, whose chief fault in the eyes of orthodox Muslims was his so-called apostasy. Dara's success would have helped the Sikh cause. In any case, there was a good chance, which the Guru felt should not be missed, of taking advantage of the split in the Imperial camp for the purpose of combating or weakening the tyrannical state.

Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom was also self-invited. *Haqiqat* states that Emperor Aurangzeb himself had written to the Guru: "If, as previously, like the poor Nanak-panthi *faqirs*, you live peacefully in a corner, no harm will befall you. On the contrary, alms, suitable for your maintenance in the style of *faqirs*, would be given to you from the state treasury... But the horses and arms and equipment of your retinue that you have gathered in your place of worship, must be removed."<sup>60</sup> "Accordingly, the *faujdar* of Sirhind intimated this order (to Teg Bahadur). Before the proud and virile disciples who had assembled there, Teg Bahadur said defiantly: "We *axe faqirs*; what God has given, why should we return it?"<sup>61</sup> Had the Guru been content to pursue the conventional practice of religion, the door was left open to him by Aurangzeb. In fact, the same Emperor had conferred a *jagir* on Ram Rai who had chosen the path of least resistance. But Guru Teg Bahadur's resolve to resist religious and political aggression, and to challenge the state in that process, was an integral part of the Guru's view of religion and *dharmā*. Otherwise there was no point in his refusing publicly to disarm, because this would be regarded as an open challenge by any state.

## 9. *Peeri, the Sikh Way*

*Peeri* was not only an essential component of *Meeri-Peeri*, it was its very life-blood. It was actually its fulcrum, as *Meeri* revolved around *Peeri*, and it was not the other way around. This was but natural; because the concept of *Meeri-Peeri*, as in fact that of the entire Sikh revolutionary

movement, had evolved out of Guru Nanak's revelation, whereby he carried God's mandate to create the Panth for carrying out His Will, His Purpose, in this world. We may refer here again to Wach's view that the moral, social, and political ideas of the prophet are caused, conditioned, and determined essentially by his basic religious experience. "Owing to his contact with the deepest source of life, the prophet reacts vigorously against all disturbance or perversion of the civic or moral order which is meant to reflect the divine will. He feels danger and seizes crucial moments to interpret present situations in the light of the past and the future."<sup>62</sup>

The most common word recurringly used in Guru Granth Sahib to denote a God-ward person is *Gurmukh*, and Bhai Gurdas designates the Sikh Panth as Gurmukh-Panth at a number of places,<sup>63</sup> implying that the Panth was God-oriented, i.e., it was designed to serve God's purpose. Guru Hargobind addressing his troops on the eve of a battle told them: "Brother Sikhs, this contest is not for empire, for wealth, or for land. It is in reality a war for our religion;"<sup>64</sup> and *Bachitar Natak* records: "He (Guru Teg Bahadur) suffered martyrdom for the sake of his religion; he gave his head but swerved not from his determination."<sup>65</sup> Guru Gobind Singh spurned political power for his own person (*Bhoom ko raj nahi man chahi*);<sup>66</sup> but blessed the downtrodden with political power at a time when his own sons were alive (*"Bhai Sudar ei Jat apare; toko panth mah main dhare; sabh jag raj tohe ko deena; pun bid so turn ko gur keena"*).<sup>67</sup> We cannot enter here into details, but the history of the revolutionary phase of the movement is an open book which leaves no doubt that it was conceived of and directed towards fighting religious and political oppression with a view to making the downtrodden the masters of their own political destiny, and not towards achieving any individualistic, sectional, ethnic, or feudalistic ends.

Historically speaking, it is Guru Arjan who 'felt the danger, seized the moment, and interpreted the situation', when he blessed Khusrav; it is he who told the Emperor: "I am a worshipper of the Immortal God, the Supreme Soul of the world. There is no monarch save Him; and what He revealed to the Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Ram Das, and afterwards to myself, is written in the holy Granth Sahib... My main object is the spread of truth and the destruction of falsehood; and if in pursuance of the object, this perishable body must depart, I shall account it great good fortune."<sup>68</sup> And Guru Arjan did refuse to pay the fine and preferred martyrdom; and it is he who instructed Guru Hargobind to sit armed on the throne and keep an army.<sup>69</sup>

The second important point about the Sikh view of *Peeri* is that it is double-edged. "I accept only the Saints and punish the evil-doers; yea, this is how I discharge the duties of the keeper of God's Peace."<sup>70</sup> Guru Arjan says in one of his hymns:

"The Lord hath protected me from the attack of Sulhi Khan, for he could carry not out his foul design; and he, the defiled one, died in disgrace. (1-Pause).

"The Lord chopped off his head with His Mighty Axe, and lo, in an instant he was reduced to the dust. He thought evil of me and lo, evil consumed him in its fire, and He, who had created him, destroyed him too."<sup>71</sup>

On the other side, there are innumerable verses in Guru Granth Sahib saying that God is merciful to all mankind, nay to all beings. "He relieves the sufferings of the downtrodden; He is the Succour of the succourless."<sup>72</sup> "God is eyes to the blind, riches to the poor; Nanak, He is the Ocean of virtues."<sup>73</sup> It is-in continuation of this double-edged ideological line that Guru Gobind Singh says: "Thou bestowest happiness on the good. Thou terrifiest the evil. Thou scatterest sinners, I

seek Thy protection.”<sup>74</sup> “God ever cherisheth the poor, saveth saints, and destroyeth enemies.”<sup>75</sup> God is “Compassionate to the poor” and “Cherisher of the lowly”.<sup>76</sup>

“Thus, ‘cherishing the poor’, ‘saving the saints’, and ‘destroying the oppressor’ are, according to Sikhism, God’s own mission. It was in pursuance of the fulfilment of this mission that God sent Guru Gobind Singh to this world: ‘Go and spread my religion there; And restrain the world from senseless acts’.”<sup>77</sup> Guru Nanak had identified himself with “the lowest of the low born”; for, “where the weak are cared for, Thy Mercy is showered”;<sup>78</sup> and Guru Gobind Singh armed the downtrodden and blessed them with sovereignty in order to enable them to stand on their own feet.

The third item that draws particular attention is that it is the concept of *Meeri-Peeri* itself which got institutionalised with the creation of the Khalsa. Therefore, the fulfilment of this concept, and hence its fuller exposition, should be sought in the ideology and historical development of the Khalsa (next chapter).

#### 10. *Comment*

There is no dichotomy either in the Sikh doctrine or in the movement inspired by it during the Guru period.

In the first place, *Nam Marg* is not a uniform school of thought or practice. Whereas some reputed Bhagtas of the medieval Bhagti movement itself were strong devotees of Hindu *Antaras*, others repudiated the *Antara* doctrine. Similarly, while Nam Dev and Kabir strongly condemn Brahminism and the caste, many of them were so much absorbed in their religious or spiritual devotion that they did not react adequately to these or other social problems. Hence, there is no common criterion for judging, much less for asserting, as to what is compatible with *Nam Marg* and what is not, at least with respect to their varied responses to social and historical problems.

Secondly, the Sikh view of religion and *Nam* is not confined to the purely devotional plane. It embraces the totality of life, and it inspires, rather requires, participation in God-oriented worldly activity with a view to produce a “meaningful, ordered totality” in the world. The development process of transforming “an embryonic church into an embryonic state” had sufficiently progressed at least by Guru Arjan’s time, and it is he who overtly challenged the authority of the state by blessing Khusrau.

The last, but not the least, is the patent fact that Sikhism is not wedded to the doctrine of *ahimsa* in the way most of the other medieval Bhagtas are. Apart from the story of Guru Nanak having cooked meat at Kurukshetra, we have the historical evidence that meat used to be served in the *langars* (community kitchens) of Guru Angad as well as some other Gurus.<sup>79</sup> (Guru) Hargobind (when he was not yet Guru) used to hunt when his father was the Guru,<sup>80</sup> and there is not the least hint that Guru Arjan disapproved of it.

