

## PREFACE

We are continuing our study of the Sikh Movement in this volume for two purposes.

We hope to show that, religion, in the true sense of the term, has been, in historical sequence, the mother of revolutionary values, and it has, also, given direct birth to atleast two revolutions—the Islamic and Sikh revolutions.

Secondly, we have subjected our earlier historical thesis (that the Sikh Movement was an egalitarian social revolution as well as a plebeian political revolution) to the scrutiny of criteria and guide-lines laid down by the two sister social disciplines of political science and sociology, and we find that it is fully substantiated.

I am grateful to S. Daljeet Singh, my brother-in-law, who has, as ever, taken keen interest in my work. S. Randhir Singh 'Josh' (formerly, Prof. of Political Science, Delhi University) and S. Kishen Singh (formerly, Lecturer, Dyal Singh College, New Delhi) were very kind to read the draft of the manuscript, and their criticism helped me to make important changes. It goes without saying that the responsibility for the views expressed in this volume is entirely mine.

I cannot sufficiently repay the love, sympathy, and encouragement I have always received from all the members of my family.

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## INTRODUCTORY

If Freud's view-point, that the seat of real human motivation lies hidden in the sub-conscious mind, and that what we are conscious of at the surface is in reality the superficial manifestation of that sub-conscious self, is given weight, then the study of that part of social sciences which involves human motivation loses much of its significance, atleast at the present level of their knowledge. To take another case, the discipline of history attempts to follow rational logic in the interpretation of established facts. But, how far the so-called established facts are, in reality, correct; or, rather, how far their validity can be established at all, are questions seriously posed by some historians.<sup>1</sup> We have expressed the above view just to shake the cocksureness of those votaries of social sciences who entertain a false notion that the exposition of a subject by their particular discipline is the last word.

Le Bon Gustave, by his scholarly studies in the field of applied psychology, has added a new dimension to the study of revolution.<sup>2</sup> To give some inkling in advance, we give here a few of his thought-provoking findings:

“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>3</sup>

“Besides the rational logic which conditions thought, and was, formerly 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 impulse of our conduct.”<sup>4</sup>

“Among the most important factors of history one was preponderant.....the factor of belief.”<sup>5</sup>

This mystic aspect of all revolutions has escaped the majority of the historians.<sup>6</sup>

We therefore, follow here the approach that life is a mystery, and, in our search to understand the human manifestations of mystery, one should look at it from as many angles as possible. In other words, an inter-disciplinary study of Social or political problems can be more rewarding than following a hidebound, narrow, isolated approach of a single discipline. This volume is an humble attempt in that direction to draw the attention of students of Sikh history to a hitherto unexplored field of study.

Another point we would like to impress on the reader to bear in mind is, that, in our discussions here, we do not at all mean by ‘religion’ any, set of discussions here, ritualism, ceremonialism, and, many other varied forms of formal religion. Nor do by religion we mean such forms of asceticism or other-worldliness which seek to turn an individual away from, his positive role in society. By religion we mean that experience, by the spirit of the deeper source of life, from which humanitarian, values and urges flow spontaneously; it is that religious experience which sustained Christ to bear the agony of crucifixion simply for the purpose of redeeming humanity; it is that deep religious faith which inspired Father Damien to voluntarily accept death, inch by inch, in order to alleviate the sufferings of lepers in a far off land, not his own; it is that revelation which impelled prophet Mohammad and the Sikh Gurus to carve out social and political revolutions, almost *ex nibilio*, in extremely backwards societies steeped in stark superstition, ignorance and poverty.

In the present volume, we have attempted to portray our study of the Sikh Revolution mainly within the frame-works of the two disciplines of political science and sociology, which are

closely allied to history. We would like to caution the reader again that he should bear in mind the limitations of these two social sciences (which concentrate on understanding what is happening rather than on the why of it), and not to look beyond what is claimed. Although most of the facts given in the earlier book (*The Sikh Revolution*) and the present volume have of necessity to be common, the exposition of the subject is different because of the different approaches adopted in the two cases. For example, the role of prophetic religion, in the historical process could not be incorporated in the earlier work; as it has been done here, because of its being confined to rational I logic. The influence of the environmental factors in the spread and fulfilment of ideologies is excluded here, not because its significance is denied; but because it is not so important to this study.

One very significant factor which lends great weight to the findings of sociology and political science, and which entitles them to be included in the circle of science is that these disciplines follow the scientific approach (i.e. without bias or prejudice) in their explorations. For this reason, we have thought it advisable to follow the procedure of quoting directly the findings of sociology and political science to the maximum feasible limit.

Notes:

1. Carr, E. H.: *What is History*, pp. 7-30.
2. We are mainly concerned here with his book, "*The Psychology of Revolution*," His other important works are: "*Psychology of Crowd*" and "*Psychology of Belief and Opinion*"
3. Le Bon Gustave: *The Psychology of Revolution*, p. 15.
4. Ibid.
5. Le Bon Gustave: *The Psychology of Revolution* p. 14.
6. Ibid., p. 89.
7. Wach, J.: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 6.; Hagopian, M. N., *The Phenomenon of Revolution* p. 76.

## CHAPTER 1

### REVOLUTION AND REVOLT

It is not easy to draw hard and fast demarcation lines between allied social phenomenon for the simple reason that their shades of distinctions tend to overlap one another, umbra and penumbra like, especially at their fringes. The contents of the phenomenon, too, go on changing with new social developments. As Eugene Karmenka has put it: “There is not a right definition and a wrong definition; there are only fruitful distinctions and less fruitful distinctions, terms useful in one context and useless in another.”<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Distinction between Revolution, and Revolt

Subject to the limitation set out above, revolution is a phenomenon qualitatively distinct from other types of armed upheavals like, revolt, rebellion, insurrection and *coup d'etat*, etc. Of the latter type, nearest to a revolution is a revolt; so when we demarcate between these two, the other armed upheavals of the latter category stand automatically differentiated from a revolution.

As revolutions, revolts, rebellions, etc., are by no means totally exclusive categories, especially at their border lines, we have to confine ourselves to what Max Weber has termed as ideal types of the phenomenon concerned. “The differences between revolt and revolution are, however, qualitative, marked by differences in kind, not just in amount. Furthermore, the differences move along several distinct planes. The most essential difference between the two are: (a) the stakes of the uprising, (b) the function of ideology, and (c) the role of leadership.”<sup>2</sup>

#### 2. Stakes

What is of primary importance is that a revolution has to have a set purpose no less than that of abolishing or reconstructing one or more of the traditional systems of stratification. It is Max Weber who emphasized the distinction between the three major systems of stratification based on class, status and power. Although economic power tends to gather round itself social and political prestige, and economic gains and social status tend to gravitate towards political leverage, the demarcation between the three systems of stratification is all the same very important. Prior to Max Weber's clarification, economic stratification was “emphasized to the point of neglecting or confusing the other forms stratification. Revolutions are too complex and too unique to be reducible to a facile formula such as bourgeois or proletarian revolution.”<sup>3</sup> Rather, Brinton is of the view that “Social antagonisms seem to be at their strongest when a class has attained to wealth, but is, or feels itself, shut out from the highest local distinction, and from positions of open and political power.”<sup>4</sup> Then, we have the clear case of the Indian caste system in which political and economic status was subordinated to the religions and social status of the Brahmin priestly caste, and which prevailed as a stable system for more than a couple of millennii. Thus, social stratification based on status and power is no less important than that based on class.

It is not necessary that a revolution should cover all three systems of stratification, but it must radically change atleast one of them. Thus, some revolutions are more revolutionary than others, according to whether they tackle one, two, or all the three systems of stratification. “Many, perhaps most, revolutions never go beyond changing the political arrangements of their society, rather fewer are social as well; and only one, as of the time Tocqueville wrote, had been simultaneously political, social and religious.”<sup>5</sup>

Hagopian writes: “We have argued that the stakes of revolution are the abolition or reconstruction of one or more of the systems of stratification in society. In simple revolt none of these systems as structure is threatened by serious attempts at reconstruction, let alone by

complete abolition. Revolts are virtual prisoners of the reigning set of social values, and, therefore, cannot mount a full-scale attack on the institutional systems of stratification that are both cause and effect of these values.”<sup>6</sup>

“What then is revolt all about. Following Camus, we can say the essence of revolt is angry, violent expression of the refusal of an individual or group to continue in its present conditions. To the rebel the existing situation and the prognosis for the future appear intolerable. Violent protest, revenge, primitive justice and emotional release are the main motive forces of many revolts. . .

“The rebel is incensed by the way society, or his corner of it, is operating. But his indictment of it is highly personalistic; he is a devotee of the “devil” theory of politics, which holds that certain bad men are accountable for the evils plaguing them. The implication is that destruction, or atleast removal of them will end the time of troubles. . . Revolt cannot be satisfied with sociological analysis, nor with abstract objects responsible for misery (the state nor with more or less hazy groups, a class for example). Revolt lives in the immediate; it is in the immediate that it needs someone accountable; it is here that it brings accusation against someone.”<sup>7</sup> “It is the very concreteness and specificity of revolt that prevents 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 revolutions.”<sup>8</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 bad.”<sup>9</sup> “The violence and elan of revolt should not obscure the fact that what is at stake is renovation than innovation. It is important not to absolutize this contrast. . . Nevertheless, the balance between the old and the new is quite different in revolt and revolution.”<sup>10</sup>

Another important feature of a revolutionary change, distinguishing revolution from revolt, is that it does not limit itself to piecemeal reconstruction of an existing system. It aims at, complete reconstruction of the system concerned and not part of it. This is what demarcates a revolution from reform movements, however radical these might be.

### 3. Ideology

The term ideology is used here in a restrictive sense to denote particularly such systems of ideas and values which play a positive role in the formulation and furtherance of some revolutionary purpose. Even otherwise, when this term is used in a general way, we do not refer to airy, hypothetical, or philosophical speculations, but only to those integrated sets of ideas and values which have practical bearing on social, political or economic movements.

It goes without saying that the abolishing or reconstructing of any system traditional stratification by a revolution has to be in the favour of the downtrodden. Otherwise, it becomes counter revolutionary, or, at best, a movement in the interest of maintaining *status quo* in a different form. And, it is a consistent fact of history that none of the revolutions has been initiated or led by the downtrodden themselves in whose favour the abolition or reconstruction of stratification took place.

The French Revolution formally liberated the peasants from feudalism, but it was the middle class which dominated the revolution, where in the peasantry of France played only a secondary role limited to localized action against landlords. One of the main reasons for the

failure of the German Peasant Wars stated by Engels is that those peasants were not indoctrinated enough, with the result that the bulk of the peasants were always ready to come to terms with the lords who exploited this weakness of theirs;<sup>11</sup> and were also readily demoralized when they met a strong resistance or a reverse.<sup>12</sup> About the Russian Revolution, we need quote only Lenin: “while workers left to their own devices could only develop trade-union consciousness and peasants only petty-bourgeois demands for land, it would be the guiding intellectuals who would lead the revolution on behalf of the workers and the peasants.”<sup>13</sup> All the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, which led the Communist Revolution in China, had higher education and most of them had studied abroad.<sup>14</sup> Truong Chinh pointed out that the great majority of the cadres and the militants in the Communist Party of the revolutionary period of Vietnam originated in the petty bourgeoisie.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Cuban revolution was a great gamble by a group of determined educated revolutionaries which paid off.<sup>16</sup>

The significance of facts given in the preceding para is that it is “wrong to assume that the latent conflict produced by the various modes of social stratification will automatically reach revolutionary proportions.”<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny that revolutions do not succeed unless objective conditions and circumstances for their success are ripe. But, what is even more important is that revolutions are initiated and led only by men who are surcharged by a revolutionary ideology. 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>18</sup> Brinton, after studying in depth four revolutions (i.e. The English Revolution of 1640, and the typical 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>19</sup> France in 1789 was a striking example of a rich society with an impoverished government.<sup>20</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>21</sup> Of course, there were always in these societies sub-marginally poor people, but the important thing to note is that French history & 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>22</sup>

In other words, extreme discontent based on economic or social disparities, even when intensified by open criticism thereof, 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>23</sup> After all, it is men who make revolutions, and man is not merely a social, political or an economic animal. He is a bundle of interests, instincts, sentiments, emotions, urges, passions, aspirations, ideas and ideals, which in varied combinations constitute the motive force for his actions. No ideas and emotions, no revolutions. It does not mean that ideas and emotions, etc. cause revolutions by themselves. All it means is that they form essential parts of the variable but mutually interacting constituents of a revolution.

Ideals and emotions both play a vital role in revolutions; but in a manner which distinguishes them from other types of armed upheavals. A revolution has all the marks of being highly doctrinaire; and is an extraordinarily energetic ideological period<sup>24</sup>. “While ideology is not the whole of revolution, it is a characteristic and partly autonomous part of it.”<sup>25</sup> Revolutionary ideology infuses a sense of purpose and direction to the revolutionary 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>26</sup> The goal (ideology) also provides legitimation to the revolution. At the heart of every revolution must be a cause the justness of which is recognized by everybody<sup>27</sup>. Some notion of progress is a logically necessary ingredient of a truly revolutionary ideology”, and the “notion of progress entails an increase of value made possible by change.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, a revolution, to be true to its name, must

strive to achieve a universally valid humanistic purpose, and its ideology is the soul of that purpose.

Revolts and other non-revolutionary upheavals also have some-sort of purpose, in view, but “The limited stakes and backward glance of revolt are associated with its low, level of ideology.”<sup>29</sup> “A revolt does not have any idea (*pensee*) at the origin; it is visceral, immediate. A revolution implies a doctrine, a project, a program, some kind of theory. 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 revolt, but is always incidental and, emerges from the developing revolt itself. Revolution, in one respect or another, possesses lines of intellectual force which revolt does not have.”<sup>30</sup> “The revolt movement shifts abruptly at its very core. 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>31</sup> Revolution contains a concrete ideology and not an embittered millennialism.”

While it is true that ideology is the soul of a revolutionary purpose, it is strong emotions allied to that ideology which are the propelling force of a revolution, which in its turn is the locomotive of history.<sup>32</sup> It is enthusiasm that drive mens minds off the beaten tracks and produces the great revolution both in thought and politics.<sup>33</sup> The French Revolution was an explosive release of energy.<sup>34</sup> One view is that the passions and emotions that a revolution arouses are a by-product of its ideology. “Whereas, the practical, activist intention of ideology strives to mobilize mens passions and emotions, true practical theory is intended to appeal to their reason”.<sup>35</sup> What is to the point here for us is that though ideology and the emotions allied to it are both inseparable constituents of a revolution, the emotive part acquires and retains its revolutionary significance only to the extent it remains harnessed to the purpose and ideals of that revolution. This is another feature which distinguishes revolution from revolt, because ideologically unharnessed, emotion and passions are the common features of non-revolutionary armed upheavals as well.

#### 4. Leadership

Revolutions are made and do not just happen. “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>36</sup> An even 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.

Because a revolution has to have a revolutionary goal and direction, it is seldom the product of spontaneous mass upsurge. In a few cases, sporadic upheavals have developed into revolution; but at that stage of development they ceased to be automatons and were ideologically harnessed. Otherwise, revolutionary spontaneity is always founded upon revolt and is therefore by nature conservative, or repressive, or utopian.<sup>37</sup> Collective spontaneity is, moreover, not really capable of devising specific forms of revolutionary organization.<sup>38</sup> Also, “Without strong leadership the very complexity of goals, aspirations and motivations of a revolutionary situation could easily degenerate into a Hobbesian war of each against all. Thus, the really distinctive work of the revolution (the attempted reconstruction or destruction of one or more of the stratification systems) cannot get very far without resorting to effective leadership.”<sup>39</sup> Without leadership a revolutionary situation may remain an unrealised potential. It is the revolutionary group (or

proto-party) which catalyses the ingredients of the revolutionary situation by developing a strategy and tactics, and by channelling the spontaneous initiative of the masses into a clearly revolutionary direction.

It is, therefore, obvious that the leaders of a revolution must be deeply conscious of their revolutionary mission and be devoted to it. "Doctrine must subdue spontaneity,"<sup>40</sup> wrote Lenin; and Trotsky was firmly of the view that, "we must become aware of the historic revolutionary mission of the Party. The party is compelled to maintain its dictatorship and to ignore fluctuations in the spontaneous reaction of the masses as well as momentary hesitation of the working class."<sup>41</sup> "What seems to typify revolution in contrast to revolt is the phenomenon of verbalization and conceptualisation in advance of action from the start; it is not a random venture ..... In addition to the ideological factor, revolution implies an orientation toward organization and institutionalisation,"<sup>42</sup> And, it is the leaders who make crucial decisions and who coordinate the functioning of the organization.