If partaking of meat and hunting are accordant with *Nam Marg*, then why is the taking up of arms for a humanitarian cause not? In any case, there is no dichotomy in the Sikh doctrine or practice. Whatever it was, it was common both to Guru Hargobind’s time as well as to the time of earlier Gurus. Hence, the very premises of judging or interpreting the Sikh doctrine and the Sikh movement, from a narrow view of *Nam*, or by the norms of *ahimsa*, are not valid; because, otherwise it would amount to weighing the Sikh view of *Nam* and the movement it inspired in the scale of non-Sikh ideals and values.

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## THE KHALSA

The creation of the Khalsa was the acme of the Sikh movement, and the outstanding feature of this development is that it marks the organization and institutionalisation of the movement around the concept of *Meeri-Peeri*. Just as the founding of Akal Takht, the declaration of *Meeri-Peeri*, and the armed struggle under Guru Hargobind appear as a dramatic turn of events, but were basically an extension of the mission of the earlier Gurus (see previous chapter), similarly the organization and institutionalisation of the Khalsa period was also an extension of the *Meeri-Peeri* mission. It is not possible to appreciate fully the *raison d'être*, the objectives, and the spirit of the Khalsa without keeping this perspective in view, and what has been called for the sake of convenience “the period of armed truce” should not mislead us into clouding this perspective.

### 1. *The Period of Armed Truce*

In fact, there can be no demarcation of revolutionary movements into water-tight defensive or offensive compartments, or into periods of military action and of armed truce. It is all a question of tactics suiting or unsuited different objective situations, which are liable to change at any time. What matters is that the movement is perceived as a threat by the ruling authority, or that the ruling authority is viewed as implacably hostile by the movement. The key factors are the militancy of the movement and its attitude towards the Government, There could not be any compromise on that score because Sikhism stood for confronting injustice and aggression in all its forms.

Guru Hargobind initiated the armed struggle but found that the Panth was as yet not in a position to sustain it. But, neither the objectives of the movement were given up, nor was there any let up in the preparations for launching the armed struggle again. It has been seen how Guru Har Rai joined Dara with his troops and goaded him to continue his fight against Aurangzeb. Guru Har Rai and Guru Teg Bahadur undertook extensive tours of the countryside to rally people round the Panth after the set-back suffered during the initial armed struggle. It is noted in *Haqiqat* that Guru “Teg Bahadur, with the view to revolt, having a large following of his disciples, was moving around intoxicated with power.”<sup>1</sup> This statement tallies with that in *Siyar-ul-Mutakberin* that Guru ^Teg Bahadur, who drew multitudes after him, all of whom, as well as their leader, used to go armed. Finding himself at the head of so many thousand people, he aspired to sovereignty... ”<sup>2</sup> Ghulam Hussain Khan writes further that Aurangzeb sent an order to the Governor of Lahore to arrest the Guru. Khushwaqt Rai writes that the Guru had enlisted an army of horsemen and camel-drivers, made “an encroachment on the royal ‘prerogative of setting up *karkhanas*’, and encouraged refractory *amils, ajardars, zamindars, munshis, musadis* to take shelter in his *darbar* where he accorded them places of highest honour.”<sup>3</sup> We have already cited how Aurangzeb offered to the Guru an allowance for his subsistence from the royal treasury provided he surrendered the arms he had collected and lived peacefully, but the Guru refused to do so in the open *darbar*. This historical evidence should be enough to show that Guru Teg Bahadur was bent upon confronting the state; and this is the conclusion to which Cunningham and Latif came to; as “his (the Guru’s) repeated injunctions to his followers that they should obey the bearer of his arrows show more of the kingly than of the priestly spirit.”<sup>4</sup> Even Guru Harkishan, at a very tender age, had refused to meet Aurangzeb.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. *Purpose, Organization and Leadership*

Unlike most other armed upheavals, revolutions are made and do not just happen. It is so chiefly because they have to have a rare combination of pre-determined revolutionary purpose or plan and an organization and leadership committed to fulfil that purpose. It is the revolutionary ideology (and not any ideology) that furnishes purpose and fixed direction to the movement, and it is the leadership committed to that purpose (and not any leadership) that gives shape to it. "It is the existence of direction... that makes revolution a political act and distinguishes it from a mere riot. Coordination and leadership form the two related aspects of any directed action having political significance. Thus, though in terms of their actual physical quality there is little to choose between the burning of Newgate prison in 1780 and the fall of Bastille in 1789, in terms of historical significance, it is abundantly clear that the latter was a revolutionary act and the former was not."<sup>6</sup> A more glaring example, which clarifies the distinction between revolution and revolt, is the well known rebellion of the gladiators. The capital of Rome lay at their feet, but they did not occupy it because they did not know what to do with it.

Organization and leadership committed to the fulfilment of the revolutionary purpose are equally indispensable, because, "utter mass spontaneity has not produced, nor could it produce, the revolutions history records"<sup>7</sup>. In a few cases, sporadic mass upheavals have developed into revolution, but at that stage of development they ceased to be automatous and were ideologically harnessed. Otherwise, revolutionary spontaneity is always founded upon revolt and is therefore by nature conservative, or repressive, or Utopian.<sup>8</sup> Collective spontaneity is, moreover, not really capable of devising specific forms of revolutionary organization.<sup>9</sup> Without a revolutionary leadership, "a revolutionary situation produced by a conjuncture of long-term and middle-term causes may remain an unrealised potential. Leadership then is necessary to give some coordination to the forces at play so that revolution will indeed 'break-out' and, when it does, will not fizzle out into mere disorder. Otherwise the hodgepodge of groups and strata, conflicts and cleavages might work against each other, rather than against the old regime."<sup>10</sup> It is, therefore, obvious that the leadership of a revolution must be clearly conscious of its mission and be deeply devoted to it.

To pin-point, the differences between revolutionary and non-revolutionary armed struggles or movements are "qualitative, marked by differences in kind, not just in amount. Furthermore, the differences move along several distinct planes. The most essential differences between the two are: (a) the stakes of the uprising, (b) the function of ideology, and (c) the role of leadership."<sup>11</sup> As already seen, revolutions are infrequent because the right combination between revolutionary stakes and the role of ideology and that of leadership harnessed to such stakes is scanty. It is in the context of such a rare combination that we shall try to interpret the social and historical significance of the Khalsa.

### 3. *Meeri-Peeri Enshrined*

Guru Nanak identifies himself with the lowest of the low born;<sup>12</sup> likens the tyrant kings and administrators to blood-thirsty tigers and dogs,<sup>13</sup> and was so much pained to see the devastation caused by Babar's invasion that he goes to the length of humbly remonstrating with God.<sup>14</sup> Guru Arjan says: "The 'bearded'(tyrant) that vent his wrath on the poor of the world; Is burnt in the fire by the Transcendent Lord. For, perfect is the justice of the Creator Lord."<sup>15</sup> And to recall again: "I accept only the saints and punish the evil-doers; yea, this is how I discharge the duties of the keeper of God's Peace."<sup>16</sup>

This ideological line of Guru Granth Sahib was the basis of *Meeri-Peeri* when Guru Hargobind declared to the Maharashtrian saint Ram Das that he was: "Internally a hermit, and arms

mean protection for the poor and destruction for the tyrant.”<sup>17</sup> Guru Gobind Singh, describing the attributes of God, says: “Thou bestowest happiness on the good. Thou terrifiest the evil. Thou scatterest sinners, I seek Thy protection.”<sup>18</sup> “God ever cherisheth the poor, saveth saints, and destroyeth enemies.”<sup>19</sup> Again, he speaks of God as “compassionate to the poor, and cherisher of the lowly.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, “cherishing the poor” and “destroying the tyrant” are, according to Sikhism, God’s own mission. This is how the Sikh view of *Peeri* was enshrined, and along with it that of *Meeri* too, but only so long *Meeri* remained confined within the orbit of *Peeri*.