The role of leadership, therefore, provides another major point of difference between revolution and revolt. "It is not that revolts are leaderless, while revolutions are led. All collective violence involves leaders of some sort. The question is rather *the role played by leadership*. The leaders of revolts are often skilful tacticians with occasional charismatic qualities. Yet, they are not charged with the inspiration of a higher ideal, which only a clear-cut ideology can provide. The leaders of revolts, therefore, continue to move within grooves determined by their narrow objectives. Without guide lines of an ideology, they cannot see beyond their limited horizons and evolve plans for accomplishing some higher mission. For the same reason the leaders of revolts are generally natural leaders—notable or ordinary individuals who at the time of the revolt display previously unknown talents."<sup>43</sup> The leaders of a revolution, on the other hand, are ideologically inspired. In fact, they are products of an ideology. They, especially those who initiate a revolution, are not just incidentally thrown up by a mass upsurge. This also explains, to an extent, why the revolutionary leaders have been mostly drawn from ranks outside those of the workers and the peasants.

## 5. 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 anomie course rather than the non-anomic. The significance of goal lies principally in the way it legitimates the uses of violence."<sup>44</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>45</sup>

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>46</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>47</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>48</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>49</sup>

## 6. Revolutionary Ethos And Fervour

A revolutionary ideology not only determines the purpose and direction of a revolution, it also inspires the revolutionaries to a higher plane of conduct. The denial of self-interest, the spirits of self-sacrifice, the spirit of comradeship, and the zeal and enthusiasm for a noble cause shared, by the revolutionaries during the revolutionary period is of a level of quality to which, generally speaking, they themselves are unaccustomed both before and after the revolution. In fact, this qualitative transformation of spirit and conduct among the revolutionaries invests the revolutionary epoch with an aura of its own.

“Indeed, one of the distinguishing marks of a revolution is this: that in revolutionary times the idealist at last gets a chance to try and realize his ideals. Revolutions are full of men who hold very high standards of human conduct, the kind of standards which have for several thousand years been described by some word or phrase which has the overtones that idealistic has for us today.”<sup>50</sup> “Roberpierre’s personal rectitude is hardly questioned, there is something of the puritanical “seeker” in Cromwell. Both Lenin and Trotsky, are always compounds of idealism and realism.”<sup>51</sup>

Eric Hopper, in his book on mass movements, concludes that revolutions are prepared by “men of words (i.e., in our times the intellectuals who have deserted) brought to fulfilment by fanatics.”<sup>52</sup> Tocqueville was quick to note a new human type; he was among the first to identify and stress the importance of the professional revolutionary.<sup>53</sup> The number of revolutionists is always small. The New Model Army numbered 40,000 in a population between three to five million in England; Jacobins in their struggle with moderates numbered about 500,000 in the French population of under, twenty millions; the Communist Party in Russia has always prided itself on its numerical smallness.<sup>54</sup> But the revolutionaries, though only few, are fanatically devoted to their cause. “All our revolutionary radicals displayed a willingness to work hard, to

sacrifice their peace and security; to submit to discipline, to submerge their personalities in the group. They maintained on this earth an *esprit de corps*, an active moral union, that is far beyond the power of ordinary men in ordinary circumstances to attain and maintain.”<sup>55</sup> It goes without saying that the success, of a revolution depends to a good deal on this revolutionary fervour.

Revolutions throw up into position of prominence, and even of responsibility, men of the kind who would in normal and healthy societies not attain similar positions. Notably, great revolutions would appear to put extreme idealists during the crisis periods in possession of power they do not ordinarily have.<sup>56</sup> “Revolutions”, especially in their crisis periods, “are like nothing on earth.”<sup>57</sup> As epitomized by Wordsworth: “France standing on the top of golden hours; And human nature seeming born again.”

Revolts can also be political, they are usually violent and do not lack fervour. Here again it is the low level of ideology to which these features are attached that makes *all* the difference between revolt and revolution.

## 7. Comment

What we find is that revolutions are a class apart from other armed upheavals like revolts, rebellions, insurrections, etc. Although these phenomena, like other allied social phenomena, tend to share in common certain features of theirs, revolutions are qualitatively distinct from the “ideal types” of other armed uprisings in respect of the stakes involved, the level of their ideologies, the role played by their leaderships. It follows that the study revolutions requires a different approach, a search for different is and values, some extra criterion than the one normally assessing other allied movements. Not only that. Every revolution is followed by a counter-revolution. This necessitates that study of the revolutionary phase of a movement be not mixed with the study of its non-revolutionary phase.

## Notes:

1. Eugene Karmenka: *The Revolution*, ed. Carl J. Friedrich, pp. 134-135.
2. Mark N. Hagopian: *The Phenomenon of Revolution*, p. 10.
3. Hagopian, p. 52.
4. Brinton, Crane: *The Anatomy of Revolution*, p. 69.
5. Carl J. Friedrich: *Revolution*, p. 82.
6. Hagopian, pp. 10-11.
7. Ellul, p. 27, quoted by Hagopian, p. 11.
8. Hagopian, pp. 10-11.
9. Hagopian, p. 11.
10. Ibid., p. 12.
11. Frederic Engels: *The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 101, 102, 129.
12. Ibid., pp. 100, 101, 105-6, 108.
13. Quoted by Wolf, Eric R.: *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, p. 83.
14. Wolf, Eric R.: *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth century*, p. 150.
15. Wolf, Eric R.: *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, p. 185.
16. Ibid., p. 269.
17. Hagopian. p. 99.
18. Quoted by Brinton, p. 34.
19. Brinton, p. 33.
20. Ibid., p. 31.
21. Ibid., p. 33.

22. Ibid., p. 34.
23. Edwards, L.P.: *The Natural History of Revolution*, p. 90.
24. Friedrich, p. 20.
25. Hagopian, p. 280.
26. Hagopian, p. 2.
27. James and Grace Leu Boggs: *Revolution and Evolution in the twentieth Century*, p. 110.
28. Hagopian, p. 272.
29. Ibid. p. 12.
30. Ellul, Jacques: *Autopsy of Revolution*, pp. 43-44.
31. Camus, p. 77.
32. Friedrich, p. 92.
33. Tocqueville: *Oeuvres*, i, ii, 267, cited by Friedrich, p.92.
34. Friedrich., pp. 12, 85, 92.
35. Hagopian, p. 259.
36. Peter Calvert: *A Study of Revolution*, p. 97.
37. Ellul, p. 125.
38. Ibid., p. 122.
39. Hagopian, p. 2.
40. Quoted by Ellul, p. 124.
41. Ibid., p. 122.
42. Ibid., pp. 47, 49.
43. Hagopian, pp. 12-13.
44. Hagopian, p. 3.
45. Hagopian, p. 3.
46. Bernard de Jouvenal (cited by Jacques Ellul, B.: *Autopsy of Revolution*, p. 108.)
47. Borkenon, F. *Sociological Review*, 29 (1932), p. 41. (quoted by Fredreich, p. 130.)
48. Hagopian, p. 3.
49. Brinton, pp. 94-99.
50. Brinton, p. 127.
51. Ibid., p. 128.
52. Erric Hopper: *The True Believer* (quoted by Brinton), 130.
53. Freidrich, p. 78.
54. Brinton, pp. 165-166.
55. Ibid., p. 171.
56. Ibid., pp. 131-33.
57. Brinton, p. 133.

## CHAPTER 2

### Revolutionary Motivation And Religious Approach

There has been endless discussion as to what is the fountainhead of revolutionary motivation, or for that matter of humanitarian values in general. "The great events which shape the destinies of people-revolutions, for example, and the outbreak of religious beliefs are sometimes so difficult to explain that one must limit oneself to a mere statement. . . I have been struck by the impenetrable aspect of certain essential phenomenon, those relating to the genesis of beliefs especially."<sup>1</sup> When scholars, particularly of political science and sociology, with whom we are presently concerned, fail to agree on defining such basic concepts as freedom, equality, justice, human good and progress, etc., any search to delve into the root-causes of revolutionary motivation is likely to make confusion worse confounded. "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>2</sup>

"We are, therefore, limiting ourselves to identifying, at the *empirical level*, important values, attitudes of mind and behaviour, which exercise considerable influence on revolutionary motivation and conduct. We will also attempt to draw religious parallels, wherever possible. "We take it that in the present analysis 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; atleast in its youthful, fresh and active phase, it will not for a moment admit that such a gap can long exist."<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. The Downtrodden and the Oppressed

The very *raison de etre* of a revolution is the abolition or radical reconstruction of a system of stratification in favour of *the downtrodden and the oppressed*. A revolution thus aims at closing the gap between what the prevailing condition of the downtrodden and the oppressed is and the level of the goal to which it should be raised. This is what makes the revolution idealistic. Its concern for the poor and the oppressed makes it humanitarian. Similarly, those who themselves do not belong to the downtrodden but devote their lives to serve their cause (all revolutions, as seen in the previous chapter, are initiated and led by such men) cannot but be inspired by an altruistic spirit and by a concern to serve others.

All great religions were deeply concerned about the fate of the sick, the weak, the poor, and the oppressed, and urged their follows to help them. But, the crux of the problem is to make social and political structural changes in their favour. We, therefore, refer here only to Puritanical christianity which moved appreciably in this direction and which has been systematically recorded. It has to be reminded that the issue of economic exploitation gained importance only in modern times.<sup>4</sup>

"The political implications of Protestantism had much to do with the overthrow of the old conception 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."<sup>5</sup>

“For him (Luethy) the major impact of Protestantism on European history has been in the political field. This impact was effected, according to him, through the direct reference to the Bible as a source for new bases of legitimation of authority. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

In Max Weber’s opinion, no other religion had influenced the course of human development in such a revolutionary manner as had been achieved by Puritanism.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. 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 fact.”<sup>8</sup> A marked feature of revolution is that revolutionary ideology transcends regionalism, sectionalism, and is universal in character. The atrophy of patriotism is a marked feature of a revolutionary period.<sup>10</sup> The Russian Revolution was universal in its principal, as is every great revolution.<sup>11</sup> Tocquville 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 an honour to human nature that we need such a stimulant. Do you wish to see what man can achieve? Then join to the passions originating in personal interest to the goals of changing the face of the world and regenerating human species.

“This the history of the French Revolution.”<sup>12</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>13</sup>

“Nevertheless, relative to earlier forms the historic religions are all universalistic. From the point of view 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>14</sup>

“. . . prophetic revelations involves for both the prophet himself and his followers. . . a unified view of the world derived from a consciously integrated and meaningful attitude toward life . . . To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented. . . .”<sup>15</sup>

## 3. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity

At the heart of every revolution must be a Cause the justness of which is recognized by everybody,<sup>16</sup> and it is the cause of “*liberty, equality and fraternity*” which provided legitimation to the French Revolution. “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; what Tocqueville wished to emphasize is the type of strain, the critical instability that is produced by a contradiction between the structure of the civil society and the make up of the political regime. When this occurs, either the society will fall apart, or it will undergo a revolution.”<sup>17</sup>

Whatever other causes of revolutions in general might or might not be there, the basic natural urge of human liberty (shared even by animals) and equality, and the common human aspiration for a better life,<sup>18</sup> 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>19</sup> "Freedom, that terrible word inscribed on the chariot of the storm, is the motivating principle of all revolutions."<sup>20</sup> Revolutionaries have always believed that they have risen against oppression.<sup>21</sup>

This quest for liberty and equality, as a basic human urge and aspiration, is further shown by its universal appeal, and inspiration. Poets in a dozen languages set to work to celebrate the regeneration of France and mankind. And not only poets. Sober business men, professional men and country gentlemen joined in the rejoicing. Far away in unenlightened Russia noblemen illuminated their house in honour of the fall of Bastille.<sup>22</sup> Foreigners like Humboet came to France "to breathe the air of liberty and to assist at the obsequies of despotism."<sup>23</sup>

Gorky saw in religion a spirit of human brotherhood.<sup>24</sup> Judaism is the first purely humanist religion.<sup>25</sup> Socialism shared with religion a thirst for justice and equality out of religious-social tradition going to Moses.<sup>26</sup> "Religion is an integral part of human psychology; striving for the brotherhood of man; denying of self-interest."<sup>27</sup> "Religion cannot exist without a strong form of love. Not to calculate, to give everything for the sake of life and living men."<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Reason, Belief and Faith

"Political or religious beliefs have a common origin and obey the same laws. They are not formed with the aid of reason, but more often contrary to all reason."<sup>29</sup> A revolution is developed only by the aid of mystic and affective elements which are absolutely foreign to reason.<sup>30</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>31</sup> Whatever its origin, a revolution is not productive of results until it has sunk into the soul of the multitude. "Political and religious beliefs are sustained almost exclusively by affective and mystic factors. Reason plays only a feeble part in their genesis."<sup>32</sup> A revolution is the work of believers.<sup>33</sup>

"The emotion which furnishes the driving power to revolution is hope and not despair."<sup>34</sup> "The revolutionary spirit being utterly convinced of the absolute truth of its tenets takes on the aspect of a religious faith. Puritanism and Islam seem to have foreshadowed it."<sup>35</sup> The English Revolution was not entirely misnamed when it was called the Puritan Revolution. In Berdyaev's view, religion and revolution became necessary complements.<sup>36</sup> There is a Communist, socialist element in christianity.<sup>37</sup> Christianity inculcated purest morality and unselfish conduct; a dynamic of a genuinely spiritual and religious kind essential for revolutions; it is faith and not reason.<sup>38</sup> Prophets are the noblest revolutionaries.<sup>39</sup> "In a very loose though real sense of the term, all great revolutions may be said to have a religious element in them."<sup>40</sup> Economic determinism humiliates men; only faith in human society raises him.<sup>41</sup> Religion provided the ideology and social cohesion for many revolutions in the historic civilization.<sup>42</sup> Radicalism first expressed itself through religious aspiration.<sup>43</sup> After all ..... the Bible itself is full of good revolutionary doctrines."<sup>44</sup>

#### 5. Attitudes and Conduct

Revolutionary ascetic:

There is a marked contrast in the behaviour of men, when they are at the peak of a revolution and when Thermidor has overtaken them.

"...all these revolutions have at their crisis a quality unmistakably puritanical or ascetic or, to use an overworked word, idealistic. There is a serious attempt by those in authority to eradicate the minor vices, as well as what some might feel inclined to call the major pleasures...in

'93 and '94...there was an earnest attempt to clean up Paris, to shut up brothels, gaming houses, to eliminate actual drunkenness. Virtue was the order of the day."<sup>45</sup>

"The Puritanism of the Bolsheviks may seem very paradoxical, but the Bolshevik leaders were almost all ascetic. Lenin was notably austere and contemptuous of ordinary comforts. The general tone among the high command of Bolshevism was in those early years that of consecrated and almost ascetic group."<sup>46</sup>

As a contrast, Hagopian identifies the symptoms of Thermidor as follows:

"Relaxation of the Puritanical standards of revolutionary virtue and the growth of careerism; corruption and self-seeking at the expense of revolutionary idealism. The masses turn their back on high-blown ideological goals and return to the more prosaic pursuits of making a living and enjoying the simple pleasures of existence; the full extent of the popular abandonment of "The Republic of Virtue" becomes manifest."<sup>47</sup>

"Within a few days of the guillotining of Robespierre and his more conspicuous followers, Parisians began to indulge publicly and with gusto in a whole series of pleasures denied them during the tension of the Terror. . . The people of Paris took Robespierre's death as a signal that the lid was off."<sup>48</sup>

Revolutionary heaven and Devotion:

What is common to religious and revolutionary goals is that men work hard and excitedly in common to achieve an ideal, a pattern of life, not at the moment universally or even largely achieved.

"The Jacobins had a much less concrete notion of heaven, and this heaven, was to be definitely here on earth in the Republic of Virtue which we have seen as Robespierre's ideal. . . . The Russian heaven is the class-less society, to be attained after the purgatory of the dictatorship of the proletariat has slowly put an end to -the worldly miseries of class struggle."<sup>49</sup>

"God for the Calvinist, nature and reason for the Jacobin, dialectical or scientific materialism for the Marxist provide comforting assurance that the believer is on the side that must win. Obviously; the belief that you can't lose will in most not all cases make you a better fighter."<sup>50</sup>

"Our orthodox and successful extremists, then, are crusaders, -fanatics, ascetics, who seek to bring -heaven to earth."<sup>51</sup>

"Now this insider (i.e., active participant), it would seem, finds in the devout service to the revolution most of the psychological satisfactions commonly supplied by what we call religion..... 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 only 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 learned journals."<sup>52</sup>

#### Comment

The historic role of religion in giving birth to humanitarian ideals, goals and values cannot be denied. Judaism is the first purely humanistic -and universal religion, and thirst for

justice and equality goes back to Moses. It is religion which first affirmed the faith in human destiny, human dignity, human equality and human freedom. It is religion which raised its voice against slavery, oppression and exploitation. It has been the greatest single factor in the integration of society.<sup>53</sup>

Spiritualism and materialism, we are aware, are poles apart. But, if we come down from the realm of the Ultimates and leave aside doctrinal complexities and prejudices, we find, at the *empirical level*, that there is much in common between religion and revolution in their humanitarian aims, values and approaches.

We have also seen that there is so much common between revolutionary motivation and 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 cause, etc., etc., are as much indispensable to revolution as to religion. Religion has no doubt been distorted, abused and misused for counter-revolutionary purposes. But, then, which ideology has not been distorted and misused? We are here concerned only with the positive aspect. What makes the difference is the purpose for which religion is used and the way it is used.

Not only religion has given birth to revolutionary ideals and values, it was also the mother of many radical trends and movements. "Religion, then, provided the ideology and social cohesion for many rebellions and reform movements in the historic civilizations."<sup>54</sup> "Michelet is quite correct in only wanting to recognize two outstanding characters in the revolutionary saga: Christianity and the French Revolution,"<sup>55</sup> The English Revolution was the product of Christian Puritanism, and Berdyaev has traced the roots of Russian communism to the very old and deep religious tradition of Russia.<sup>56</sup> The revolutionary character of Islam is well known, and we hope to show in the next chapter that the Sikh Revolution, born of the religious ideology of Sikhism, conforms remarkably to all the characteristics of a revolution postulated by political science, and indicated in the previous chapter.

Notes:

1. Gustave Le Bon: *The Psychology of Revolution*, p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 91.
3. Crane Brinton: *The Anatomy of Revolution*, pp. 202-203.
4. Wach, Joachim: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 214; Ellul p. 21.
5. *Sociology of Religion*; edited by Roland Robertson, p. 283.
6. Robertson, p. 302.
7. Ibid., p. 305.
8. Brinton, p. 216.
9. Edwards, pp. 122-123.
10. Ibid.
11. Berdyaev (Nicholas): *The Origin of the Russian Revolution*, p. 114.
12. Oeuvres (M), 11, ii, 349-350; (B), ix, 118 (cited by Friedrich, p. 94.)
13. Wach, J. *Sociology of Religion*, p. 377.
14. *Sociology of Religion*, edited by Rolland Robertson, p. 277.
15. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 58-59.
16. James and Grace Lu Boggs: *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, p. 110.
17. Friedrich, p. 80.
18. Boggs, p. 83.



19. Hannah, Mendt; *On Revolution*, p.
20. Camus, Albert, *The Rebel*, p. 76.
21. Hagopian, p. 59.
22. Brinton, pp. 99-100.
23. Gustave, p. 170.
24. Cited by Christopher Read: *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia*, p. 87.
25. Ibid., p. 81.
26. Ibid., p. 79.
27. Read, pp. 58-59.
28. Camus, p. 10.
29. Le Bon Gutsy: *The Psychology of Revolution*, p. 28.
30. Ibid, p. 17.
31. Ibid, pp. 23-24.
32. Gustav, p. 26.
33. Ibid., p. 17.
34. Edward, L.P.: *The Natural History of Revolution*, p. 35.
35. Hagopian, p. 69.
36. Read, pp. 76-77.
37. Read, pp. 82-83.
38. Edwards, p. 90.
39. Ibid., p. 26.
40. Ibid., p. 137.
41. Berdyaev, pp. 97-107.
42. Wach, J.: *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 6, 13, 110, 383.
43. Walzer (Micheal); *The Revolution of the Saints*, p. 19.
44. Brinton, p. 276.
45. Brinton, p. 199.
46. Ibid., p. 207.
47. Hagopian, pp. 228-230.
48. Brinton, pp. 233-44.
49. Brinton, pp. 214-15.
50. Ibid., p. 211.
51. Ibid., p. 210.
52. Brinton, p. 202.
53. Wach, pp. 6, 13, 110, 383.
54. *Sociology of Religion*, edited by Roland Robertson, p. 280.
55. Camus, p. 82.
56. Berdyaev (Nicholas): *The Origin of Russian Communism*.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Sikh Revolution

In the previous chapter, we have shown that religion has not only been the mother of revolutionary values and goals, but it was also the source of inspiration for many a radical movements. It is a fact that not many religious movements directly culminated into revolutions. But, our thesis will stand proved if we demonstrate even in one case that religion did give direct birth to a revolution which meets the important criteria laid down in the first chapter. As a case study we take up the Sikh Revolution and discuss it under the following heads: -

(1) Stratification; (2) Purposive; (3) Political and Violent; (4) Idealistic and Emotive; (5) Leadership.

#### 1. Stratification<sup>1</sup>

The abolition of atleast one of the traditional systems of stratification has been identified as the foremost requirement or hallmark of a revolution. Max Weber, as already indicated, has differentiated stratification of society into three types based on status, power, or class. Although these three types tend to overlap one another, their differentiation is nevertheless of great value in analysing social stratification in terms of its separate strands.

##### (a) Stratification Based on Caste Status

The supreme purpose of the Indian caste system was the preservation of the 'caste-status', primarily of the priestly class, and, to a lesser degree, of that of other so-called Aryan castes, within a fixed and graded hierarchy based solely on 'caste-status'. The predominant role which the 'caste-status' assumed in the Indian society can be gauged from the fact that economic status was made lower than the 'caste-status', and political power was made subservient to the Brahmanical priesthood.<sup>2</sup>

The caste was essentially a social rank, but it gave social status a new content by giving it a religious and ritualistic significance. That is why we have termed social rank of the caste order as Caste-status, in order to distinguish it from social rank in class societies. Moreover, social status ordinarily depends upon the personal endowments of an individual or a group, as also on wealth and power. These could be additional adjuncts to Caste-status, but Caste-status retained its primacy even without these as it was placed above political and economic status. A Chaturpati King was lower in Caste-status than his own priest (*purohita*), who was economically dependent on the prince. Gautma lays down that when a king and a Brahmin pass along the same road, the road belongs to the Brahmin and not to the king.<sup>3</sup> "The Visas (Visyas) bow spontaneously to the chief (*rajan*), who is preceded by a Brahmin."<sup>4</sup> The wealthiest Bania was lower in caste-status, than the Poorest Kshatriya. As late as the beginning of the present century, "the Shanans of Southern India, in spite of the wealth they have acquired, have no right to build two storeyed houses, to wear gold ornaments, or to support an umbrella."<sup>5</sup> Shivaji, the embodiment of the solitary successful Hindu revolt against Muslim political domination, had to go about abegging to the Brahmins for the legitimation of his sovereignty by them. Besides, social status is generally variable. With the loss of political and economic power, status consciousness tends to vanish. Whole classes have been replaced by other classes; races have been known to lose their identity; occupations have risen and fallen in the scale of social estimation; and group biases and prejudices have disappeared altogether, or have been replaced by others of different kinds. But Caste-status is immutable, as illustrated by the well-known story of Matunga in the Epic, because it is based on birth and not any other consideration.

“Order and rank of the castes- is eternal (according to the doctrine) as the course of the stars and the difference between the animal species and the human race.”<sup>6</sup>

Another feature of Caste-status, that differentiated it from social status in other societies outside India, was that it was not confined to a few individuals, groups, or sections of people. It covered, the entire Hindu society. Excepting the mendicants, Sadhus, etc., before “every thing else, without caste there is no Hindu.”<sup>7</sup> It was unique also in another sense. The. Caste-status transcended geographical limitations. A Brahmin or a Pariah in one nook of the country was as much a Brahmin or a Pariah in any other part of the land. In this way, caste society developed; its own pattern of slavery, which led to the enslavement of entire communities by the entire Hindu society. The slaves in other Countries- were the slaves of individuals or of a limited number of enslaving groups. The society as a whole had, if any at all, only an indirect interest in keeping them enslaved. The fate of slaves could change with the change in the attitudes or the destinies of their masters. Many a slave won their freedom in Rome, and some of the slaves in the Muhammadan kingdoms rose to be kings. Slavery in the U.S.A. came to be abolished wholesale under the impact of Christian liberalism. But, in India, the Sudra was the slave not of individuals or groups; he was the slave of the caste-system, i.e., of the entire caste society. This system of slavery was guided by the dictum that even if freed by his master, a Sudra is not free, “for this (servitude) is innate in him; who then can take it from him.”<sup>8</sup> Abbe Dubois, who spent a long time among the untouchables in South India, wrote in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (after the Islamic and Western liberal influences had some time to influence the caste society) that: “in fact these Pariahs are the born slaves of India; and had I to choose between the status of being a slave in one of our colonies and a Pariah here, I should unhesitatingly prefer the former.”<sup>9</sup>

The Sikh Guru declared specifically: “O Unwise, be not proud of thy caste. For, a myriad errors flow out of this pride.”<sup>10</sup> Guru Nanak Identified himself with the lowliest of the low castes. “There are lower castes among the low castes and some absolutely low. Nanak seeketh their company. What hath he to do with the high ones. For, where the lowly are cared for, there is Thine (Gods) Benediction and Grace.”<sup>11</sup> Bhai Gurdas writes that Guru Nanak, “made the Dharma perfect by blending the four castes into one. To treat the king and the pauper on equal footing, and while greeting to touch the feet of the other (i.e., regard oneself humble as compared to others) was made the rule of conduct.”<sup>12</sup> Guru Nanak thus did away with not only ‘Caste-status’ consciousness, but also with the-status-consciousness gap between the rich and the poor. Again, “The four castes were made into one, mid higher castes (*Varn*) and out-castes (*avarn*) regarded as noble. The twelve sects were obliterated and the glorious Panth (created).”<sup>13</sup> Here the abolition of caste and sects is linked with the creation of the Sikh Panths Bhai Gurdas repeatedly, mentions this achievement.<sup>14</sup> The language used by him (its grammatical construction) makes it clear that he was not, just repeating a precept enunciated by the Guru in his hymns, but a precept actualised in the Sikh Panth.

The spirit of brotherhood and fraternization is evens more difficult to inculcate than the spirit of equality. The Sikhs addressed each other as brother (Bhai). In all the available letters written by the. Gurus to the Sikhs, the Sikhs have been addressed as brothers (Bhai).<sup>15</sup> “The Sikhs served each other, regarding every Sikh as the Gurus image.”<sup>16</sup> All the members of the Khalsa Dal, who were drawn from all, castes, including the Rangrettas (drawn from the lowest outcaste, i.e., sweepers), dined together.<sup>17</sup> “If any Sikh got or brought any eatable, it was never used alone, it was partaken by all the Sikhs.” “One would offer-food to others first and then eat oneself. Singhs would be addressed with great love.”<sup>18</sup> “Guru’s Sikh was the brother of each Sikh.”<sup>19</sup> All members of the Khalsa Dal “were issued clothes from a common store. Without concealing anything, they would pool all their earnings at one place.”<sup>20 21</sup>

“The prevalence of this spirit of equality, brotherhood, and fraternization among the Sikhs is confirmed by evidence from non-Sikh historical sources also. Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din, the author of *Fatubat Namab-i-Samadi* (1722-23) was a contemporary of Banda. He writes that low-caste Hindus, termed *khas-o-khask-k-i-hamidi-i-jahanmi wajud* (i.e., the dregs of the society of 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 (Guru Gobind Singh), and would publicise themselves with the title of *Sabibzada*, i.e., the privileged son of the Guru (“*Yaki rab targib-i-digran pisar-i-khanda-i-guru-i-magbur gufts b-lagub-i-shahzadgi mashur kardab*”).<sup>22</sup> Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan writes (1783-A.D.) about the Khalsa Panth: “When a person is once admitted into that fraternity, they make no scruple of associating with him, of what ever tribe, class, or race he may have been hitherto, nor do they betray any of the scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.”<sup>23</sup> The author of *Haqiqat* also writes about the same time that the Sikhs were told: “Whoever might join you from what ever tribe, don’t have, any prejudice against him and without as superstition eat together with him. . . *Now this is their custom.*”<sup>24</sup> And Max Weber has recognized the value of commensality as a method for producing fellowship.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization achieved by the Khalsa can be realized only if it is contrasted with the caste milieu, confined to India, in which this transformation was brought about. Bougle 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, on principle, it tolerates neither the parvenu, nor miscegenation, nor a change of profession”<sup>26</sup> “From the social point of view, caste is division, hatred, jealousy, and distrust between neighbour.”<sup>27</sup> All authorities on caste are agreed that mutual repulsion and disunity, besides inequality and hierarchism, are the in-built constituents of the caste system.

In addition, the caste ideology, and the caste system in actual practice, invested the Sudras with a notion of, inherent impurity, which, in extreme cases, took the form of execrability that contaminated the upper castes by bodily contact, or in some cases by mere sight. The Sudras were regarded as almost bestial rather than human. One text puts the murder of a Sudra on the same level as the destruction of a crow, an owl, or a dog.<sup>28</sup> “Even on touching persons who have touched a shandaIa, one shall purify himself by bathing dressed in his clothes.”<sup>29</sup> “It is sinful to touch a chandala, to speak to him or to look at him.”<sup>30</sup> The glance of a man of low caste falling on the, cooking pot may necessitate throwing away the contents.<sup>31</sup> This plight of the Sudras, particularly that of the untouchables, unapproachables, and unseeable outcastes, was not shared by the worst slaves outside India. Hence, in incorporating the Rangrettas (drawn from the untouchable sweeper caste) in the Sikh Panth and fraternizing with them as brothers (Bhais) in the Khalsa brotherhood, the Sikh revolution bridged a chasm of abhorrence, the resulting social exclusiveness and status differentiation, not met elsewhere on such a scale in any other society. It meant a good deal more than the abolition of slavery.

Above all, the Sikh Panth abolished not only caste-status but an entire social system based on it. There is a clear distinction between caste, as such (elements of which are to be found in many societies outside India), and when castes come to constitute a system, as it happened in India alone.<sup>32</sup> Without unity of purpose, organization, and coordination of functions, the loose elements of social discrimination and exclusiveness either remain a haphazard assortment of social factors and forces; or, at best when these combine casually to approach caste-like formations, they constitute only a fraction of the -potential resultant force that might have resulted had these been welded into a system. This is amply illustrated when caste like social fabrics outside India are contrasted with the corresponding phenomenon in the Indian caste-system.<sup>33</sup>

The Indian caste order was no ordinary system. It was the most rigid and elaborate hierarchical system of social exclusiveness evolved by human ingenuity. Of the three necessary elements of a system; the unity of purpose was provided by the caste ideology; the organization was the Hindu society, the most hierarchical one known to history; and the coordination of function was inspired by the ideology and executed by both the Brahmins and the functioning of the caste society.<sup>34</sup>

The Sikh Panth did away with all the three main components of the caste system.<sup>35</sup> It repudiated the entire caste ideology, of which we point out only one item because Hagopian, too, has taken note of its implications. He writes: "What really differentiates the Indian caste system from estate systems are the religious concepts of purity and, impurity. . . This religious foundation enjoins some drastic limitations on social mobility, which mark the caste system off from even rigid estate systems."<sup>36</sup> The Sikhs eliminated the Brahmins as a caste, or any other hereditary sacerdotal class, from their ranks.<sup>37</sup> And the Sikh Panth completely broke away from the caste society, i.e., the Hindu society.<sup>38</sup> In accomplishing these targets, the Sikh Panth, thus, broke away from the caste system based on caste-status. And, abolishing an established system of stratification is the most important condition for, ear-marking a revolution, as laid down by Hagopian and others.

(b) Stratification Based on Power:

One cannot overdraw the distinction between social and political revolutions, as social revolutions are *ipso facto* political revolutions.<sup>39</sup> They are, in fact, of a mixed character, because there can be no lasting social revolution without a political revolution.<sup>40</sup> However, we will examine here the specific changes in the political and military power-relations between the different social strata brought about by the Sikh Revolution, as political and military power is the power that sanctions stratification in the last analysis.

Magesthanes noted that military duty was confined to one caste, i.e., the Kshatriyas, and that the peasants went about their work quite unconcerned close to the battle-fields. Whether the people were totally disarmed or not is not quite certain, but it is clear that they were psychologically disarmed by the caste ideology. Pacifism and the caste system "blocked the development of the military power of the citizenry; pacifism blocked it in principle, and the caste in practice, by hindering the establishment of a *polls* or *commune* in the European sense."<sup>41</sup> It was for this reason that, on the eclipse of the Kshatriyas, a few petty Rajput princes, springing up from the desert of Jasselmere, were able to usurp political power practically through northern India.<sup>42</sup> The same phenomenon repeated itself, more or less, when a handful of Muslim invaders overran vast tracts of the land, without encountering any sizable resistance.<sup>43</sup>

The Khalsa Panth rejected the pacifism of the caste society as well as its policy of monopolizing military power by the caste oligarchy. The way it was done is very important for understanding the significance of Sikh militarization.