It is to be recalled that the great founders of religions were, each in his own way, deeply concerned with following out an experience which became decisive in their lives and which determined their own attitude towards God, towards the world, and towards men.<sup>21</sup> The political, national, and social activities of prophets are not central to prophetic activity. These are caused, conditioned, and determined by their basic religious experience.<sup>22</sup> Jesus was not at all interested in social reform as such;<sup>23</sup> and, yet, in Max Weber’s own opinion, none had influenced the course of human development in such a revolutionary manner as had Puritan religiosity.<sup>24</sup> It is so because humanitarian values are found to be common to prophetic experience, and humanitarian values are irreconcilable with systems based on injustice, inequity, and aggression. And, according to the Sikh view, *Meeri* is perfectly legitimate for undoing unjust orders, but *Meeri*, in order to be sanctified, must remain tied down to *Peeri*. *Meeri* is the means to an end and not an end in itself; the end is *Peeri*.

*Meeri* becomes an essential part of *Meeri-Peeri*, because “for the ascetic, moreover, the divine imperative may require of human creatures an unconditional subjection of the world to the norms of religious virtue, and indeed a revolutionary transformation of the world for this purpose.”<sup>25</sup> *Bachitar Natak* describes the divine imperative received by Guru Gobind Singh in specific terms:

“Go and spread my religion there. And restrain the world from senseless acts.”<sup>26</sup>

It was in pursuance of this divine imperative that Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa.

#### 4. *Wahiguru jee ka Khalsa*

At the time of founding the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh ended his address with the slogan: *Wahiguru jee ka Khalsa; Wahiguru jee kee Fateh*. It means, “The Khalsa belongs to God, and so does victory belong to Him.” This slogan became a motto of the Khalsa; and, in order to make it the central focus, is repeated on all congregational occasions and ceremonies, especially the initiation ceremony, as well as a form of daily greeting among the Singhs. Guru Nanak had told Daulat Khan Lodhi, whom he served earlier, after his illumination that he recognized no other authority than that of God.<sup>27</sup> Guru Arjan had defied Emperor Jahangir with the declaration: “I am a worshipper of the Immortal God... There is no monarch save Him.”<sup>28</sup> Guru Gobind Singh said in his hymn: “Since I have embraced Thy Feet, I have paid regards to none besides.”<sup>29</sup> The same lesson continued to be impressed on the mind of the Khalsa by the repeated expression of the above motto. The Khalsa owed allegiance to God and to none else. In its historical implications, it meant allegiance only to the God-oriented Khalsa mission (and not to any worldly secular purpose) with which it believed it had been charged by God Himself through the medium of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh spurned political power (*raj*) for his own person (*Bhoom ko raj nahi man chahi*),<sup>30</sup> but blessed the Khalsa with *raj*<sup>31</sup> for the purpose of undoing political oppression and for making the downtrodden the political masters of their own destiny. This is how *Meeri* was encompassed within the orbit of *Peeri*. It is highly significant that Guru Hargobind named the centre of his armed struggle as Akal Takht (God’s Throne) and Guru Gobind Singh labelled the instrument of his armed struggle as *Wahiguru jee ka*

*Khalsa* (God's Khalsa). It was not a chance coincidence, but signified that it was a continuation of the same mission and on the same lines. Guru Hargobind had told his troops that the battle about to be joined was not for wealth, or empire, it was for the upholding of *dharmā*; and *Wābiguru jee kee Fateh* was meant to generate a spirit of everlasting optimism and humility — optimism because the mission of the Khalsa, being God's own, was bound to succeed, sooner or later, and humility, because all victory was the victory of God's mission and by His Grace. It involved no personal gain or credit for the participant.

Idealism rarely lasts long and mass movements should not be judged by absolute standards, but, subject to these considerations, its record does no little credit to the movement the way and the extent to which it attempted to bear in mind that the Khalsa was meant to carry out God's mission. As an ideal, the *Meeri-Peeri* mission continued to be cherished for quite a long time in Sikh literature of the post-Guru period. In the very text, ascribed to Bhai Nand Lal and which contains the oft quoted lines "*Raj Karega Khalsa*" ("The Khalsa shall rule"), we have also the following injunctions: "Khalsa is one who looks upon all as his own; Khalsa is one who attunes himself with God." "Khalsa is one who protects the poor; Khalsa is one who crushes the tyrant (*dushaj*)."<sup>32</sup> "Where the Singhs fight the Turks for upholding *dharmā* and for the Sikh ideals and to help others, there my (i.e., Guru Gobind Singh's) presence will be felt among the Sikhs."<sup>33</sup> "Khalsa is the army of God."<sup>34</sup> Historically, the sharing of political power by "the lowest of the low in Indian estimation" under Banda, and by the common peasantry, the Sudras and Kalals (lower than Sudras), to the complete exclusion of castes higher than these during the Missal period, were not chance developments; these were the by-products, though in a distorted form, of the *Meeri-Peeri* mission and tradition of the Khalsa.

##### 5. Institutionalisation of *Meeri-Peeri*

It was Guru Hargobind who founded the Akal Takht and made it the central institution of *Meeri-Peeri*, but he did not have much time at his hands to organize the Sikh militant movement on a permanent footing. He laid the foundation of Akal Takht in 1606 AD, and his first engagement with Mughal troops at Lohgarh took place in 1628 AD. Within this short span of time, of which a good many years were spent as an internee in the Gwalior fort by Jahangir's orders, he had to gather together troops on an improvised basis; and had little time of his own even later as he was constantly engaged in battles following in close succession till he retired to the hills.

By founding the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh gave a permanent organizational and institutional shape to the doctrine of *Meeri-Peeri*. Historically, it was a landmark, since the role of leadership and organization is important in all stages of revolution. "Thus, the really distinct work of the revolution — the attempted reconstruction or destruction of one or more of the stratification systems — cannot go very far without resorting to effective leadership."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, one of the characteristic features that differentiates revolution from revolt, according to Ellul, is that "revolution seeks to institutionalise itself... what characterizes the transformation of revolt into revolution is the attempt to provide a new organization..."<sup>36</sup> The institutionalisation of *Meeri-Peeri* by founding the new organization of Khalsa is, therefore, of great historical importance and its significance may be viewed from more than one angle.

##### 6. Initiation Ceremony

A revolution is developed only by the aid of mystic and affective elements which are absolutely foreign to reason;<sup>37</sup> because, "we must not forget that the reasons invoked in preparing

for it (revolution) do not influence the crowd until they have been transformed into sentiments.”<sup>38</sup> “Political and religious beliefs are sustained almost exclusively by affective and mystic factors. Reason plays only a feeble part in their genesis.”<sup>39</sup> In any case, whatever its origin, a revolution is not productive of results until it has sunk into the soul of the multitude. A revolution is the work of believers.<sup>40</sup>

The founding of Khalsa was initiated by the solemn ceremony of *Amrit Chakna*, literally meaning ‘drinking nectar’ — the drink of gods. In addition to partaking *amrit*, every participant in the ceremony swore by five solemn vows and undertook to abide by certain injunctions. We need not enter into details, as what is relevant to our purpose is that the initiation ceremony bestowed religious sanction to the institution, organization, and leadership of the Khalsa; and thereby strengthened the cohesion, tenacity, and permanence of the salient features of *Meeri-Peeri*. It made the membership of the Sikh brotherhood, in addition to being spiritual is before, more strictly organizational; and it required of the Singhs a much deeper commitment to the Sikh ideals and cause; a commitment both to the validity of belief as well as a commitment to put one’s interests, *tan, man, dhan* (body, soul, wealth) at stake for the sake of that belief.

#### 7. A New Beginning, Break with the Past

“The significance of such a (i.e., revolutionary) plan, whatever form it may take, is that it provides a beginning.” Revolution “is the only political event that confronts us directly and inescapably with the problem of a beginning.”<sup>41</sup> Revolution is not an attempt to transform what exists; it has nothing to do with reform... it invariably comes down to establishing a beginning. And after that everything assumes a new aspect...”<sup>42</sup>

The very title of the initiation ceremony ‘*amrit chakna*’ (drinking nectar — the drink of gods) signified transporting human beings to a higher plane of motivation and conduct. Every one on taking *amrit* had to change his or her previous name into an alike one, the name of a male ending in ‘Singh’ and that of female ending in ‘Kaur’. The Guru himself did so, replacing ‘Gobind Rai’ by ‘Gobind Singh’. In order to emphasize the ‘new beginning’, every entrant into the Khalsa had to (and has to even now) take five solemn vows, each one of which bound one down to make a complete break with the ideological and social past; for the word used ‘*Nash*’ is very strong, meaning complete annihilation. The vow of ‘*Dharm Nash*’ meant annihilation of any allegiance to previous *dharma*, religion, ideology, ceremonies, or practices; that of ‘*Kul Nash*’ meant annihilation of any ties with lineage or caste; that of ‘*Karm Nash*’ meant annihilation of the effect of past *Karma*, i.e., deeds or sins; that of ‘*Kirat Nash*’ meant annihilation or obliteration of stigmas or discriminations attached to a calling or a hereditary profession; and the vow of ‘*Bharm Nash*’ meant dispelling all false beliefs, traditions, and superstitions. It is obvious that all this signified the creation of a personality with an entirely new outlook in order to launch him on a new venture. It also meant breaking the shackles of the social past, because caste is founded on religious sanction of distinctions and exclusiveness based on birth and hereditary calling. “In contrast to the orthodox sects, the heresy of the theophratrics consists in the fact that they tear the individual away from his ritualistic duties, hence from the duties of the caste of his birth, and thus ignore or destroy his *dharma*. When this occurs, the Hindu loses caste. And since only through caste can one belong to the Hindu community, he is lost to it. *Dharma*, that is ritualistic duty, is the central criterion of Hinduism.” Again, “Before everything, without caste there is no Hindu.”<sup>44</sup> “For a man to lay his hand to the plough or to cultivate vegetables is... throughout the high castes, considered to entail degradation.”<sup>45</sup> Castes came to be downgraded because they took to vocations which involved processes or handling of articles

considered to be religiously impure.<sup>46</sup> And the Karma theory was utilized to justify the unjust caste order.<sup>47</sup>

The five vows taken at the time of the initiation ceremony (*amrit-chakna*) thus bound the proselyte to cut himself completely from his ideological and social heritage. In the Indian caste context, it amounted not to a mere innovatory change or reform; it was a revolutionary social upheaval. Whereas the non-observance of ritualistic or caste duties led to the abrogation of the *dharma* of a Hindu, one could become a Singh (Kaur) only by severing all his (her) links with that variety of *dharma*. The term *dharma* was retained by the Khalsa also, but the Khalsa *dharma* had a new content and a new dimension.

The creation of the Khalsa not only cut off the Singhs completely from their ideological and social Hindu past, but it also, in a manner of speaking, cut the destiny of the Sikhs into two. To become a Sikh, what was essential was a commitment to the validity of Sikh faith and ideals; but, to become a Singh, in addition as it will be seen, it was made obligatory to stake one's all, *tan, man, dhan* (body, mind and wealth) for the practical implementation of those ideals in society. All Singhs were Sikhs, but all Sikhs were not Singhs. It was not a theological cleavage, as both Sikhs and Singhs owed allegiance to the Sikh Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib and to none besides. It was a demarcation based on the degree of commitment to the Sikh faith, as not every Sikh was prepared to stake his all for the faith.

#### 8. *The Sikh Revolution Made A Religious Obligation*

As already seen. Guru Arjan sacrificed his life for upholding the Sikh concept of *dharma*. Guru Hargobind fought his battles with the Mughals in order to confront religious and political tyranny; and Guru Teg Bahadur was arming his followers, laying claim to sovereignty, and ultimately sacrificed his life for the same cause. Guru Gobind Singh now gave this religious obligation of Sikhism to fight aggression and injustice an organizational and institutional shape by creating the Khalsa. "It is to destroy the aggressor (*asur*) and evil-doer (*durjan*), and to resolve the crisis (*sankat*), that the Khalsa is created."<sup>48</sup> And as one inevitable sequence of the same purpose, and not for a secular enjoyment, was the Khalsa blessed by the Guru to strive for political power.<sup>49</sup> Because, "Even when it (i.e., revolution) springs from revolt, even when it raises the cry of liberty, there is an important difference: revolt is itself the liberating movement. Revolution seeks to organize the situation, to find a stable structure for freedom. Thus, revolt is movement; revolution tends towards establishing of stability. Revolt can take its course under a monarchy or even under a tyrant, without attempting to alter the regime. Revolution is destined to create a new regime or political body. For revolution to exist, the drive to be free must seek to establish freedom. Revolution inevitably channels itself into institutions and constitutions."<sup>50</sup>

This is why, bringing about the Sikh revolution was made a religious obligation of the Singhs. The aim was not only to liberate the people from the religious and political tyranny of the regime, but no less also was the aim to "establish the freedom" thus won in the interest of the downtrodden. It was to be they who were to be the masters of their own political destiny; it was they who were blessed by the Guru with sovereignty (*raj*). "Vaisya, Sudras, and Jats in great numbers have I incorporated in the Panth; they are blessed with the sovereignty (*raj*) of the whole world..."<sup>51</sup> Because, without political power, freedom can neither be won, nor retained. "We saw that some groups united by a characteristic religious experience, would never make an effort to 'capture' the state and might even oppose any such attempt on grounds of principle. We will dismiss groups with this attitude for the time being and concentrate on those striving toward the

ideal of a 'holy' state... The Mohammedan holy army, the warlike organized Sikh, and the followers of Cromwell represent a revolutionary type..."<sup>52</sup> "The obligation to bring about a revolution in behalf of the faith was naturally taught by the religions that engaged in wars of missionary enterprise and by their derivative sects, like the Mahdists and other sects of Islam, including the Sikhs..."<sup>53</sup>

### 9. *Revolution-Oriented Leadership and Symbols*

Apart from the vows undertaken at the time of *Amrit Chakna* (initiation) ceremony, some other features, like the quality of leadership, symbols, rules of conduct, etc., associated with the Khalsa, were all designed to make it obligatory for the Singhs to bring about the Sikh Revolution.

#### (a) *Leadership and Mass Action*

It has been seen that, "utter mass spontaneity has not produced, nor could it produce, the revolutions history records. Most spontaneous collective behaviour falls into sub-revolutionary categories (e.g., revolt)." <sup>54</sup> This is well illustrated by the fate of the Satnami revolt and that of Jat revolts sparked by the destruction of Hindu temples at Mathura. While the history of most revolutions shows, on the one hand, the "pivotal importance of leadership, planning, and organization"; on the other hand, "without eventual popular response a movement would remain too restrictive to become the advance guard of a genuine revolutionary breakthrough." <sup>55</sup>

This problem was faced by all revolutions and each one tackled it in its own way. Guru Gobind Singh made the Five Beloved, whom he had initiated in the first instance, as the nucleus of the Khalsa leadership. They were neither nominees nor elected, but earned the distinction by offering their heads to the Guru. Banda was nominated by Guru Gobind Singh, but he was enjoined. to abide by the consensus of the Khalsa, particularly by the advice of the five Singhs selected by the Guru for that purpose. <sup>56</sup> During the later revolutionary period, it became customary to elect either five '*piaras*' (reputed Singhs) or one '*Jathedar*' (leader) to lead, at different levels of the Khalsa, as the occasion demanded. There was no formal counting of votes. The names were proposed in the open assembly of Singhs and their acceptance ensured by the assembly as a whole.