First, people from all castes, including the untouchables, were freely admitted to the Khalsa fraternity and took part in its military campaigns as equal partners. When Guru Hargobind declared his intention of arming the Panth, "Calico-printers, water-carriers, carpenters and barbers (all Sudras), all come to (his) place."<sup>44</sup> Out of the first five recruits to the Khalsa (Panj Pyaras), who formed its nucleus, four were Sudras. A near contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh lists low castes like oil pressers, barbers, leather-dressers, and carpenters, etc., among the castes from which his army was recruited.<sup>45</sup> Jiwan Singh Rangretta (drawn from the untouchable caste) was one of the distinguished commanders in the battle of Chamkaur.<sup>46</sup> Bhangu has

referred to the plebeian composition of the Khalsa at several places.<sup>47</sup> When the Taruna Dal of the Khalsa Dal was reorganized into five divisions, one of the divisions was under the command of Bir Singh 'Rangretta'.<sup>48</sup> This division continued to participate in the campaigns of the Khalsa right upto the conquest of Malerkotla.<sup>49</sup> In the great battle with Abdali, called *Wada Ghalu Ghara* because of the largest number of Sikhs killed in a single battle, it is specifically mentioned that Ramdasias (Cobblers) and Rargrettas (sweepers), both outcastes, took a prominent part.<sup>50</sup>

The plebeian composition of the Khalsa is corroborated also by evidence from, non-Sikh sources. Banda's forces were recruited chiefly from the lower castes of Hindus, and scavengers, and such like persons were very numerous among them.<sup>51</sup> We have already referred to the contemporary Muslim historian who described Banda's army being composed of "the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus." Another contemporary Muslim historian writes that Banda brought into the forefront the unemployed and worthless people who had hitherto been hidden by the curtain of insignificance.<sup>52</sup> Khafi Khan says, "Many of the ill-disposed low-caste Hindus joined themselves to them (the Sikhs), and placing their lives at the disposal of these evil-minded people, they found their own advantage in professing belief and obedience, and they were active in persecuting and killing Hindus of high castes."<sup>53</sup>

It has also been seen that there prevailed in the Khalsa Dal a spirit of complete equality and brotherhood without distinctions of caste-status. Bhangu has written that in the Khalsa Dal, "All ate together from one vessel; no discrimination was left; the four *varnas* and four *ashrama*, *janeo* and *tikka* (Hindu insignia), were discarded."<sup>54</sup> At the time of the reorganization of the Taruna Dal wing of the Khalsa Dal, the division under Bir Singh 'Rangretta' was bestowed a standard flag (*jbanda*) from the Akal Takhat in the same manner as was done in the case of the other four divisions.<sup>55</sup> This was to signify equality of rank not only in the caste-status but also in the military power status. Again, to emphasize the same equality, Bir Singh Rangretta was accorded first priority to receive the honour when Ala Singh of Patiala offered horses to honour the Khalsa Dal for their help in conquering Malerkotla.<sup>56</sup>

Secondly, it was made incumbent for every member of the Khalsa to remain armed at all times.<sup>57</sup> On being baptized, i.e. on being initiated as a member of the Khalsa, a Sikh became a Singh (lion). A Singh had to carry five distinguishing marks as a religious obligation; one of which was keeping a Kirpan (sword).

These two facets of the Sikh militarization, i.e. the plebeian composition of the Khalsa and the arming of its every member, had profound significance. This meant effective abolition of caste hierarchy in the Khalsa Panth, as hierarchy depended ultimately on the military power being made a close preserve of the caste oligarchy. It also ensured equal distribution of military power in the Khalsa ranks, as it was made incumbent upon every Sikh to bear arms. In other words, no member or section of the Khalsa could be in a position to dominate society, militarily, or politically any other member or section of the Khalsa, as in the military equation one Singh was as good as another. Thus, the Khalsa became a worthy instrument for achieving the two main social objectives of the Sikh Revolution, i.e. the creation of an egalitarian society and the capturing of political power for and by the plebeian masses. Military equality was a step towards acquiring political equality.

When the Khalsa tasted political power for the first time under Banda, "The lowest of low in Indian estimation" were appointed rulers. Irvine, who based his account on contemporary Muslim historians, writes: "In all *parganas* occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather-dresser, the lowest of low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), when in a short

space of time he would return to his birth-place as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well-born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort him home. Arrived there, they stood before him with joined palms, awaiting his orders.”<sup>58</sup> It was in this manner that the hierarchical caste order was symbolically made to salute to the Sikh plebeian political revolution.

Again, “All power was now usurped by the Sikhs, and one Bir Singh, a man of poor origin. . . was appointed *subbadar*, or governor of Sirhind.”<sup>59</sup> Ordinary peasants, shepherds (Tara Singh Gaiba), village menials (carpenters), and distillers (a despised sudra caste) became the leaders of the Missals. Of the total twelve Missals, there was not one from castes higher than these. The Rangrettas had all along been equal members of the Khalsa Dal, but at the time of the formation of Missals, they joined the Missal of Nishanias, which Missal did not carve out a territorial rule of its own.<sup>60</sup> Thus the Rangrettas on their own dropped out of the race for capturing political power and were not pushed out.<sup>61</sup>

The common peasantry of the land suddenly attained political power.<sup>62</sup> The leaders of the Missals were more *de jure* than *de facto* chiefs, because their followers were mostly friends and volunteers who regarded themselves as their companions and partners.<sup>63</sup> “The lowest of the low bred and the meanest of the mean people got elevated to high government positions. The nobility and grandees retired to secluded places on account of the elimination of their tribe.”<sup>64</sup> Syed Ghulam Khan writes: “. . . the whole country of the Punjab. . . is in the possession of this community (the Sikh) and most of their exalted leaders are of low origin, such as carpenters, animal skin-treaters and jats.”<sup>65</sup> Even in the post-revolutionary period, an ordinary member of the Khalsa, according to a European observer, did not regard himself as any body’s servant except his. Guru’s.<sup>66</sup> Polier (1780) observed, “As for the government of the Siques (Sikhs), it is properly an aristocracy, in which no pre-eminence is allowed except that which power and force naturally gives; all the chiefs, great and small, and even the poorest and most abject siques, look themselves as perfectly equal in all the public concerns and in the greatest Council or Goomata of the nation, held annually at Ambarsar (Amritsar), Lahore, or some other place. Everything is decided by the plurality of votes taken indifferently from all who choose to be present at it.”<sup>67</sup>

Thus the political revolution brought about by the Sikh movement, during its revolutionary phase, in the military and political status of the so-called low castes, is amply clear. What matters is the content, the social location of political power, and not its form. It coincides squarely with Kamenka’s concept of revolution that it “is a sharp, sudden change in the social location of power, expressing itself in the radical transformation of the process of government, of the official foundations of sovereignty or legitimacy, and of the conception of social order.”<sup>68</sup>

#### (c) Stratification Based on Economic Power:

“For revolutions before the middle of the nineteenth century, the search for class’s struggle can lead to grave confusion”, writes. Hagopian.<sup>69</sup> Class struggle is a modern phenomenon.<sup>70</sup> “Classes in the Weberian sense emerge out of market relationships, and as these market relationships were weak before the growth of capitalism, these failed to erupt out of their isolation and reduce whole societies in their image.”<sup>71</sup> “Today it is the fashion to interpret every insurrection, rebellion, or revolt in terms of class conflict. . . Yet this is absolutely incorrect from a historical Point of view. . . This is a firmly established fact: revolts and revolutions, prior to the end of the eighteenth century are really not expressions of the class struggle. . . It is difficult today to understand that the social issue of exploitation, never played an important part in revolts prior to the eighteenth century.”<sup>72</sup> What is damaging to “the generic class-struggle explanation of revolutions, which holds that revolutions are always movement of the lower class against the upper class”<sup>73</sup>, is the lack of symmetry between the dominant system of stratification,

and the split between friends and enemies of the revolution. What emerges from the study of the history of certain revolutions is the multi-class (or multi-strata) composition of the revolutionary coalition. . . It is rather that the peculiar mix on both sides is too heterogeneous to be written off as individual 'exception to the rule'. The exceptions are often the very stuff of the revolution."<sup>74</sup> It is the Bolshevik Russian Revolution that for the first time put the issue of economic exploitation on the world agenda.

Apart from this, there are other more weighty considerations. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, land was the pivot of economy. As the socialization of land is a headache even for the communist regimes of the twentieth century, it is no surprise that attempts in this direction in the earlier periods remained either utopian, or "ended ultimately, sooner or later, in one or other form of feudalism. "Moreover, without class consciousness classes do not crystallize into an effective social or political force. It has been recognized by many social theorists that revolutionary class conflict is rather less than an automatic consequence of mere economic stratification."<sup>75</sup> Marx himself contrasts the proletariat as a "class in itself," and the proletariat as a "class for itself,"<sup>76</sup> and regarded the mass of peasants as a bag of potatoes. Before Marx elaborated his theory, the vague sense of polarization between the different grades of the exploiters and the exploited, or those of the rich and the poor, lacked that sharpness of edge which the Marxist idea class-conflict denotes. More than that, "the issue of subordination is more pervasive than that of exploitation."<sup>77</sup> At least it was so in the medieval age; and, in the Indian context, caste-status consciousness overshadowed economic considerations. For these reasons it is idle to expect of the Sikh Revolution to have changed the entire system of relations based on land. The idea of revolution in that age lacked the insights afforded by the changes in property and production organization that occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>78</sup>

Bearing in mind the afore-mentioned limitations, the anti-exploitation and pro-poor general thrust of the Sikh Revolution is clear. Guru Nanak had declared that wealth cannot be amassed without sinning, and the Sikhs were enjoined to earn their living by their own manual labour (*Dasan Nawan Di Kirat*). There are faint indications that the Khalsa at, one stage regarded the acquired property as the common property of the Khalsa Commonwealth. Polier states that the contributions collected in expeditions were duly accounted for to the central council of the Khalsa and were distributed equally.<sup>79</sup> Prinsep and Scott go further in writing that the land acquired by the Khalsa was regarded as its common property.<sup>80</sup> However, it is not certain how far, and for how long, The nationalization of land was achieved. What is certain is that the revolutionary Khalsa worked for the uplift of the unprivileged strata to the detriment of the established vested interests.

Dr. Ganda Singh has expressed the view that the Khalsa abolished the zamindari system and established peasant proprietorship in land.<sup>81</sup> This may also be inferred from the fact that "The Sikhs when they hold land at all hold it usually as proprietors and seldom as tenants."<sup>82</sup> Khushwaqt Rai wrote in 1811 that "The sect of Singhs took possession of the country of the Punjab. Since then, upto this time, the whole administrative machinery of the country is in disarray and the normal system of governance, official codes, the set up of *levies and awards*. . . and the allowances accruing from estates bestowed by kings and nobles were abolished for the people. The lowest of the low-bred and the meanest of the mean people got elevated to high government positions, The nobility and grandees retired to secluded places on account of the elimination of their tribe..."<sup>83</sup> The author of *Haqiqat* writes (1784-85): "On attaining power the Sikhs repopulated the whole country. They dispersed the *ashraf* (the privileged feudal classes) and the *firqa-i-sipahi* (the soldier class represented by *mansabdars* and *faujdar*s), and conciliated the *rayyat* (the tillers of the soil) and the *ahil-i-hirfa* (the artisans and the craftsmen, i.e. the working



classes).<sup>84</sup> According to the same author, the “Guru sought to uplift the *qaum-i-arazil*, i.e. the down-trodden; and he was keen inflicting *kehft* (humiliation) on the *mardum-i-ayyan* (the privileged classes).<sup>85</sup> The author of *Asrari Samadi* states, though in hyperbolic style, that there was not a single *amir* (rich man or noble) in Hindustan whom Banda spared.<sup>86</sup> This statement tallies with that of Bhai Gurdas, the second, that the Khalsa scattered to the winds the *zamindars* (feudal chiefs) and the *amirs* (richmen and nobles).<sup>87</sup>

Even when feudalistic tendencies had set in the Missals, there were “at no stage of Sikh feudal history, a haughty noblesse as in Rajputana or medieval Europe. The Punjab system was not feudal in the European sense. The all-pervading sense of brotherhood, and super-added theocratic outlook would not, atleast in theory, allow distinctions of rank.”<sup>88</sup> Polier regarded the plebeian character of the Sikh agrarian set up so contagious, even during its post-revolutionary phase, that he suggested: “if they (Sikhs) are not attacked soon in their own proper provinces, it is much to be feared their tenets and manners will be adopted by all the Zamindars (here meaning the peasantry) of the *Subah of Delhi* and part of *Agra*.”<sup>89</sup>

Of course, here, as in all countries before the Industrial Revolution, the question of changing the feudal system and replacing it by the socialization of land, could not arise. Sooner or later, feudal tendencies were bound to arise. But, what is significant is that the Sikh militant movement in the beginning did make a move in the direction of nationalizing land; and its success in the reshuffling of property and inheritance in favour of *qaum-i-arazil* (the poor and the down-trodden) was no mean achievement in the times prior of the Industrial Revolution.

Tocqueville postulated, as another essential characteristic of revolution, that the standards of legitimacy may themselves be transformed by changes in the structure of society; in the system of property or inheritance. In other words there is a transition from a society of ascribed status to a new order based upon achievement and legal equality.<sup>90</sup> The Sikh Revolution conforms to this postulate as well. Indubhushan writes that, all authorities are agreed that the Sikh regime was attended with circumstances which inevitably led to tribal disintegration and the creation of new proprietary rights. Specially during the period of the Missals, which have been very aptly described as ‘fighting Corporations’, the very life of the community depended on military strength, and necessarily physical prowess counted for more than age, birth or other considerations.” In short, as Tupper says “The general result of Sikh rule was to destroy the old tenures of the country,”- and to “reduce squatters and inheritors to the same level.”<sup>91</sup>

## 2. Purposive and fixed Direction

The second feature of a revolution as formulated by Hagopian is that a revolution must have a purpose—a humanitarian purpose at that. The Sikh movement had the two-fold mission of creating an egalitarian society (Sikh Panth) and to bring about a plebeian political revolution. We need refer only to the ample evidence already given about the egalitarian character of the Panth, and about how proselytes from the Sudras and the untouchable castes shared political powers on an equal footing with other members of the Khalsa.

It is the goal of a movement which fixes its direction, and “it is the existence of direction...that makes revolution a political act and distinguishes it from a mere riot.”<sup>92</sup> The mere fact that the Sikh movement succeeded, in achieving both of its said objectives, as a result of a long period of development and a protracted armed struggle, is in itself a strong proof that it did not swerve from either its purpose or its direction. The Tat Khalsa did not hesitate to part company with Banda, its supreme leader at that crucial time in its history, when he showed an inclination towards deviating from the anti-caste and democratic principles of the Khalsa.<sup>93</sup> Although they were struggling for their very survival, the leaders of the Missals spurned Abdali’s

several offers of negotiated settlement, and preferred that the Khalsa should capture political power in its own right.<sup>94</sup> In fact, the Sikh militant movement, during its protracted armed struggle (from A.D. 1606 when Guru Hargobind for the first time unfurled the banner of revolt to A.D. 1764 when the Missals were established), had to face many ups and downs, but never once swerved from its egalitarian political aims.