By following this procedure, the movement kept contact with the masses by keeping the doors of the Khalsa brotherhood open to all persons without any discrimination whatsoever, provided they got initiated, i.e., solemnly entered into a contract to abide by the Khalsa ideology and committed themselves to its practical fulfilment. This procedure also ensured that the leadership of the Khalsa was assumed by persons who were ideologically doubly-distilled. Firstly, by the choice of leadership being made only by Singhs; secondly, as the best out of the available Singhs were chosen by the collective wisdom of the assembly.

The implications of the above procedure are also significant. The instrument of the Sikh revolution to be brought about was the Khalsa and not the masses, as such. In other words, the revolution aimed at was a revolution governed by the Sikh ideology and not any revolution the whims or the interests of the masses might lead to. The 'state' to be established was to be a 'holy state' and not any 'state' for secular enjoyment by anybody, including the Khalsa itself; for, any aim, social or political, which was not God-oriented cut across the very *raison d'etre* of Sikhism and the Khalsa.

#### (b) *Symbols*

Revolutions are the work of believers, and "Believers live on myths, intellectuals on patterns." <sup>57</sup> Here myth is used in the sense of "a universal system of images capable of evoking

instinctively all the feelings and ideas corresponding to a socio-political movement aimed at mass action, images to which myth gives intense reality and which arouse intuitive identification between subject and object and among the subjects themselves.”<sup>58</sup>

Every Singh was required at the time of *Amrit Chakna* (initiation) to strictly adhere to certain injunctions. Of these, two were absolutely binding. A Singh had to keep hair intact and had to abstain from the use of tobacco. Any violation of these rules necessitated excommunication or reinitiation. Both these injunctions were designed to establish the separate identity of the Khalsa from Hindus as well as from Muslims. Distinct symbols and signs can, and do, play a great part in separating sects, communities, or societies from one another; “the Jewish retention of circumcision and the Sabbath taboo was also intended, as is repeatedly indicated in the Old Testament, to effect separation from other nations, and it indeed produced such an effect to an extraordinary degree.”<sup>59</sup> Unless the Khalsa separated itself from these societies, how could it dream of creating a casteless society of its own and of displacing the old regime by a ‘holy state’? Also, keeping hair was designed to demarcate a Singh by his appearance from among thousands of non-Singhs,<sup>60</sup> and thus made each Singh a standard-bearer of an open defiance of the state. Thousands of Singhs preferred death than allow their hair to be cut when the Mughal government, in order to single out the Khalsas from the Hindus, ordered the non-Muslims to shave their beards. Later on, when the Muslim rulers and invaders focussed their attention on destroying the premier Sikh temple (gurdwara) at Amritsar, history records how the preservation of this temple became a living symbol of the Khalsa struggle.<sup>61</sup>

Another important injunction to be observed by a Singh is to keep a *kirpan* (sword) for the purpose, as Guru Hargobind had declared much earlier, of protecting the poor and killing the tyrant. “Khalsa is one who protects the poor; Khalsa is one who annihilates the tyrant (*dusbat*).”<sup>62</sup> Making the keeping of *kirpan* a compulsory religious injunction for a Singh was designed to serve two purposes. It made the bringing about of the Sikh revolution by the use of force, if necessary, a religious obligation of the Khalsa. It was also meant to preserve practical equality among the Singhs, especially for those downtrodden who joined the Khalsa; because, all the Singhs being equally armed would inhibit the tendency of one dominating over the other.

The value of symbols to a movement is not gauged by the callipers of reason and science; the important thing is the faith that these evoke. What is very significant about the symbols and injunctions associated with the Khalsa (of which we have noted here the important ones) is that all these focus on the supreme purpose of serving, in one way or the other, the Sikh revolutionary cause. This is unlikely to have happened, had there been any ambiguity about the revolutionary objective of the Khalsa. Nor could the Singhs have stuck to these symbols and injunctions at the heavy cost they paid, had their commitment to the Khalsa cause been less or lukewarm. Syed Muhammad Latif concludes his account of the glorious period of the Khalsa in these words: “The wearing of the long hair and beard was enforced, and an initiation into the *Pahul* of the Guru, or the ‘baptism of the sword’ as it is called, made the votaries Singhs, or ‘Lions’ of the race. The pages ‘of history shine with the heroic deeds of this martial race, and the examples of self-devotion, patriotism, and forbearance under the severest trials, displayed by the leaders of their community, are excelled by none in the annals of the nations.”<sup>63</sup>

#### 10. *Some other Features*

There are some other features associated with the Khalsa that also show how the development of the movement at this stage was oriented mainly towards a revolutionary purpose.

(a) *The Khalsa Brotherhood*

Max Weber writes: “Complete fraternization of castes has been and is impossible because it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be at least ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes.”<sup>64</sup> And, “without commensalism — in Christian terms, without the Lord’s Supper — no oath-bound fraternity and no medieval urban citizenry would have been possible.”<sup>65</sup> In order to break this inviolable caste barrier, Guru Amar Das made it compulsory for the visitors to dine at the *Langar* (community kitchen) before they could see him. Now, the five Beloved Ones, whom Guru Gobind Singh initiated and included the Sudras, dined together.<sup>66</sup>

The process of fraternization had been carried on all along in the Sikh Panth since the time of Guru Nanak,<sup>67</sup> but now a new dimension was added to it. The Khalsa brotherhood, in addition to being a spiritual and social brotherhood, became also a brotherhood-in-arms to serve an egalitarian political purpose. The foundations for this dimension had been laid by Guru Hargobind, but Guru Gobind Singh now formalized it by the *Amrit Chakna* ceremony and gave it an organizational shape by the creation of the Khalsa. The *Amrit Chakna* ceremony itself is known by the other name of *Khande Dee Pahul*, i.e., “the baptism of sword”. “By administering the *Pahul* (*Amrit Chakna*) was the authority (of the Khalsa) enhanced; by making the Singhs powerful was (their) sway spread” (“*Dey Khande Kee Pahul Tej badhya; Jorawar kar Singh hukam vartaya*”).<sup>68</sup> All the Singhs on initiation regarded themselves as the sons of Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur (“*tat tu mat kee ans bhai ab*”).<sup>69</sup> Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din, the author of *Fatubat Namah-i-Samadi* (1722-23), records that the low-caste Hindus, “the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus”, swelled the ranks of Banda, and every one in his army “would address the other as the adopted son of the oppressed Guru (i.e., Guru Gobind Singh) and would publicise themselves with the title of *sahibzada*.”<sup>70</sup> The feeling of solidarity based on the relationship of the concept of spiritual fatherhood and spiritual brotherhood is to a certain extent revolutionary.<sup>71</sup> To this was added the spirit of comrades-in-arms generated by dedication to a commonly shared noble cause. This fraternization was as indispensable as the keeping of *kirpan* (sword) by all Singhs for preserving the egalitarian character of the revolution the Khalsa was committed to. It was to be an egalitarian political revolution and no other.

(b) *An Egalitarian Political Revolution*

The commitment of the Khalsa to an egalitarian political revolution proved a source of great inspiration and strength to the Sikh militant struggle.