The Sikh Revolution also fully meets another criteria about the purposive aspect of revolution laid down by Ellul and Calvert.<sup>95</sup> Its purpose was deliberately determined before-hand and given an institutional shape; and was not an incidental by product. It is shown in the way Guru Nanak, who laid down the foundation of the egalitarian Panth and the following nine Sikh Gurus worked, one after the other, over a period of 200 years to consolidate its egalitarian character and created and maintained a number of institutions for that purpose.<sup>96</sup> There is contemporary and near-contemporary testimony which testifies that the Khalsa was created for the specific purpose of fighting political tyranny and for capturing political power for the poor and plebeian classes.<sup>97</sup> “The Mohammadan holy army, the warlike organized Sikh, and the followers of Cromwell represent a revolutionary type.”<sup>98</sup>

Hannah Ardent has pointed out yet another significant trait of revolution. It is the only political event that confronts directly and inescapably with the problem of a beginning-”<sup>99</sup> “It has nothing to do with reform..... It is fresh start from zero..... It invariably comes down to establishing a beginning..... After that everything assumes a new aspect. Whenever, this laying of the first stone occurs, there is revolution. In the eyes of those who make it, it is a completely new story. A story that has not been told before.”<sup>100</sup>

The founding of the Sikh Panth was a complete negation of the caste ideology and the caste society. The establishment of the caste-less Sikh Panth opened a new chapter in the Indian Society. Unlike the Lingayats, the chaitanyaites, the Radical Bhaktas and others, the Sikh movement had nothing to do with reform. The Sikh Panth marked a clear break from the caste society and the caste system.<sup>101</sup>

Similarly, far from bringing about a plebeian political revolution, its very concept was abhorrent both to the Hindu Caste society and the foreign dominated Indian feudal Muslim polity. The Sikh movement was not only a fresh start from zero, it had to overcome great resistance from these negative forces. Upanayna ceremony was made absolutely obligatory for the first three castes. Unless performed by the prescribed age, the Hindu individual lost his caste. Thus, in addition to the right by birth, initiation by this ceremony, called rebirth or second birth, was the door by which one entered the Aryan family..... The *Davijya* or the twice-born. The baptism ceremony of the Khalsa was also called rebirth. But it was a rebirth not into the Aryan caste society but into the egalitarian Khalsa society. It was rebirth because it erased the proselytes previous religious beliefs (*Dharm Nash*); his lineage by birth, i.e. caste (*Kul Nash*); and any stigmas attached to him on account of taboos associated with occupations, notions, of purity and impurity, or other prejudices (*Karm Nash, Bharam Nash*); and made him a free and an equal human being.<sup>102</sup>

In fact, the creation of the Khalsa marked, like a water-sheds a break of the Sikh Panth with the caste society,<sup>103</sup> and this break with the- past was not accidental. Guru Gobind Singh himself made, as recorded by the Mughal Governments official news reporter, a public declaration of this new beginning.<sup>104</sup>

An interesting indication of a revolutions break with the past is the revolutionary mania for renaming persons, etc.<sup>105</sup> The English confined their efforts largely to the names of persons;

the. Puritans of course drew chiefly from, the Bible and from evangelical abstractions..... Faith, Prudence, charity, and so on. The French drew from the virtuous, days of Roman republicanism, from the abstractions of the Enlightenment, and from their own leaders and martyrs. One faithful Jacobin had his child republically baptized *Libre Constitution Letüre*. Corrupt street names were also changed. In the conventional greeting of ones fellows, *mansieur* became *citoyen*. The Russians, in addition to their fondness for personal *noms de guerre*, have been particularly addicted to changing place names.<sup>106</sup>

In this respect, too, the Sikh Revolution did not lag behind. On getting baptized, every male member of the Khalsa became a *Singh* (a lion) and every female member a *Kaur* (a lioness). The conventional Hindu greetings were replaced by “Wahiguru jee ka Khalsa; Wahiguru jee kee Fatch (Khalsa belongs to God and the victory is also His). “The arrival of one Sikh was announced as the advent of a host of one lakh and a quarter; five Sikhs declared themselves as an army of five lakhs; death was termed an expedition of the Sikh to the next world.<sup>107</sup>

#### 4. Political and Violent

The third feature of Hagopian’s formulation is that revolutions are political and violent. The political and violent character of the sikh Revolution and its implications are obvious. Politically, the militant Sikh movement resulted in the overthrow of Mughal authority in Northern India and the establishment of the Sikh rule over an area roughly equal to that of France. More than that, in Gupta’s words, “We now close the narrative of the Sikhs, who placed themselves at the head of the nation, who showed themselves as interpreters of the rights of the people, who maintained the struggle between good and evil, between the sovereign will of the people and the divine rights of kings, and the opposition of liberty to despotism; who avenged the insults, the outrages and slavery of many generations past; 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>108</sup>

As regards violence, we need only emphasize that it was not incidental or spontaneous; it was a projection of the Sikh view of life and was yoked to achieving revolutionary, ethical ends. Sikhism believes in resisting evil, if necessary by resort to Violent means. One great ideological hurdle in the revolutionary path, on which the Sikh Gurus wanted to lead their followers, was the odium attached to the use of force even for just social and religious purposes. Brahmanism did sanction the use of force for upholding the caste order but not for use against it. The primary duty of the Kshatryas was to fight, and one of the primary obligations of kings was to preserve the *Varna Ashrama Dharma* (the caste order) by all means at their disposal. But, it was made sinful for the lower castes to take up arms against the ruling castes. Jainism and Buddhism went a step further. They eschewed the use of force for any purpose whatsoever. The cumulative result of all this was that resort to arms came to be regarded as a highly irreligious act in India.

The Gurus deliberately rejected the doctrine of *ahimsa* as a part of their revolutionary ideology and plan. Guru Nanak ridiculed the fallacy of those who make a fetish of the question of eating meat, but have no scruples in devouring (exploiting) men.<sup>109</sup> He himself cooked meat at Kurukshetra,<sup>110</sup> and meat was served in the Langar of the subsequent Gurus.<sup>111</sup> Guru Gobind Singh designates God as “the protector of the weak” and “the destroyer of the tyrants.”<sup>112</sup> He wrote to Aurangzeb that it was lawful to take up arms for the redress of wrongs when all other peaceful avenues had been exhausted.<sup>113</sup> The Khalsa was created for the very purpose of destroying the tyrant and for bringing about a plebeian political revolution.<sup>114</sup> “Khalsa is one who fights in the front line..... Khalsa is one who protects the poor..... Khalsa is one who crushes the tyrant (*dushat*).”<sup>115</sup> It was ordered that, “You (the Sikhs) should now wear weapons,

and worship iron and love it because this iron will lead you to loves: and-high position.”<sup>116</sup> In fact, the worship of weapons became a cult with a section of the Khalsa, particularly with the Nihangs, and a voluminous literature took shape to propagate this cult.<sup>117</sup>

Violent means are an almost indispensable ingredient of revolutions and a part of many revolts and armed insurrections as well. What distinguishes the two categories is that in the former case these means are related to pre-conceived high stakes, while in the latter category, violence is either incidental or it is related to a low level of ideology. Without being linked to a high ideological purpose, violence easily degenerates into oppression and tyranny. The obligation to bear arms by the Khalsa was specifically harnessed to accomplish a revolutionary as well as an ethical purpose. The regularity with which the bearing of arms is bracketed with the maintenance of ethical standards in Sikh literature is remarkable. It was a logical corollary of the twin objectives of the Sikh movement; which aimed at raising man above his ego-centeredness and thus produce an ideal man, and, at the same time, it wanted to change the social and political environment which hindered such a development.

“Khalsa is one who does not speak ill of others;  
Khalsa is- one who fights in the front ranks;  
Khalsa is One who conquers the five evils;  
Khalsa is one who destroys doubt;  
Khalsa is one who gives up ego;  
Khalsa is one who keeps away from women, not his wife;  
Khalsa is one who looks upon all his own;  
Khalsa is one who attunes himself with God.”<sup>118</sup>  
“They (the Singhs) would destroy the (established) rule, and establish their own rule everywhere...  
Khalsa would become the image of God, with His own attributes.”<sup>119</sup>

“Khalsa is the army of God.”<sup>120</sup> The Singhs were to be saints and soldiers in one, i. e. what a writer has aptly described, “Saint-soldiers”. Many a time they risked battle with Muslim invaders to liberate Hindu women and prisoners, and at one time marched all the way from *majha* (central Punjab) to beyond Jamuna river, a distance of over two hundred miles, just to rescue a Brahmin woman who had been forcibly seized by a Muslim Syyed.<sup>121</sup>

This distinct emphasis on the amalgamation of violent means with ethical principles has two clear implications. The Sikh militancy was neither incidental nor aimless. It was married to humanitarian ideals; hence it was revolutionary and not a revolt. Further, such a rare combination of revolutionary goals and revolutionary ethical means could not be the product of a casual get-together of casual historical factors. It was born of a deep philosophy of life, and engineered by master-minds.

#### 4. Idealistic

The Guru declared that “There is one Father and we are His children.”<sup>122</sup> Let all be called high, to me no one appears low. One pattern has fashioned all vessels and one light pervades the whole universe.”<sup>123</sup> “The real Yoga lies in treating alike all beings.”<sup>124</sup> This philosophy of life was the fountain-head of the egalitarian Sikh Panth; and the plebeian Sikh Revolution was just its projection on the political plane, because Sikhism took a comprehensive and integrated view of religion.

We have very briefly touched on this aspect of Sikh philosophy in order to show that it supports Camus’s view that 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 an individual experience to an idea.”<sup>125</sup> The Sikh Revolution began not only with an idea, but with a deep religious conviction and faith about human equality. It was based on a set of principles involving belief in the nature and destiny of man. It was a social and political revolution because the Sikh philosophy and faith translated itself by actually changing the old social and political order based on human inequality and injustice.

The ideological basis of the Sikh Revolution meets another stipulation made, regarding the characteristics of revolutionary ideology, by Tocqueville, Hagopian and some other writers. Tocqueville, as already seen, has expressed the view that however intense might be the passions when these are joined only to self interest, their effect will be limited unless the cause is made legitimate by joining it to some cause that serves all mankind.<sup>126</sup> Hagopian also holds that the major revolutions tend to develop what we might call “world-revolutionary” tendencies.<sup>127</sup> This tendency serves to differentiate world-revolutions not only from revolts but also from regional and national revolutions, it is not that “world-revolutions”, spread simultaneously over the whole globe, or people from different countries take part in it simultaneously. These are also limited to regions at a time and are also carried out by some regional Component. What really distinguishes “world-revolutions” from purely regional and national revolutions is that these serve a cause common to whole mankind.

Sikhism is a universal religion as it places humanitarianism above sectarianism or regionalism. The first prophetic message of Guru Nanak was: “There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman.” The Guru thereby wanted to emphasize the eternal unity and brotherhood of man. For the Guru everybody was primarily a human being, and not a Hindu or a Musalman. It was Guru Gobind Singh, the founder of the Khalsa (a militant body devoted to the service of humanity), who specifically made it clear that “the temple and the mosque are the same; and the whole humanity is to be regarded as one.”<sup>128</sup> The doors of the Panth were open to men from all races and regions, and its mission was to bring about social and political equality-a-mission dear to all mankind.

When Guru Gobind Singh conferred leadership on the Khalsa, he ended his address with the expression:

*Wahi Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahi Guru ji Ki Fateh.*

It means, the Khalsa belongs to God, and so does victory belong to him. In this way, the revolutionary mission of the Khalsa, was regarded as Gods own mission. It was not only universals the destiny of the Khalsa (i.e. revolutionists) was hitched to ever abiding polar star.<sup>129</sup> The Khalsa is, as already seen, the army of God.<sup>130</sup>

## 5. Leadership

It is not only the ideology that imparts a sense of purpose and direction to a revolution; the role of leadership is no less important. As Hagopian was preoccupied with the study of Western revolutions, he assigns a pronounced role to the “elites” as leaders of revolutions. His elites are very closely associated with the “intelligentsia” class. In India, there was no “intelligentsia” class worth the name outside the Brahmin caste. As Max Weber has pointed out, in India Pariah intellectualism is non-existent.<sup>131</sup> The Sikh Gurus solved this vital questions of leadership in their I own way.

So long as the Sikh Gurus were there, it is they who determined the goals of the movement and guided its direction and organization. Theirs was the last word. But, in their own time, they made a consistent conscious effort to devolve the leadership on the Panth. The Sikh congregation was declared to be twenty one parts as against Guru being twenty parts (*Sangat iki*

*viswe, Guru weeh viswe*), Guru Gobind Singh devolved the leadership of the Khalsa on the five Beloved ones. Dr. Gokal Chand writes: "Of the five who offered their heads, one was a Khatri, all the rest being so-called Sudras. But the Guru called them Panj Pyaras, or the Beloved five, and baptised them after the manner he had introduced for initiation into his brotherhood. He enjoined the some duties upon them, gave the same privileges, and as a token of newly acquired brotherhood all of them dined together.

"The Guru's views of democratic equality were much more advanced than the mere equality among the followers could satisfy. In his system, there was no place even for the privileges of the chief or the leader. . .Therefore, when he had initiated his first five disciples, his Beloved Five, he was initiated by them in turn, taking the same vows as they had done, and claiming no higher privileges than those he allowed them."<sup>132</sup> This shows that the Guru regarded "them not only as his equals but made them his leaders. This was the utmost limit to which a religious head could conceive of or practice human equality.

Before passing away, Guru Gobind Singh formally conferred Guruship both on Guru Granth Sahib and the Khalsa.<sup>133</sup> In other words, he devolved the leadership on the Khalsa but made it subject to the ideology of Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh declared, that he would ever abide in the Khalsa.<sup>134</sup> This conviction became a live component of the Sikh faith. The Khalsa had deep faith that its decisions were the Gurus own decision. This faith percolated down to this level that wherever five Singhs assembled, the believed that the spirit of Guru Gobind Singh pervaded among them. It was this belief in the devolved leadership at the lowest level, as will be seen later, which animated the Sikhs and sustained them in the severest trial they had to undergo during their revolutionary struggle for sixty years. The guerrilla warfare covered half the period.

Besides being ideologically surcharged, the second vital qualification of a revolutionary leadership is that it must be totally devoted to the revolutionary cause. The Sikh history is full or glaring examples of the devotion exemplified by the Khalsa. Here, we limit ourselves to the conclusion arrived at by a Muslim historian who writes: "The pages of history shine with 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>135</sup>

Other important points raised regarding the issue of leadership-by Ellul and Hagopian are: "Collective spontaneity is not really capable to devising specific forms of revolutionary organization"; and, without effective leadership a revolutionary situation may remain an unrealised potential. Both these propositions become manifest if we just draw attention to the contrast presented by the Sikh movement as against two Indian spontaneous mass revolts, i.e. Satnami revolt and the Jat revolt led by Raja Ram. The Sikh movement had clear cut revolutionary aims; it was assiduously built by the Gurus over a long period through institutions such as sangat, pangat, the Panth and the Khalsa. Not only the Sikh. movement, endured but it carried on a bitter, prolonged armed struggle till it emerged victorious. The Jat and the Satnami revolts had no revolutionary stakes; both were built around anger and violent protest. The Jat revolted against the desecration of the Mathura temples by the Muslim rulers whereas the Satnami revolts arose out of a local dispute between a, Satnami cultivator and a foot-soldier. None of the two movements built any permanent organisation; both died after putting up a shortlived resistance; and both remained forever an unrealised potential. All this happened because the Sikh movement was a revolution while the other two-were just spontaneous revolts.

No movement, unless it was every inch a revolution, could meet-all the criteria laid down by political science, in the manner the Sikh Movement has done. While Islam brought about social equality on an extensive scale not matched by any other revolution, the Sikh movement is quality wise, probably, the biggest social revolution, considering the lowest level of human inequality and execrableness attached to the untouchables, who were incorporated; in the Khalsa brotherhood. Slaves in other countries were not religiously polluted or inherently degraded. The way the political power came to be shared by the commoners is also rarely met.

Our next step is to show that a religiously inspired Revolution compares favourably with one of the topmost secular revolutions.

#### Notes:

1. This item is dealt with at some length as the over-hauling of an established system of stratification is the hall-mark, of a revolution.
2. Ghurye, G.S.: *Caste and Race in India*, pp. 57-58, 90-91; Max Weber; *Religions of India*, pp. 60-61.
3. Ghurye, pp. 57-58, 90-91.
4. Senart, Emile: *Caste in India*, pp. 124-25.
5. Hutton, J. H.: *Caste in India*, p. 122.
6. Max Weber; *The Religion of India*, p. 122.
7. Max Weber: *The Religion of India*, p. 29.
8. Manu, viii, 413-14.
9. Dubois, Abbe: *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 49.
10. Guru Granth, p. 1128; English translation by Gopal Singh, iv, p. 1188.
11. Guru Granth, p. 15.
12. Bhai Gurdas, Var one, Pauris, 23, 25; Var. 23, Pauri, 20.
13. Ibid., Var 23, Pauri 19.
14. Ibid., Var 18, Pauri 14; Var 24, Pauri 4; Var 26, Pauri 18.
15. *Hukammamas*, ed. by Dr. Fauja Singh.
16. *Mehma Parkash*, ii, pp. 36, 37.
17. Bhangu, Rattan Singh: *Prachin Panth Parkash*, pp. 202, 216, 436.
18. Bhangu, pp. 261, 436.
19. Ibid., pp. 86, 212.
20. Ibid., p. 215.
21. "For more details see *The Sikh Revolution*, pp. 116-124.
22. Cited by Gurbax Singh: *Punjab History Conference*, (Dec. 15-16, 1973) Proceedings, pp. 55-56.
23. *The Siva-ul-Mutakberin*, trans. by John Briggs, p. 73.
24. Haqiqat: *Indian Historical Quarterly*, March 1942, Sup., p. 5.
25. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 41.
26. Celestin Bouglé.: *Essays on the casts System* (trans. by D.F. Peacock), p. 9.
27. Ibid., p.10; (Cf. Sherring: *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, iii, pp. 218, 235).
28. *Baudhayana*, i, x, 1906; E.R.E., Volt .vi, p. 915.
29. *Gautma*, XV, 24.
30. *Apastambo*, 11, 1, 2, 8, 9; Dutt, N.K.: *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, pp. 154-155.
31. Thurston: *Omens and Superstitions*, p.109.
32. Hutton, J.H.: *Caste in India*, pp. 133, 183, 138.
33. *Perspectives on Sikh Studies*, by the author, pp. 1-6.
34. It is an extensive subject to which justice cannot be done in a few pages. See *Perspectives*, II Chapter.

35. For details see *Perspectives*, III Chapter.
36. Hagopian, p. 87.
37. For details see *Perspectives*, pp. 43-45.
38. For details see *Perspectives*, pp. 45-52.
39. Hagopian, pp. 105-106.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
41. Max Weber: *The Religion of India*, p. 89.
42. Sykes, W.H.: *J.R.A.S.*, Vol. 6, No. xii, p. 323.
43. *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. iii, p. 46.
44. *Gurbilas Shevin Patsbahi* p. 143.
45. Koer Singh: *Gurbilas, Patsbahi Das*, p. 90.
46. Cunningham, J.D.: *History of the Sikhs*, p. 71.
47. Bhangu, pp. 50, 58, 104, 236, 244, 262, 368.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 469.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 368.
51. Irvine, W.: *Later Mughals*, pp. 94, 96, 98-99.
52. *Asrara-i-Samadi*, trans. in Punjabi, p. 7.
53. Elliot and Dowson: *The History of India as Told by its own Historians*, vii, pp. 419-20.
54. Bhangu, pp. 44, 215, 436.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
56. Bhangu, p. 469.
57. *Rabatname*, edited by Piara Singh Padam p. 92.
58. Irvine, W.: *Later Mughals*, i, pp. 98-99.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
60. Rose, H.A.: *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and N.W.F.P.*, i, p. 706.
61. When the Khalsa decided on territorial conquests; it was specifically laid down in the resolution that every one was free to conquer whatever territory one, liked and no one would wrest from another what he had already occupied (Bhangu; p. 399). And there is not the least hint that the Rangrettes were prevented by others of the Khalsa Dal from following this course.
62. Cunningham, p. 159.
63. Prinsep, p. 23; Wilson, J.R.A.S.(1846), p. 50, Malcolm, p. 222; Poller, Ganda Singh, *European Accounts of the Sikhs*, p. 197.
64. Khushwat Rai: *Tarikhi Sikhan*, pp. 63-64.
65. *Imadul-Saadat*, p. 71.
66. Forster, George: *Journey from Bengal to England*, i, p. 330.
67. *Early European Accounts*, p. 197.
68. Friedrich, p. 124; See also pp. 12, 90.
69. Hagopian, p. 83.
70. Wach, Joachim; *Sociology of Religion*, p. 214.
71. Hagopian, p. 81.
72. Ellul, pp. 17-22.
73. Alfred Mensal, "Revolution and Counter-revolution" in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, xiii, p. 371.
74. Hagopian, p. 83.
75. Hagopian, p. 84.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Ellul, p. 108, 21.
78. Friedrich, p. 15.
79. *Early European Accounts*, p. 197.



80. Prinsep, Henry T.: *Origin of the Such Power in the Punjab*, p. 23; Scott, G.B., *Religion and Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 40.
81. Ganda Singh: *Banda Singh Bahadur*, p. 242.
82. Punjab Census Report, 1868 (*The Punjab Past and Present*, Oct. 1974, p. 347).
83. *Tarikh Punjab Sikhian*, pp. 63-64. (For the original text see *The Sikh Revolution*, pp. 242-43).
84. Cited by Gurbax Singh: *Punjab History Conference*, (March 17-19, 1978) Proceedings pp. 89-90.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
86. *Asrara-i-Symadi*, trans. in Punjabi, p. 7.
87. Bhai Gurdas, Var 41; Macauliffe, Max Arthur: *The Such Religion*, V, p. 258.
88. Sinha, N.K.: *Rise of the Sikh Power*, p. 110.
89. *Early European Accounts*, p. 200.
90. Friedrich, p. 78, 81.
91. Tupper, *Punjab Customary Law*, p. 31, cited by Indubhushan Banerjee: *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. Two, pp. 37-38.
92. Peter Calvert: *A Study of Revolution*, p. 97.
93. Bhangu, p. 131; Cunningham, p. 79.
94. Gupta, Hari Ram: *History of the Sikhs*, i, pp. 143-264; *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, ii, p. 35; Griffin, pp. 24-25.
95. Ellul, pp. 43-44.
96. *Sikh Revolution*, by the author, pp. 103-110.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-142.
98. Wach, J.: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 313.
99. Hannah, Arendt: *On Revolution*, p. 35.
100. Michelet: *Historie de la Revolution* quoted by Ellul, p. 45.
101. *Perspectives on Sikh Studies*, by the auther, III Chapter.
102. Macauliff, Max Arthur: *The Slick Religion*, Vol. 5, pp. 93-96.
103. *Perspectives*, III Chapter.
104. Macauliffe, Vol. 5, pp. 94-96.
105. Brinton, p. 196.
106. Brinton, pp. 196-197.
107. Hari Ram Gupta: *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1, pp. 12-13.
108. Gupta, Hari Ram: *History of the Sikhs*, i, p. 282.
109. Guru Granth, trans. by Gopal Singh, pp. 1230-31.
110. *Janamsakhi*, Balewali, ed. by Surinder Singh Kohli, p. 277.
111. *Mehma Parkash*, ii, pp. 49, 64, 609.
112. *Jap*, Patshahi Das.
113. *Zafarnama*.
114. *Sri Gur Sobha*, p. 21; Koer Singh, pp. 130, 137.
115. *Rebatnama*, ed. Piara Singh, Padam, p. 47.
116. *Haqiqat I. H. Q.* March 1942, Sup., p. 5.
117. *Sarbloh Granth* and *Shaster Mala*. *Sarabloh Granth* alone comprises three volumes totalling 1665 pages.
118. Bhai Nand Lal: *Rebetnama*, p. 47.
119. Bhangu, p. 42.
120. *Sarabloh Granth*, part 3, p. 532.
121. Bhangu, pp. 445-447.
122. Guru Granth, p. 611.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 730.
125. Camus, p. 77.
126. *Qewres* (M) 11, ii, 349-350; *Ibid* (B), ix, 118 (Friedrich, p. 94).

127. Hagopian, p. 278.
128. *Macauliffe*, V, pp. 275-76.
129. S. R., p. 175.
130. *Sarb Lok Granth*, part 3, p. 532.
131. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 126-27.
132. Narang, Gokal Chand: *Transformation of Sikhism*, p. 81.
133. *Sri Guru Sobha*, p. 128.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
135. Latif, Syed Muhammad: *History of the Punjab*, p. 629.

## CHAPTER 4

### Comparison

In the preceding chapter, we have attempted to establish, within the framework of guidelines laid down by political science, that the Sikh movement was an egalitarian social revolution as well as a plebeian political revolution. We can now proceed to the next step of examining as to how for a revolution born of a purely religious inspiration compares with a secular revolution when measured by the scale of revolutionary intensity. As a test case, we are comparing the revolutionary concept of the Sikh Revolution with that of the French Revolution of 1789.<sup>1</sup> We have chosen the French Revolution for comparison as it is one of the topmost secular revolutions that have captured the imagination of history. All revolutions, in Hagopian estimation, hark back to the French Revolution. The French Revolution made world history, while the American Revolution was of local significance.<sup>2</sup> Rude contends that this French Revolution (1783-1815) “was more violent, more radical, mores democratic, and more protracted”; and “posed problems and aroused classes that other European revolutions (and the American, for that matter) left largely untouched.”<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, we follow the headings in the order it was done in the previous chapter, i.e. (1) Stratification, (2) Purposive and fixed direction, (3) Political and violent, (4) Ideological, (5) and Leadership.

#### 1. Stratification

It has been seen that the abolition or radical reconstruction of atleast one of the entrenched systems of stratification (based either on status, power or class, or on any combinations of them) is the very *raison d’etre* of a revolution. These systems of stratification tend to overlap one another, but we treat them here separately to make our point more pointed.

(a) Stratification based on status:

Revolutionary France had to face a class society based on feudal relations; whereas in India it is the caste system based on caste-status that governed all social, political and economic developments.<sup>4</sup> The social status in France was subject to change in the same manner as it was in other class-based feudal societies. The gain or loss in personal endowments, or in political and economic leverage, by individuals or groups, made a marked difference in the social status of those involved in the process. But caste-status is immutable.

Secondly, the caste system invested the lower castes, especially the Sudras, with a notion of impurity and pollution, which, in the case of the outcastes, took a form of execrability that contaminated the upper castes by bodily contact (i.e. the untouchables), or in some extreme cases, by mere sight (i.e. the unseeables). It has been seen that the Sudras were regarded as almost bestial rather than human.<sup>5</sup>

No other society outside India, including that of France, had either such wide status chasms among the different social strata of its society, or a comparable rigidity of such status gaps. Even Islam was lucky to have its teething troubles in a society very near primitive communism.<sup>6</sup> Hence, in abolishing the caste-status and the caste system among the Sikhs, the Sikh movement jumped over a gap of status stratification and its rigidity which was not done by any other revolution, including the French Revolution. It is this perspective which is very relevant to judging the specific instances given below; because, for comparing the revolutionary potential of movements, taking into consideration only the upper limits of progress reached by

them is not enough. What also matters are the lower points from which the movements started in reaching their upper limits.

Toynbee has written that, "Like all converts to Islam, all converts to Sikhism became one another's brothers and peers in virtue....."<sup>7</sup> These converts included the Rengrettas, drawn from the sweeper caste, "the lowest of low in Indian estimation."<sup>8</sup> In fact, scavengers, leather dressers and such like persons were very numerous among Banda's forces<sup>9</sup> as well as in the Khalsa of the later period.<sup>10</sup> And, the prevalence of the spirit of equality brotherhood and fraternization among the Khalsa is confirmed equally by both Sikh and non-Sikh historians.<sup>11</sup> Forester attests that, even in the post-revolutionary period of the Misals, "The Khalsa Siques, even of the lowest order, possess a haughtiness of deportment."<sup>12</sup> Haughtiness is not approved by the Sikh ideology, but the development of an exaggerated sense of self-respect is understandable-among the ranks who had tasted it after ages. In any case, it does indicate the wide distance the Sikh society had moved away from the arena of caste servility. Within the Khalsa ranks, the spirit of equality was a vital principle,<sup>13</sup> and a Brahmin had no higher claim to eminence than the lowest Sudra who used to sweep his house<sup>14</sup> Lepel Griffin expresses the opinion that, "The Sikh Theocracy had equality and fraternity for its foundations for more literally than has been the case with the modern republics of Europe and America."<sup>15</sup>

As against this, slavery in the French colonies was maintained by the Constituents and was abolished by the Jacobins only in 1794<sup>16</sup> to be restored again afterwards. Roberts writes that 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>17</sup> The slogan of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity had no doubt great inspirational value, but the content of equality was determined by class interests even at the height of the revolutionary period. So much so, that the *sans-cullotes*, the vanguard of the French Revolution, hesitated to take up the cause of journeymen, wage earners, house-servants and the unemployed.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the -French Revolution was more of a political revolution rather than a social revolution. "The *sans-cullotes* by no means envisaged the total overturning of the social order attributed to him by the most alarmed of the reactionaries."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, "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."<sup>20</sup> Although slavery came to be finally abolished in the U.S.A. (and it was a great achievement), the American Revolution, like the French Revolution, was dominated, even at its peak, by class interests and, in addition, by racial aversion. There was no social fraternization with the Negroes at any stage. In fact, they were, till very recent times, prohibited, or at least prevented, from using the same public amenities as are available to whitemen.<sup>21</sup> As the French and American revolutions were, even at the periods of their highest idealistic reach dominated by class interests, there was little of that egalitarian and fraternal integration which the Sikh revolutionaries acquired through their training in the Sikh egalitarian ideology by the Gurus themselves over a long period (i.e. from A.D. 1469 to 1708), and their relentless struggle for its fulfilment. The English had been more interested in 'equality', as the society remained unshaken. Despite attacks on the summit, the social base remained firm.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the American revolution as not concerned with overturning social or economic systems.<sup>23</sup>

Guru Nanak declared, "Why call her (woman) bad from whom are born Kings."<sup>24</sup> Guru Amar Das abolished the customs of Purdah and Satti;<sup>25</sup> and when he organised dioceses for the spread of the Sikh religion, women were made in charge of them along with men<sup>26</sup> Sikh women participated in many battles, even led the armies,<sup>27</sup> and took a leading part in the political and military activities of the Sikh Misals.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the French Revolution did not envisage female liberation. The formal suffrage was denied to them and to their successors until

1946.<sup>29</sup> “Women who attempted to find a place in the *sans-cullote* received short shrift.”<sup>30</sup> The Pope declared in the year 1879 that the Christian tradition prohibited the ordination of women as priests.<sup>31</sup> The attitude of Shariat towards womenfolk is well known. It specifically interdicted against entrusting government to women.<sup>32</sup>

Ibbeston writes that “In the Sikh tract, the political position of the Jat (who constitute majority of the Sikh population) was so high that he had no wish to be called Rajput; under the hills the status of the Rajput is so superior that the (non-Sikh) Jat has no hope of being called Rajput.”<sup>33</sup> This enhancement of the social status of the common peasantry (*en-bloc*), which regards itself as superior to the noblesse (The Rajput), is not met with, at least in the same measure, in the French Revolution. And, this was a permanent achievement of the Sikh Revolution as Ibbeston attested it as late as in 1883.

Finally, we would draw attention to the lower levels from which the metamorphosis in the social status of these categories was brought about. It has been seen in the last chapter that the fate of the untouchable was worse than that of the slaves. As regards women, Maitrayani Samhita (1, 10, 11, and iii-6, 3) identifies women with evil; and the Satpatha—Brahmana (xiv-1, 1. 31) declares that the women, the Sudra, the dog and the crow are falsehood. Even Digambra Jainism considered that women had to be reborn as men before they could attain their ultimate liberation; and Buddhism declared that a monk was not to lend a helping hand to a woman even if his own mother or wife was drowning.<sup>34</sup> Keith concludes, “Women in India has always suffered much from all religions, but by none has she been so thoroughly despised as by the Brahmins of the period of Brahmanas.”<sup>35</sup> It was in this background that the position of women was raised in the Sikh Panth.

The Caste system reduced gradually the Vis (the later day Vaishyas to which the peasantry belonged) to a derogatory social position very near the border line of the Sudras. Bhagavadgita (verse ix, 32) “puts women, Vaishyas, and Sudras in one and the same category of people to whom eligibility to abolition through *Bhakti* (devotion) is conceded by the Lord.”<sup>36</sup> Alberuni (C. 1030), whose direct experience of India was confined to the Lahore area (which later became the Sikh tract), took the Jats to be “Cattle owners, low Sudra people.”<sup>37</sup> The author of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* (C. 1655), in his account of Sikhism, describes the Jats as “The lowest caste of the Vaishyas”.<sup>38</sup> “In the old days of Rajput ascendancy, the Rajputs would not allow Jats to cover their heads with a turban” and continued to humiliate them even more abjectly till recent times during the British rule.<sup>39</sup> In the Muslim area of Western Punjab, the Jat “is naturally looked upon as of inferior race, and the position he occupies is very different from that which he holds in the centre and east of the Punjab.”<sup>40</sup>

In order to compare the revolutionary potential of revolutions, we repeat, it is not only the quality of the change but also the magnitude of the transformation these bring about that has to be weighed. From the social point of view, caste is division, hatred, jealousy and distrust between neighbours.<sup>41</sup> It is these disparate elements which were welded into a genuine, egalitarian Khalsa brotherhood. The French society was not torn by the kind of rigid hatred, division and hierarchy actualised by the caste system. Even so, the French revolutionaries did not realize the degree of equality and fraternization achieved by the Khalsa. There is no parallel to the social stigma attached to women, Sudras and the untouchables formalized by the caste ideology and institutionalised by the caste society. Yet, the Khalsa abolished untouchability, whereas the French Revolution did not abolish slavery, which should have been easier to do, comparatively speaking; the Sikh movement accorded equal status to women, but the *sans-cullote* did not admit their own women to their ranks on terms of equality; and the Sikh Revolution, raised permanently The social status of the common peasantry (Jats) *en-bloc* above that of the

noblesse (the Rajputs). In fact, all Singhs (including those drawn from the Sudras) came to be addressed as Sardars (lords) by non-Sikhs, and this continues to the present day. Such an elevation of the commoners and the downtrodden in social estimation, one does not come across, at least on such a mass scale, in the French Revolution. In short, whereas the French Revolution was a political revolution only, the Sikh revolution was an egalitarian social revolution as well.

(b) Stratification based on power:

A very prominent feature of the French Revolution was that, although the slogan of liberty, equality and fraternity' had tremendous ideological and emotional appeal, its dynamics never overstepped its class contradictions. The content of liberty and equality was determined by class limitations even at the height of revolutionary fervour. In other words, it never aimed at, or worked for, the total abolition of either social or political stratification.

The summoning of the Estates General in 1789 opened the Pandora's box, as it brought into the open the class conflicts of the three Estates in a manner which nobody had anticipated. The subsequent history of the French Revolution revolves around the-various combinations and permutations among these three Estates-that continued to take different forms in order to gain political leverage for safeguarding their respective class-interests. Interestingly, the King at one stage joined hands with the Third Estate as against his own nobility. By January 1789, it was no longer a constitutional contest between the King and the privileged classes, but "a war between the Third Estate and the other two orders."<sup>42</sup> However, the Third Estate of commoners was by no means a plebeian force, pure and simple. It embraced, at one end, millionaires who had far greater interests in common with the rich noblemen than with the poorest peasants at the other end.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, even the Third Estate struggled for capturing or sharing more political power for its own ends rather than for the total abolition of stratification based on power. This is clear from the manner in which the orders lower than the Third Estate were deliberately kept out of the picture.