“The Hindu’s conception left unchanged for all time the caste stratification obtaining in this world and the position of his own caste within it; indeed, he sought to fit the future state of his own individual soul into this very gradation of ranks. In striking contrast, the Jew anticipated his own personal salvation through a revolution of the existing social stratification to the advantage of his pariah people; his people had been chosen and called by God, not to a pariah position but to one of prestige.”<sup>72</sup>

It became an article of firm faith of the Singhs that to seek martyrdom in the battles for upholding a noble cause was *mukti* (salvation). The forty Sikhs, both at Chamkaur and Khidrana, who died fighting to the last man, are to this day called as *Muktas* (i.e., who have achieved *mukti* or salvation) at the time of every *Ardas* (supplication to mark the end of a Sikh ceremony). To commemorate their memory, the name of Khidrana itself was changed to that of Muktsar, i.e., the place where the forty achieved *Mukti*. When the eldest son of Guru Gobind Singh died fighting in

the battle at Chamkaur, it was commended that it was by his martyrdom that he had qualified himself to become the Khalsa (“*Aj kbas bhayo Khalsa, satgurke darbar*”).<sup>73</sup> All observers, Indian and European, unite in remarking that about 700 Singhs, made prisoners along with Banda and taken to Delhi for execution, had no fear of death; they called the executioner *Mukt* or the Deliverer. They cried out to him joyfully, “O *Mukt*, kill me first.”<sup>74</sup>

It also became a firm faith of the Khalsa that “it had been chosen and called by God” to bring about a social and political revolution to the advantage of the downtrodden. “Create My (God’s) *Panth* for the cause of *dharmā*”;<sup>75</sup> and the Khalsa did regard itself as being God’s own (*Wahigurujeē ka Khalsa*).<sup>16</sup> Guru Gobind Singh blessed the Khalsa (virtually the downtrodden) with *raj*, i.e., political sovereignty: “You (the Khalsa) are blessed with the *raj* of the whole world” (“*Sabhjag raj tohe ko Jeeraa*”);<sup>77</sup> “We (i.e., the Singhs) have been blessed with *raj* by you (the Guru), you have not discarded us for having been of low castes” (“*Tum Charan te ham raj payo, jat neech nabin dhart?*”);<sup>78</sup> “Now they will rule”; “I (the Guru) am pleased with the sparrows (i.e., the downtrodden)... and I will call myself the bearer of arms only when I make the sparrows vanquish the falcons (i.e., the dominators).”<sup>79</sup> It was the faith in this benediction which sustained the Khalsa during its hour of trial:

“The Singhs had no resources,  
Were naked, hungry, and thirsty;  
Those who fell sick died for lack of medicines;  
They were sustained by the hope of Guru’s benediction,  
This was the only treasure they had.”

(c) *Dedication of “Tan, Man, Dhan”*

An important part of the Sikh ideal from the very beginning was the dedication of one’s all — body, soul, and belongings (*tan, man, dhan*) — to the Guru or God. “By dedicating body, mind, and possessions to the Guru and abiding by His Will does one reach God.”<sup>81</sup> With the militarization of the Sikh movement, this ideal was oriented towards dedication of one’s all to the revolutionary cause. When Banda expressed his desire to become a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru cautioned him that, in order to become a Sikh, he would have to surrender and stake his all for the mission.<sup>82</sup> Guru Gobind Singh has himself made this point explicit. “All the wealth of my house, my soul and body is for them (Khalsa).”<sup>83</sup> “Khalsa is my own image; I abide in the Khalsa; Khalsa is my body and life; Khalsa is the life of my life; I belong to the Khalsa, and the Khalsa belongs to me; the way the ocean and drop are one.”<sup>84</sup>

Thousands of Singhs lived upto this ideal. Even at a very late stage of the movement, those who joined the Khalsa Dal were honorary combatant volunteers, who had to pay a penalty if they left the Dal without permission even to visit their families.<sup>85</sup> Nihangs, Akalis, or Shaheeds were those volunteers who dedicated their entire lives to the militant service of the Panth. They were to the Sikhs what the Jannaseers were to the Turks, with the difference that they were honorary volunteers and not organized or paid by the state. They were held in high esteem in the Panth and were at one time its conscience-keepers. When the movement entered its lean period, it was the Akalis who became the rallying point for the Missals to coordinate in order to meet a common danger to the Panth; and even Ranjit Singh was afraid of offending them.<sup>86</sup> This indicates how the value of selfless dedication to the Sikh revolutionary cause was cherished and given the highest priority by the Khalsa in its golden days; as the Akalis, who were a small minority, owed their honour and prestige in the lean period only to the fall-out of that tradition.

## 11. *Implication and Comment*

### (a) *The Guru's Militancy and Spiritualism*

Rabindra Nath Tagore writes: "The liberation which Baba Nanak realised in his heart was not political liberty, but spiritual freedom. Nanak had called upon his followers to free themselves from selfishness, from narrow bigotry, from spiritual lethargy. Guru Gobind organized the Sikhs to suit a special purpose. He called in the human energy of the Sikhs from all other sides and made it flow in one particular channel only; they ceased to be full free men. He converted the spiritual unity of the Sikhs into a means of worldly success."<sup>87</sup>

Tagore's view expressed here raises a number of issues which remain unanswered. Are "political liberty" and "spiritual freedom" irreconcilable? To put it in more specific terms, can spiritual freedom flourish in the midst of an all-pervading political slavery? Or, can the spiritual freedom, even of an individual, co-exist unconcerned within the surrounding slavery? In any case, the Sikh view of religion is diametrically opposed to the traditional one given above. It does not permit of any dichotomy of life, or of any divorce of the individual from his society. Nor does it visualize that true religion, or ethics can operate unconcerned beside an unjust social or political order, nor that spiritual freedom can co-exist with dictation or political slavery.<sup>88</sup>

The second part of Tagore's comment is also misleading. Guru Gobind Singh did not strive for any kind of worldly success for his own sake or for that of his family. He created the Khalsa and sacrificed his four sons to bring about an egalitarian social and political revolution. Was that meant to raise the downtrodden to be "full free men", or otherwise? And, how partaking in a revolutionary enterprise contributes to make men "free themselves from selfishness" is very cogently argued by Camus:

"The appearance of the conception of 'All or Nothing' (Lalande, *Vocabulaire Philosophique*) demonstrates that rebellion, contrary to present opinion and despite the fact that it springs from everything that is most strictly individualistic in man, undermines the very conception of the individual. If an individual actually consents to die, and when the occasion arises, accepts death as a consequence of his rebellion, he demonstrates that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny. If he prefers death to a denial of the rights that he defends, it is because he considers that the latter are more important than he is. He acts, therefore, in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate, but which he feels are common to himself and to all men. We see that the affirmation implicit in each act of revolt is extended to something which transcends the individual in so far as it removes him from his supposed solitude and supplies him with reason to act... Then we note that revolt does not occur only amongst the oppressed, but that it can also break out at the mere spectacle of oppression of which someone else is the victim. In such cases, there is a feeling of identification with other individuals. And it must be made clear that it is not a question of psychological identification — a mere subterfuge by which the individual contrives to feel that it is he who has been oppressed. It can even happen that we cannot countenance other people being insulted in a manner that we ourselves have accepted without rebelling. The suicide of the Russian terrorists in Siberia in a protest against their comrades being whipped is a case in point. Nor is it a question of a community of interests. Injustices done to men whom we consider enemies can actually be profoundly repugnant to us. Our reaction is only an identification of destinies and a choice of sides. Therefore, the individual is not, in himself, an embodiment of the values he wishes to defend. It needs at least

all humanity to comprise them. When he rebels, a man identifies himself with other men and, from this point of view, human solidarity is metaphysical.”<sup>89</sup>

All this reasoning is even more relevant to the case of an egalitarian revolution where its goals are predetermined and known to the participants in advance.

Above all, historical movements have to be viewed more in the light of their social and historical impact rather than in the light of theological abstractions. From this angle, nobody even attempts to face squarely the issue posed by the Muslim Sufi saint Bullah Shah that, had there been no Guru Gobind Singh, India would have been overwhelmed by *Shariatic* dictation.<sup>90</sup> Gupta writes: “We now close the narrative of the Sikhs who... delivered their mother country from the yoke of the foreign oppressor;... who alone can boast of having created a bulwark of defence against foreign aggression, the tide of which had run its prosperous course for the preceding eight hundred years...”<sup>91</sup> What was the other alternative practical course open? If not, would the non-Muslim Indians have become better “full free men” had they continued to remain slaves?