When the King was persuaded by the Court party to agree to quash the Assembly's decree of 17<sup>th</sup> June and to overcome the Third Estate by a display of force, thousands of Parisians invaded the Courtyard of Chateau and compelled the King to yield. The above event was the first eye-opener as to what the direct intervention of the people could achieve. Its significance was not lost upon the bourgeois and middle classes, and henceforward, they made full use of popular pressure to serve their interests. But, the bourgeois and middle classes were equally determined not to let this geni get out of their control. The Paris electors formed a permanent committee to act as a provisional government of the city and determined to put a stop to the indiscriminate arming of the whole population. To them the bands of unemployed and homeless were as great a menace to the security and property of the citizens as the Court and privileged orders conspiring at Versailles."<sup>44</sup> It was with both these threats in mind that they now organise a citizens militia, or *garde nationale*, from which all vagrants and homeless persons (*gens sans aveu*), and even a large part of the settled wage-earners were specifically excluded: it was, as Barnave said, to be "*bonne bourgeoise*."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the fall of Bastille under the mass upsurge saved the National Assembly, and the second intervention of the people of Paris on 5<sup>th</sup> October consolidated the gains of the July revolution. Yet, "Once the insurrection had served its purpose, the Assembly took steps to curb the revolutionary energies of the Parisian *menu peuple* by imposing martial law, the death penalty for rebellion and-a censorship of the radical press."<sup>46</sup> "The Brissotin party, which had demagogically aroused the sections and *faubourgs* to demonstrate against the monarchy, drew back in support of the King; they had not bargained for a Republic that would be at the mercy of the votes and weapons of the hitherto passive citizens, or *sans-cuiotes*."<sup>47</sup> The Gironde succeeded in persuading the Assembly to disband the revolutionary

commune that had usurped authority on the eve of the August revolution.<sup>48</sup> The Jacobins, who came nearest to an-alliance with the common people, were also predominantly *bons bourgeois*.<sup>49</sup> When the *sans-culottes* reacted against the sharp rise in the prices of food and consumer goods and invaded the shops, the City Council, the Jacobin club and the parties in the Convention, all joined in denouncing this infringement of the sacred right of property.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the *sans-culottes* were politically silenced by purging and converting the commune into a Robespierist stronghold and by disbanding the Parisian *arme revolutionnaire*. Robespierre's own fall from power was in no small measure due to the wage-earner's hostility he had earned and the apathy of the *sans-culottes* whom he had alienated by his policies.<sup>51</sup> It goes without saying that the privileged two Estates could not be expected to commit *hari kari* by working towards the abolition of political hierarchy. The French National Assembly had no desire to destroy the monarchy. The same is true of the approach of the moderates in the English and American revolutions.<sup>52</sup>

There were no contradictions based on class/caste within the ranks of the Sikh revolutionaries, as there is not a single instance mentioned of this in history during the revolutionary period. Firstly, the Sikh revolutionaries were drawn overwhelmingly from the Sudras and the lower grade Vaishyas. In the backward of Indian economy of that period, petty village shopkeepers (Khatries and Aroras), the common peasantry (Jats), and the artisans and the menials (Sudras), all of them were so near the "Asiatic-poverty" line that the poverty they shared was a more prominent feature than any minor differences in income grades that might have existed among them. In any case, it was the caste that divided these categories rather the class.

"Secondly, the three Estates came together in the French Revolution by accident and not by design, for wresting political power, in the first instance, from the king. Later, when the revolution developed on the lines of the contest between the privileged two Estates and the Third Estate, the latter did not find it obligatory or necessary to unify itself on the basis of equality and fraternity, and, as seen above, it deliberately excluded the fourth Estate. It remained throughout a get together of heterogenous elements and interests. But, it was an indispensable prerequisite for the Sikh movement to ideologically weld the mutually hostile castes into the Khalsa brotherhood before it could think of launching its political struggle for plebeian ends. It was the egalitarian Sikh ideology alone which forged the hostile castes into a unified force, and it was the plebeian political mission, hammered into them by the Sikh thesis in the long Guru period; which inspired the Sudras and the low grade Vaishyas, who had never even aspired for political power, to revolutionary action. Thirdly, whereas the French Revolution found it necessary to disband the armed revolutionaries it was made incumbent upon every member of the Khalsa, including those drawn from the lowest castes, to bear arms. There is no further need to prove that the Sikh Revolution was motivated towards achieving political power for the plebeians. In other words, the Sikh Revolutionaries, unhampered as they were by inner class contradictions, and inspired as they were by the goal of improving the socio-political lot of the poor and the downtrodden, worked more single-mindedly, unlike their French counterparts, towards bringing about a genuine plebeian political revolution.

Above all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof. In the French Revolution, at no stage did the common peasants and the *sans-culottes*, much less social strata less than these, come anyway near to wielding political power directly or indirectly. Let alone the privileged two Estates, the urban bourgeoisie captured the great bulk of the seats among the deputies of the Third Estate that went to represent their order at Versailles in 1789. Some 25% were lawyers 5% were other professional men; 13% were industrialists, merchants and bankers; and at most 7 to 9% were agriculturists, and even of these only a handful were peasants.<sup>53</sup> The Assembly or National Convention, which met on the 20<sup>th</sup> Sept., 1792, socially "differed little from the members of the two preceding parliaments; there was a similar preponderance of former

officials, lawyers, merchants and businessmen as before, there were only two working men of their number.....”<sup>54</sup> The Jacobins were the most radical group within the Assemblies and the *sans-culottes* were in the van of revolutionary demonstrations and insurrections. Brinton, in his other book *The Jacobins: A Study in the New History*, comes to the conclusion, after examining tax rolls and other data, that “The Jacobin was neither a nobleman nor a beggar, but almost anything in between.”<sup>55</sup> “If anyone was bourgeois, Jacobins were”<sup>56</sup>, and “shopkeepers, master-craftsmen, not the lower order, were the backbone of the *sans-culottes*.”<sup>57</sup>

In the Sikh Revolution, “The lowest of low in Indian estimation”, were appointed as rulers by Banda<sup>58</sup> and in the post-revolutionary period of the Misals, it is the ordinary peasants, shepherds (Tarn Singh Gaiba)<sup>59</sup> village menials (carpenters), and distillers (Kalals, a despised Sudra caste) who became the leaders of the Misals. There was not one drawn from castes higher than these.<sup>60</sup> We have already referred to the testimony of contemporary Mohammadan historians whose burden is that “most of their exalted leaders are of low origin, such as carpenters, animal-skin treaters and Jats.”<sup>61</sup> As against this, “none of these (English, American and French) revolutions quite substituted a brand-new ruling class for the old one, atleast not unless one thinks of class without bothering about the human beings, who make up the class.....”<sup>62</sup> This analysis would be confirmed by a detailed study of the social origins of those who actually ran the government of England in 1670 and France in 1810.<sup>63</sup>

It is not only the social status of the leaders that marks the plebeian distribution of political power in the Sikh Revolution. What is even more remarkable was the extent of the socialization of political power, which came to be shared by the rank and file of the hitherto oppressed castes. To the testimony of Polier (1780) already given in this connections<sup>64</sup>, we would add that of another contemporary European, Forster, who gives a similar account of the Misal period “An equality of rank is maintained in their civil society, which no class of men, however, wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down. At the periods when the General Council of the nation were convened, which consisted of the army at large, every member had the privilege of delivering his opinion, and the majority, it is said, decided on the subject in debate.”<sup>65</sup> Again, “The civil and military government of the Siques, before a common interest had ceased to actuate its operations, was conducted by general and limited assemblies, which presided over the different departments of the state.”<sup>66</sup> Even when feudalistic tendencies had started setting in the Misal system, there were as already referred to, “at no stage of Sikh feudal history a haughty nobles, as in Rajputana or medieval European..... The Punjab system was not feudal in the European sense. The all pervading sense of brotherhood and a superadded Theocratic outlook, would not, at least in theory, allow distinction of rank.”<sup>67</sup> As the leaders of the Misals were more *de jure* rather than *de facto* chiefs, because their followers were mostly friends and volunteers who regarded themselves as their companions and partners.<sup>68</sup> Sikh society was very much circumspect in safeguarding its internal equality.<sup>69</sup>

Some scholars cannot set over their hunch of lumping together the revolutionary and post-revolutionary phases of a movement for a historical study thereof. Post-revolutionary periods of a movement should be compared with post-revolutionary periods of similar movement and not with revolutionary periods. The Khalsa movement did end in Missals and Ranjit Singh. But the fate of many other revolutions is not very much different. In fact, it has almost become a dictum of political science that revolutions are followed by counterrevolutions as their own shadows. “All (i.e. the English, French, and Russian revolutions) are begun in hope and moderation, all reach a crisis in the reign of terror, and all end in something like dictatorship..... Cromwell, Bonaparte, Stalin.”<sup>70</sup> Moreover, in assessing the post-revolutionary developments of the Sikh Revolution, one should not ignore that it was not born in a parliamentary democratic tradition like the one to which the European revolutions were heir to.



It was on this account that the Khalsa Missals, while groping to give their political egalitarianism an institutional form (e.g. Sarbat Khalsa) were unable to achieve something approaching a parliamentary form of government. However, there is no doubt that the “Sarbat Khalsa” was the type of those jerry-built organizations (e.g. sections or soviets) which Hagopian regards as closest to pure grassroots participatory democracy.<sup>71</sup> Also, the way the politically egalitarian spirit of Khalsa survived the vicissitudes of time is remarkable. Ranjit Singh, afraid of the Akalis, dared not to ascend a throne, and called his government as *Sarkari Khalsa jeo* (i.e. the Government of the Khalsa). After him, the real military power passed into the hands of elected Panches of the army. “The Akalis would represent the Fifth Monarchy men, stern and uncompromising, firmly believing in the righteousness of their cause, insisting on the right of equality for all, guided by the Panch or Committee of Five than by their nominal leaders, and watching those leaders with the jealous eyes lest they should assume absolute power.”<sup>72</sup>

The essence of stratification based on political power is not so much the form of government as the actual social location of power and its widespread diffusion. Judged by this test, there is no doubt that The French Revolution was no more than a political revolution, in which power passed into the hands of bourgeoisie, whereas the Sikh Revolution was a genuine plebeian political revolution.

(c) Stratification based on Economic Power:

Let us make it clear at the outset that, although the Sikh Revolution was undoubtedly a plebeian political revolution, it did not, and possibly could not, replace the feudal system by another economic system. This issue has already been touched upon briefly in the previous chapter (under subheading: *Stratification based on economic power*). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, land was the pivot of economy. As the socialization of land is a headache even for the communist regimes of the twentieth century, it is no surprise that attempts in this direction in the earlier periods remained either utopian or ended. Ultimately, sooner or later, in one or other form of feudalism. The “social issue of exploitation never played an important part in revolts prior to the eighteenth century.”<sup>73</sup> These limitations apply equally both to the French Revolution and the Sikh Revolution, and it is within the parameter of these limitations that we have to compare the achievements of the two.

One of the great achievements of the French Revolution was that it abolished the feudal regime by what has come to be known as August decrees. As the legislator was dominated by landlords, it was done in a qualified manner. “Specifically, it removed many grievances recorded in the *cahiers*. . . rights of hunting and game, for example, or those exacting payments based on old obligation to use the lord of the manors mill, or his baking-oven. It meant, also, the end of manorial courts and the rights of justice exercised some *seigneurs*, and the disappearance of the obligation of individuals to provide labour on the seigneur’s estate, or to pay *dim* which were in effect rent charges instead of it. Yet a distinction between obligations of this sort which were personal, in that they had fallen on an individual because he lived in a certain place, and those that had fallen on the property of which he was tenant, was fundamental to the decrees; *the first class was abolished outright, while the second was to be bought out.*”<sup>74</sup>

The one great occasion when the redistribution of land took place was when estates of the Church were nationalized and put up for public auction. But, it was the bourgeoisie, or the rich peasants, who benefited, for they alone could raise the bid. Later, “Some peasants (though a minority) had been able to benefit from the sale of *biens nationaux*, particularly after the law of June 1793 had made it possible, for a short while, for villages to band together to bid together for smaller lots.”<sup>75</sup> The majority of the aristocracy though shorn of their titles and privileges had retained their lands even at the height of the Jacobin Terror.”<sup>76</sup>

There is no doubt that the abolition of serfdom, of feudal services and privileges, and of the toll of feudal titles, rents and levies, etc. by the French Revolution ushered in a new era in the rural society of France, but, “the transfer of land between classes had been on a relatively modest scale; and it was the bourgeoisie rather than the peasantry that had reaped the main reward; the losers were the church rather than the nobility and those least favoured were the poorest peasants.”<sup>77</sup> Here and there, some peasants occupied feudal land on their own, sporadically. But it was not done as a matter of policy by the French Revolution. “If the three revolutionary assemblies were consistent about anything, it was that restraints, on the enjoyment and exploitation of property should be removed.”<sup>78</sup> “In their respect for the sanctity of property, the *sans-culottes* were at one with the members of the successive National Assemblies.”<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, the Khalsa, seized the feudal lands directly without paying heed to preceding rights and legalities, and it was the policy of the Khalsa to do it. It has to be recalled that the Khalsa under Banda abolished the Zamindari system and established peasant proprietorship in land; the set-up of levies and awards and the allowances accruing from estates bestowed by rings were abolished; the tribe of nobility and grandees was eliminated; the Sikh chieftains did not molest the mass of people; the Sikhs dispersed the *ashraf* and conciliated the *rayyat*; and “the general result of the Sikh rule was to destroy the old tenures of the country” and “reduce Squatters and inheritors to the same level.”<sup>80</sup> There are even faint indications that the Khalsa, at one stage, entertained the idea of nationalizing land in some form or other and holding it as a common trust.<sup>81</sup>

It has to be made clear that neither the French Revolution nor the Khalsa abolished the feudal system, as such. At best both established peasant proprietorship in land. Also, there was redistribution of land in both cases. But, the redistribution in the former case was hampered by constitutional limitations, whereas the Khalsa did it to its hearts content, unhampered by any legal niceties. These changes do not amount to substituting one system by another, but they are radical enough when compared to similar changes brought about by the French Revolution at comparable levels.

## 2. Purposive and Fixed Direction

As the changing of at least one of the existing systems of stratification is the *summum bonum* of a revolution, any purpose other than this becomes of secondary importance. Secondly, it is the goal of a revolutionary movement which fixes its direction, which alone makes revolution a political act and distinguishes it from a riot.<sup>82</sup> Thirdly, the goal must be a humanitarian one, because it provides legitimation to revolution. At the heart of every revolution must be a cause the justness of which is recognized by everybody.<sup>83</sup> The more humanitarian a cause, the more readily is its justness recognized. Fourthly, the goal or purpose of a revolution should be deliberately determined beforehand,<sup>84</sup> and given an institutional shape. True revolutions are made and do not just happen.

The French Revolution does not meet satisfactorily any of those criteria. On the eve of the revolution, there was no clear view of its aims in France. As it had no clearcut revolutionary purpose, it had consequently no fixed direction. “The patricians began the Revolution”, wrote Chateaubriand, “the plebeians finished it.”<sup>85</sup> What is even more erratic is that they did not finish in plebeian interests. Much less was it conceived<sup>86</sup> or planned as a plebeian revolution. It is true that Rousseau had advocated the idea of ‘The sovereignty of the people’ and the slogan of ‘liberty and equality’ had caught the imagination of the people at large. These ideas and concepts, no doubt, formed an ideological and emotive component of the French Revolution, but, these ideas and concepts, in their practical implications, mean different things to different

classes of people. In fact, none of the French political thinkers had shown any marked concern for the lower orders of the "Fourth Estate".<sup>87</sup> Rousseau would have nothing to do with the underprivileged natives of Geneva when they sought his aid.<sup>88</sup> In the light of his conduct in this matter, Rude is, perhaps, not wrong in his surmise that "had Rousseau lived, he might well have condemned the Parisian *sans-culottes* for the use made of his teachings as forthrightly as Luther had, 270 years earlier, condemned the German peasants."<sup>89</sup> The Estates General was summoned in, 1789 not for a reformist, much less for a revolutionary purpose, but for solving the fiscal crisis into which France had laded itself. And it was the aristocracy which forced the king to summon the Estates General: Without the problem of public finance, there would not have been a revolution.<sup>90</sup> Hence, the French Revolution was wayward in its course, not so much on account of the exterior opposition it had to encounter, but, because of its own internal weakness born out of the lack of a predetermined revolutionary purpose and direction. It was not made, it just happened.

The Sikh Revolution was both an egalitarian social revolution and a plebeian political revolution. Both these objectives were preconceived and pursued without swerving.

It is Guru Nanak, the founder Sikh Guru, who declared the caste ideology as perverse,<sup>91</sup> and aligned himself with the lowest of the low castes. It is again he who institutionalised his anti-caste ideology into *panjats* and *sangats*, which later on developed into the full fledged casteless Sikh Panth. From A.D. 1486 (when Guru Nanak started his mission) to 1764 (i.e. the end of the revolutionary period when Misals were established), not a single deviation from the Sikh egalitarian mission was tolerated.<sup>92</sup> Even otherwise the abolition of caste distinctions within the Sikh Panth is in itself a strong proof of the Sikh movement having a set purpose and a fixed direction. We have to recall Bogle's apophthegm that for Hindus patriotism consists in attachment to the caste system, and they achieve the paradox of being unable to unite except in the very culture pattern that divides them.<sup>93</sup> In Risley's somewhat graphic phrase, the removal of the caste system would be "more than a revolution; it would resemble the removal of some elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction." It is obvious that the greater is the resistance to be met with, the greater is the force required to overcome it. Thus, the Sikh Panth could come into existence and survive only by overcoming such a tremendous caste resistance. And, this could not be done without an unswerving attachment to, and pursuit in, the fulfilment of a predetermined egalitarian social mission.