*(b) God-oriented and Not God-oriented*

Some scholars do concede that the use of force is religiously and morally justified, but only for the purpose of defending religion and *dharmā*. If fighting to shake off slavery and to win freedom is justified, why is the use of force for establishing freedom thus won in the form of a ‘holy state’ not equally just? It appears that any confusion on this score arises from not differentiating between a ‘holy state’ and a state as an instrument for the secular enjoyment of political power.

It is a well established principle of Sikhism that it rejects Mammon and not the world. Rather, a Sikh is enjoined to live a worldly life, but he should remain unsullied by the glamour of the world. “The living (*lebada paidd*) and wealth of those who are imbued with *nam* are all chaste (*pavitar*); The houses, lofty buildings and guesthouses where the God-oriented Sikhs and the poor are taken care of are all chaste;... The activities, *dharam*, and pursuits of those who utter God’s *Nam* are all chaste.”<sup>92</sup>

If a Sikh could be expected to remain unsullied in the midst of wealth and other glamour of the world, why could he not be expected to remain unsullied in the midst of political power of a ‘holy state’? And in the Khalsa, the wielding of sword and the practice of *Nam* went hand-in-hand.

“Khalsa is one who fights in the front ranks;

... ..

Khalsa is one who gives up ego;

Khalsa is one who looks upon all as his own;

Khalsa is one who attunes himself with God.”<sup>93</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh’s uncle, Kirpal Singh and some other leading Sikhs expressed their concern to the Guru that it would not be possible to maintain the sense of discrimination between good and evil in the revolutionary struggle the Guru wanted to launch. And, if that discrimination is lost, the Sikh ideals would be nowhere. The Guru’s reply was that the true Sikh would not lose that discrimination; only those would go astray who join the struggle from ulterior motives.<sup>94</sup> Hence, the governing criterion in Sikhism for all worldly activities and pursuits was whether it was God-oriented or otherwise.

(c) *Historical Basis*

There are other scholars who are of the view that there is not enough historical evidence to show that the Sikh Gurus or their followers ever aspired for political power before the time of Banda. Here are the facts which speak for themselves. As it is a very important issue, we recall some of the evidence already given for the sake of ready reference.

(i) PRE-BANDA PERIOD

Gokal Chand Narang writes, on the basis of the testimony of *Dabistan*, that, “A state, powerful and unobtrusive, had been slowly evolved, and with the Guru at its head as *Sacha Patsbah*, the Sikhs had already become accustomed to a form of self-government within the empire.”<sup>95</sup> Guru Arjan used to hold assemblies which gave the look of royal *darbar* (court); and henceforth the Guru was looked upon by his followers as a worldly lord and ruling sovereign.<sup>96</sup> Khushwaqt Rai states that some of the Sikhs, apparently dazzled by the brilliance of the Guru’s *darbar*, were prompted to lay claims to sovereignty.<sup>97</sup> Toynbee is also of the view that the predecessors of Guru Hargobind had already transformed the Sikh community “from an embryonic church into an embryonic state.”<sup>98</sup>

Guru Hargobind founded the Akal Takht (i.e., a throne), donned a *kalgi* (plume), and unfurled two flags of *Meeri* and *Peeri*. As all these steps were well-known insignias of royalty, the Guru thus made an open declaration of his political sovereignty, and fought six engagements with the Mughals in order to defend it. The author of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* writes about Guru Teg Bahadur that, “finding himself at the head of so many persons, he aspired to sovereignty.”<sup>99</sup> Ram Rai incited Emperor Aurangzeb with his allegation that Guru Teg Bahadur boasted of *badshahi-karamat* (kingship and miracle).<sup>100</sup>

There is internal evidence to show that the author of *Sri Gur Sobha* was a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>101</sup> He writes that the Guru established his authority at Anandpur (which came to be later called as Anandgarh, signifying it as a fort); and the hill *rajas* wanted the Guru either to pay them as a token of their ownership of the place or to quit it, but the Guru refused.<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, the Khalsa conquered the surrounding villages, and the Guru’s sovereignty (*raj*) was established on all sides:

*Pher basyou Anandgarh rajan mani aan;*  
*Nikatjeta basal lai kbalse jeet;*  
*Ketak din ar doi bars eh bid bhai bateet;*

Then founded Anandgarh, and the *rajas* took it as an affront; ... the Khalsa won the surrounding villages, in this manner passed two years and many days.

*Chaupai*

*Tabe Khalsa aise karai;*  
*Hoi aswar gavan pai charai;*  
*Jo age te milnai avai;*  
*Basat rabai kach bhet charaivei;*  
*Karai bilam bhet nahi daiee’;*  
*Tako loot Khalsa laiee,*  
*Ih bid charcha bhai apara;*  
*Tab rajan man mabe bichara;*  
*Hamro raj akarth gaio;*  
*Satgur raj chahu dis bhaio.*<sup>103</sup>

Then the Khalsa would act like this; “launched an offensive action against the villages with their cavalry; those who came forward with offerings were not disturbed; those who hesitated and did not come forward with offerings, were looted by the Khalsa; this disturbance (*charcha*) spread on a large scale; then the *rajas* thought that their rule (*raj*) had become meaningless; (and) Satguru’s sovereignty (*raj*) had been established on all sides.”

When the *rajas* found that they could not dislodge the Guru on their own, they approached the Mughal authorities,<sup>104</sup> which led to the last battle of the Khalsa at Anandgarh with the combined forces of the hill *rajas* and those of the Mughals.

#### (ii) REGARDING THE PERIOD OF BANDA

There are no two opinions that the Khalsa, under the leadership of Banda, established a short-lived *raj*, struck their coin in the name of Nanak and Gobind Singh, and even demarcated, on one side, their territorial sovereignty from that of the Mughals.<sup>105</sup> An outstanding feature of this *raj* was that the lowest of low in Hindu estimation became local rulers. All this happened within years of Guru Gobind Singh’s death.

We in no way under-estimate Banda’s contribution to this temporary success of the Khalsa; but the main relevant issue for us here is: from where else did the inspiration and direction for those historical developments come, if not from Guru Gobind Singh?

Banda is reputed to have been a *vairagi* prior to his meeting with Guru Gobind Singh. Wilson writes: “The term *vairagi* implies a person devoid of passion, and is therefore correctly applicable to every religious mendicant, who affects to have estranged himself from the interests and emotions of mankind... but it is more usual to attach a more precise sense to the terms, and to designate by them the mendicant Vaishnavas of the Ramanandi class, or its ramifications, as the disciple of Kabir, Dadu, and others.”<sup>106</sup> In either sense of the term, both as mendicants or as Vaishnavas, *vairagis* are wedded to *ahimsa*.

Later, one of the main reasons for the main body of the Khalsa parting company with Banda was that he wanted to transgress the democratic principles of the Khalsa and become himself *Patshah*, and tried to introduce Vaishnavite usages in the Khalsa Panth.<sup>107</sup> Does not that show that Banda departed from the *ahimsa* principle of the Ramanandi sect, and owned the democratic principle of the Khalsa, which also ran contrary to the caste-bound Vaishnavas, under the influence of somebody, and tended to revert to his earlier religious affiliation when that influence passed away or became weak? And, there is no record to show that Banda met and was influenced in this respect by any person other than Guru Gobind Singh.

#### (iii) PAUCITY OF EVIDENCE

The historical evidence available about the Sikh movement should be judged, not in isolation, but in this background that the recording of history, according to its present-day discipline, was practically unknown to Indians. The fact is that, if the accounts provided by the foreign, Chinese, Greek and Muslim, travellers and historians are left out, Indian history upto the medieval period, left entirely to its own indigenous sources of information, would be reduced to a negligible part. It is evident from a cursory reading of the *Bhagatmala*, the one original account covering the medieval Bhagti movement, that there is very little of authentic historical significance that one can derive from it. In this context, in reconstructing the history of the Sikh movement, one should not

expect the detail and thoroughness of the historical evidence one finds in European historiography. The author of *Sri Gur Sobha* tends to skip over some important events of the time of Guru Gobind Singh; hence, his brief account of the establishment of the Guru's *raj* at Anadgarh assumes greater significance, especially if seen in the light of the later *de facto* developments of the movement.

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## OVERALL VIEW

As the Sikh movement was born of a unified experience of the multiplicity of life, it was multifacet. Some of these facets appeared to assume, in their development, the dimensions of being almost independent movements, but all of them, emanating as they did from the same core experience, were linked intimately to one another as well. We take a brief notice here of a few important aspects.

### 1. *Social Significance*

We can take the help of political science to narrow down the circle of issues which should remain really open for discussion. Revolutionary movements are qualitatively different from non-revolutionary movements, and so is the revolutionary phase of a movement different from its own non-revolutionary phase. Secondly, social and economic tensions alone do not create revolutions; what is missing is a humanitarian ideology and a leadership and organization committed to that ideology. The very objective of a revolution, according to Hagopian's definition, is to abolish, or radically reconstruct, one of the three traditional systems of stratification; and this makes humanitarian ideology the pivotal point around which a revolutionary movement must revolve. All other factors become irrelevant or secondary. Thirdly, revolutions are made; they do not just happen.

Given these premises, arrived at scientifically, it should not be difficult to follow the genesis of the development of the Sikh movement. There are no two opinions as to who originated the Sikh ideology, or as to what the Sikh ideology is, as it is authenticated in Guru Granth Sahib. Nor is there any difference of opinion that the Sikh Gurus were the undisputed leaders of the movement during their lifetimes, and that the Sikhs followed them with implicit faith. And, what the Sikh movement achieved under the circumstances on the practical plane, from the point of view of the down trodden and the oppressed, socially, politically, and historically, is remarkable and is an open book.

Most of the contradictions in interpreting the Sikh movement, we find, arise, because it is not distinguished from non-revolutionary movements, or from its own post-revolutionary phase. This leads the scholars to apply a logic, which may or may not be appropriate for explaining non-revolutionary mass movements, but is certainly inadequate for understanding a revolutionary upsurge. The straightest course for comprehending a revolutionary movement is to trace its ideology, and the leadership and organization committed to the fulfilment of that ideology. What is one to say of interpretations of Sikh history which take minimal notice of Sikh ideology, or do not take it into consideration at all.

Some scholars are so much preoccupied with the class/caste interests of the constituents of the Sikh *Panth* that they turn a blind eye to the glaring outstanding fact that the very growth and development of the *Panth* would not have taken place, in the manner it did, without the overwhelming integrating power of the Sikh ideology. It is the Sikh ideology and the charismatic leadership of the Sikh Gurus that generated a centripetal force which welded the disparate, even hostile, caste elements into the egalitarian Sikh *Panth*. "The four-footed *dharma* (was abolished) by integrating the four castes into one."<sup>22</sup> Like national movements, genuine religious movements are

all-class movements; and it is simple arithmetic that dispersive elements, held together by centripetal force, can be held together only so long such a force dominates over the sectional centrifugal forces. We repeat that the question is not whether centrifugal forces are eliminated or not; the issue is whether or not the centripetal force overrides the centrifugal tendencies, and this too is valid for a particular period.

In fact, it is not understood why the question of class interests should be introduced at all. In the Indian caste system, caste predominated over class to such an extent that the whole economy and polity were moulded into the caste structure of society, and it is ritual taboos and not economic interests that governed castes. *Tellis*, who sell oil, preserve caste barriers against *tells*, who press oil.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, in the low-key rural economy of medieval Punjab, where the Sikh movement struck roots and where barter was still the rule rather than an exception, economic differentiation, if any, was marginal. Hence, the social problem that was acute was caste and not class; and it is in this background that the social significance of the Sikh movement should be viewed. Because the three main pillars of the caste system were the caste ideology, the Brahmin sacerdotal caste, and the penalties enforced by the caste society against defaulters of caste norms and rules; and, as all these pillars rested on religious or socio-religious sanction of one kind or other; the caste could be counteracted effectively only by ante-dating caste ideology with an anti-caste religious ideology and by breaking away from the caste society. This is what the Sikh movement did.

It was a long-standing Indian tradition that the obligation of obedience to the guru took precedence over loyalty to family.<sup>4</sup> The Sikh Gurus tried to transform the plane of loyalty to the Sikh ideology. "He is disciple, friend, relative, brother, who abides by Guru's (God's) Will."<sup>5</sup> The same view was expressed by Jesus that those who "do the Will of God" are truly his brothers, sisters and mothers.<sup>6</sup> The important point in both cases is that the "adept owes blind, unquestioning obedience to the *messiah* because of the holiness of his work."<sup>7</sup> Although radical messianic movements do have a predominantly lower-class appeal, that appeal also cuts across social and economic divisions. "Religious beliefs alone, no matter whether it was held with fanatic conviction or for political expediency, could bring together the divergent interests of nobles, burghers, and peasants over areas as wide as the whole of France."<sup>8</sup> "Religious experience, being fundamental, constitutes the basis of a communion of a most intimate character, boring deep into the beds of impulses, emotions and thoughts which are common to all men. The subjective religion has, at all times, proved potent enough to unite and integrate people who are otherwise widely separated by differences of descent, profession, wealth or rank. A study of the social status of those who followed the prophets, teachers and founders of religion will reveal the surprising social heterogeneity of the motley groups who became one when united in a common religious experience. It is not necessary that the objectification and formulation of this experience will lessen division and separation, but undeniably greater leeway for such inferences is offered by an articulation of the expression of religious experience."<sup>9</sup>

It goes to the credit of the Sikh Gurus that they took the greatest possible care to channelise the faith and loyalty reposed in them by the Sikhs towards serving the egalitarian cause the Sikh ideology stood for. In fact, they went to the extent of emphasizing the supremacy of Sikh ideology even on the spiritual plane. Guru Nanak touched the feet of Guru Angad when he nominated him as successor Guru, and Guru Hargobind touched the feet of Baba Budha, a Sikh. Bhai Gurdas repeats it again and again that there is no difference between the Guru and a true Sikh. Guru Gobind Singh requested with folded hands the Five Beloved Ones to initiate him in the same manner he had initiated them earlier. It was this egalitarian spirit, and its continuous cultivation in

this manner, that made the Brahmins and Khattris bow before the Jat *Masrands*, and goaded the Brahmins, Khattris, Jats and others to accept the Sudras and untouchables (*Rangrettas*) as brothers in Banda's army and the Khalsa Dal.<sup>10</sup> In the long history of the Sikh movement, even upto the post-revolutionary period of *Missals*, there is not a single word in Sikh literature or tradition about the Sikhs having ever grouped on caste lines. And yet, without naming the people who grouped on such basis or their leaders, or without mentioning the occasion when they grouped or the purpose for which they grouped, it is simply supposed that those who came from a particular caste or ethnic group and happened to be in majority (again not factual but supposed) must have given a particular direction to the movement according to their traits.

Here there is another fallacy. Brinton devotes two chapters to show how the same set of people behaved quite differently in the four modern revolutions (the English, American, French and Russian) when they were under the spell of a revolutionary urge and when they were not.<sup>11</sup> Within the Sikh movement itself, Qazi NurMuhammed has paid high compliment to the Sikhs for certain outstanding qualities of character which the Jats conspicuously lacked before they joined the Sikh movement and then again in the post-revolutionary period.<sup>12</sup>

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Footnotes:

1. Based on works cited.

	chapter	Book page, line	Doc page, line
sansculotte	D the sikh panth	101,18	5,2
sansculotte	”	101,23	5,6
theophraties	F The Khalsa	153, 33	5,41

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