To bring about a plebeian political revolution was no less difficult. The caste system had debarred the lower Vaisayas and the Sudras, who formed the backbone of Sikh militancy, from bearing arms or wielding political power. Moreover, the Khalsa was locked in a very bitter and protracted (from A.D. 1606 when Guru Hargobind unfurled the banner of revolt to 1764 when the Misals were formed) revolutionary struggle with the mightiest military empire in the world at that time. During this long period, which saw many ups and downs, the Sikh revolutionaries did not once compromise their plebeian political objective. When Guru Gobind Singh had lost all his army, he refused to come to terms with Aurangzeb, as suggested by some Sikhs; and the Misals though hard pressed, refused Abdali's several offers for a negotiated settlement<sup>94</sup> and fined Ala Singh for cooperating with him.<sup>95</sup> As for a pre-planned mission, it should suffice to indicate that plebeian political objective of the Khalsa was only a projection of the Sikh religious egalitarian ideology (pursued over a long period) on the political plane; that this ideology was institutionalised as the military organisation of the Khalsa; and that the Sikh plebeian political revolution was born of the Khalsa and it was not *vice versa*. In short, the Sikh Revolution, both social and political, by its very nature and circumstances had to be made and could not just happen.

### 3. Political and Violent

All social, political and economic systems get entrenched, in the last analysis on the basis of political and military sanctions; therefore, there cannot be even a lasting social revolution without a political revolution. Also, as political and military power is concentrated in the State, the primary concern of every revolution is the struggle for capturing the State. Both the French Revolution and the Sikh Revolution did change their respective existing political orders and did use violent means for that end. What distinguishes them, however, is the different revolutionary goals they pursued and accomplished, as well as, the political and military strategy they resorted to.

It has been seen that the French Revolution had no preconceived revolutionary political goals to begin with. It was all along a struggle for sharing political power between the King and the privileged classes in the first instance. Later on, it developed into a struggle for sharing political power between the privileged Estates and the Third Estates, which ended in a Bourgeois Republic. The Sikh militancy, on the other hand, started with the definite aim of capturing political power by the downtrodden masses and ended in a plebeian political revolution.<sup>96</sup> At no stage it was a struggle for sharing power with the foreign ruling classes, as there never was a scope for compromise between the *status-quo* represented by them and the plebeian aims of the Sikh movement. There is, thus, a wide gulf between the political anatomies of the two revolutions.

The French Revolution was not a peoples direct revolution in the sense that the insurrectionists never attempted, rather never conceived, to capture political power in their own hands. They looked to, or at best pressurized, the higher orders to concede their demands through constitutional channels, such as Estates General, Assembly or National Convention, etc. The Sikh revolutionaries, on the other hand, depended, for the achievement of their political goal, entirely upon direct militancy contest, and were not distracted by reformist or constitutional illusions. Guru Arjun had set the ball roiling by courting martyrdom in pursuance of an "open profession of his faith."<sup>97</sup> Guru Gobind Singh assigned such symbols to every member of the Khalsa that he became a living insignia, distinguishable from a distance, of the open revolution he launched. It was a direct confrontation between the Mughal state and the Khalsa. There were no illusions on either side. At least, the Sikhs knew that there could be no compromise between their revolution and the established order it wanted to overthrow.<sup>98</sup> The Khalsa, as already seen, spurned Abdali's offers of a compromise and fined Ala Singh for accepting honour from him.<sup>99</sup> The Rehatnamas are full of injunctions warning the Singhs not to have any contract with the Mughals (Turk) at any level whatsoever.<sup>100</sup> They are required to remain armed at all times and to be at guard against the enemy even when performing their natural functions.<sup>101</sup> This was how the Sikh Revolution was conceived as an armed Struggle *perpetuum*.

The character of the Sikh Revolution as a direct armed struggle is also confirmed by the high price in blood and sufferings it had to pay. In this regard the French Revolution stands no comparison. The fall of Bastille is remembered as a great event and turning point in the history of the French Revolution. Its garrison consists of only 80 superannuated soldiers, reinforced by 30 Swiss. The revolutionaries who stormed it suffered 98 casualties in killed and 73 wounded; whereas only one of the old soldiers was hit.<sup>102</sup> The demonstrators of Germinal dispersed without offering any resistance when Merline of Thionville appeared at the head of loyal troops.

The popular revolt of Prairial was one of the most stubborn resistance offered; but in the end the *faubourgs* surrendered without a shot when invested by troops. A military commission after the revolution tried 149 persons and sentenced 36 to death and 37 to prison and deportation. There were further proscriptions and arrests but no large scale executions of the

revolutionaries. “It was an important turning point. With the proscription and removal of its leaders (both actual and potential) the Parisian *sans-cullotes* ceased to exist as a political and military force.”<sup>103</sup> With that ceased to exist the spearhead of the French Revolution of 1783-1815. And a little later, Bonaparte’s famous ‘whiff of grapeshot’ fully established the reactionary forces in the saddle. It opened the way for the Bourgeois Republic itself to melt into monarchy via the Directorate and the Consulate.

The high price paid by the Sikh Revolution is an open book. “When a Sikh was brought before him (the governor of Lahore), his body was cut in his presence, and sometimes his brain was taken out by driving a nail (into his head).”<sup>104</sup> None of the Sikh revolutionaries including woman, abjured their faith, by which they could have saved their lives.<sup>105</sup> Three times a genocide of the Sikhs was ordered by the Mughal authorities,<sup>106</sup> Forester writes: “Such was the keen spirit that animated the persecution, such was the success of the exertions, that name of a Sique (Sikh) no longer existed in the Mughal dominion.”<sup>107</sup> The Sikh movement was virtually crushed a number of times,<sup>108</sup> but each time, like the proverbial phoenix, it rose from its ashes.

The contrast between the French Revolution and the Sikh Revolution in this respect is not a contrast between the courage of the French revolutionaries and that of the Khalsa. The difference is due to the clear perception of the revolutionary aims and the revolutionary means. The Khalsa had that perception whereas the *sans-cullotes* and the other revolutionary forces in the French Revolution lacked that. The difference is also due to the intensity with which the Khalsa leadership and the rank and file had committed themselves to the revolutionary cause. In fact, those alone could remain in the Khalsa who were prepared to sacrifice their lives; because it was an open revolution which admitted of no camouflage or retreat.

#### 4. Ideological

Ideals and emotions both play a vital role in revolutions. Ideology infuses a sense of purpose and direction, whereas the emotional part is the propelling force of a revolution, which in its turn is the locomotive force of history. “It is essentially strong emotions that produce revolutions..... It is enthusiasm that drives men’s minds off the beaten tracks and produces the great revolution both in thought and politics.”<sup>109</sup> However, non-revolutionary armed upheavals also do have some Sort of purpose and are usually emotionally surcharged. What distinguishes revolutionary ideology is that it must aim at abolishing atleast one of the systems of stratification and the emotions it arouses must be geared to that aim.

The French Revolution was a quest for ‘liberty and equality’, but it was never given a social content. Even in the political field, none of the French political thinkers, including Rousseau, had shown any marked concern for the ‘lower orders’ or the ‘Fourth Estate’.<sup>110</sup> At its best, it was a political (Bourgeois) revolution and not a social revolution. The Sikh ideology, on the other hand, aimed at total human freedom and equality in every respect. The founder Sikh Guru declared: “Religion consisteth not in mere words, he who looks upon all men as equals, is religious.”<sup>111</sup> The very basis of establishment of the Sikh Panth was abolition of status-consciousness in all its forms.<sup>112</sup> The goal of the Sikh Revolution of gaining political power for the plebeians was also born of a deep egalitarian, religious faith assiduously practised by the Sikhs under the guidance of the Gurus themselves for over two centuries. Unlike the French Revolution, there was neither any ambiguity about the Sikh plebeian political goal, nor was there any wavering of the Sikh militancy in its pursuit. This is one of the reasons why in the Sikh Revolution, the idea of ‘fraternity’ was given equal emphasis along with those of ‘liberty and equality’, and why it materialized into a revolution giving political power to the plebeians; whereas in the French Revolution, ‘liberty and equality’ contented itself with a Bourgeois Republican cloak.

“The French Revolution was an explosive release of energy.”<sup>113</sup> But, as the content of liberty and equality did not crystallize into a definite pattern (meaning different things to different orders, and hence did not infuse a set purpose and direction to the revolution), the emotions aroused by it also lacked a purpose and direction. “On the whole, the wage workers had no clear consciousness of class. If they had, it is very doubtful whether the Revolution of 1789 would have been possible probably the bourgeoisie, as happened later in Germany, would have shunned the Support of such formidable allies.”<sup>114</sup> As a contrast, it is doubtful whether the Sikh Revolution would have been possible, had not the Sikh revolutionaries been fired with the ideal of capturing the state by the plebeians themselves.<sup>115</sup> Bhangu records that in the darkest hour of the revolutionary guerrilla warfare, “When the Singhs had no resources; when they were naked, hungry and thirsty; when those who fell sick died for lack of medicine; they were sustained by the hope of Gurus blessings.”<sup>116</sup>

Two aspects of the equation between the ideological and emotional contents of a revolution, as these come to the surface in these two revolutions, are also revealing. ‘The explosive release of energy’ in the French Revolution manifested itself mainly in sporadic street demonstrations or insurrections; the Sikh Revolution on the other hand was a continuous grim struggle of ‘do or die’ spread over a number of decades. The *sans-cullotes* ceased to exist as a political and military force once their leaders were proscribed,<sup>117</sup> and Bonaparte wound up the French Revolution with a whiff of grapeshot; the leaderless Khalsa guerrillas carried on the struggle to the bitter end, even when thrice decimated, till they emerged victorious in their mission. One revolution was effervescent in nature; the other reflected tenacity of purpose based on a highly motivated rank and file.

### 5. Leadership

What has been discussed in the previous chapter under this subheading about the Sikh Revolutionary leadership need not be repeated. In contrast, the French Revolution was erratic in its course mainly because there was no committed leadership to give the great upsurge for ‘equality’ and ‘liberty’ a concrete content from the plebeian point of view, and to control and direct the course of the revolution towards that end. It has been seen that people of the Fourth Estate had not yet developed a sufficient consciousness of their own political interests and had not thrown up a leadership of its own alive to these interests. In fact, “the overwhelming majority of Frenchmen did not want a revolutionary change in the foundations of social life”, and were preoccupied with comparatively minor issues like wage hikes, control of prices of bread and consumer goods; the extension of franchise, etc.<sup>118</sup> We have already quoted Lifebevre’s assessment about the Fourth Estate. The plebeian part of the Third Estate was not in a much better position, as Rude comes to a similar conclusion. “Up to now (i.e. when the Parisians invaded the Courtyard of Chateau and compelled the King to yield) the revolutionary temper developing in France had been without effective leadership. With the latest news from Versailles (i.e. the King had yielded to popular pressure), however, the professional/commercial classes who had been prepared to await events and viewed the simmerings in the *fauburgs* and markets without sympathy, began to give direction to affairs without which the July revolution could hardly have taken place.”<sup>119</sup> Hence, the French revolutionary upsurge was rudderless at one juncture. Rather, it had at this stage, more of the characteristics of a spontaneous revolt than of a revolution. And, when it came to be effectively led, the leadership passed into the hands of bourgeoisie. The end result, a Bourgeois Republic, therefore, could be a foregone conclusion. At no stage of the French Revolution, the plebeian masses (the peasants sad workers, etc.) were any way near sharing political power, much: less wielding power in their own interests. Not once the acquisition of political power in their own hands was even made a primary issue.

Another glaring contrast with the French Revolution is that the thrust of the Gurus from the very beginning was to devolve the leadership of the movement on the *Sangat* (congregation), which was declared to be greater than the Guru.<sup>120</sup> But, when it came to maintaining the purity of the ideological line, the Gurus put their foot down whenever there were likelihoods of deviations from the ideological direction.<sup>121</sup> The same double-edged approach towards the question of leadership of the movement was maintained when the Sikh revolutionary militancy was institutionalised by the creation of the Khalsa. The ideology was to be supreme and the individuals realized their status according to the extent they imbibed this ideology and dedicated themselves towards its realization. Nobody could become a member of the Khalsa without being baptized; and no body could be baptized without binding himself, through solemnly taken vows, to the egalitarian ideals of the Khalsa.<sup>122</sup> The Khalsa was bound together only by commonly shared ideals and not by ethnic or other group considerations. As seen earlier, anybody, from whatever stock, who subscribed to these ideals and dedicated himself to the pursuit thereof, was freely admitted to its ranks. This marriage of ideological commitment with broadbased leadership helped the Khalsa in the prosecution of their revolutionary struggle. The (active, political phase of the Sikh Revolution was institutionalised by the creation of the Khalsa in A.D. 1699. From that year to 1764, when the Khalsa assumed sovereignty, is a period of continuous and intense armed struggle). The plebeian aspect of the French Revolution ended once the leaders of the *sans-cullotes* were proscribed; but the Khalsa guerrillas carried on a relentless struggle, almost single handed, without a centralized leadership or common centre until they were successful in achieving their goal.

In addition to being ideologically committed, all the members of the Khalsa Dal (the standing army of the Khalsa) were honorary, volunteers and not mercenaries. Whatever they brought from their homes, or acquired otherwise, they deposited in the common pool of the Dal.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, they were wholetime revolutionaries. No one could leave the Dal to visit his home without permission.<sup>124</sup> A sizeable section of the Dal, known as Nihangs or Shaheeds, dedicated their entire lives to the revolutionary cause.

## 6. Comment

It is to be emphasized that we have undertaken the comparison for a limited purpose and within defined parameters. No two revolutions can be compared in their totality simply because the historical, social, and political contexts in which they take place always vary. The French Revolution has captured the imagination of history in a dramatic manner which few other revolutions have done. It happened, so to say, on the world stage, in the full gaze of the Western world, which was in great ferment at that time on account of the stimulating ideas and sentiments of human dignity, human rights, human equality and human freedom, being widely disseminated on a scale not done earlier. In a way, the French Revolution just spearheaded this ferment, but the way it was done was spectacular. For instance, the French Republic in its decrees offered help to any people striving to achieve freedom from their rulers.<sup>125</sup> In short, the French Revolution was just a revolution, in which political power passed into the hand of bourgeoisie, but it was that revolution on the world stage, which has left a rich legacy lasting to the present day. As Brinton has put it, "The whole temper of the Western democracies is influenced, surely, by the fact that they were born of one kind of revolution, with one kind of ideal that is still best summarized as "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."<sup>126</sup> This is no mean tribute.

As against this, the Sikh Revolution was born in a caste-ridden society and under a fanatical foreign rule. The Sikh revolutionaries were nicknamed by Muslim historians as 'dogs', 'dregs of society', 'lowest of low-bred', 'meanest of the mean', and 'coarse-blanket wearer'. The caste society, also, could not be expected to value the egalitarianism of the Sikh movement. It is

significant that it was the early European visitors to India (like Malcom, Polier, and Forster), brought up in European culture, who were the first to recognize the egalitarian and the plebeian character of the Sikh movement. Even to-day the full historical significance of the egalitarian and plebeian character of the Sikh Revolution is not widely understood.

Footnotes:

1. It is said that comparisons are odious, but Brinton bases his *The Anatomy of Revolution* on the comparative study of four revolutions (the American, the English, the French and the Russian revolutions). And so it has been done by many other authors in order to support their view points. Far from denigrating any revolution, we hold them as all great; as all of them, each one in its own way, strive to further the common humanitarian cause. We are undertaking this comparison for a limited purpose.
2. Ellul, pp. 65-66.
3. Rude, George; *Revolutionary Europe*, p. 221.
4. S. R., II Chap.
5. Baudhayan, i, x, 1905; *E. R. E.*, Vol. VI, p. 915.
6. Nizami, Khalid Ahmad: *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, p. 15.
7. Toynbee, A. J.: *A Study of History*, Vol. viii, p. 591.
8. Irvine; pp. 98-99.
9. Ibid., pp. 94, 96, 98-99.
10. S. R., pp. 142-43; Irvin, i, pp. 83-85; Bhangu, pp; 202, 216, 435.
11. II Chapter, S. R., pp. 122-24.
12. Forester, George: *A Journey from Bengal to England*,. Vol. I, p. 329.
13. Malcoln, Brigadier General: *Asiatic Researches* (1812), p. 292.
14. Ibid., p. 219.
15. Griffin: *Ranjit Singh*, pp. 132-33.
16. Rude, George: *Revolutionary Europe*, p. 119.
17. Roberts, J. M.: *The French Revolution*, p. 76; regestave La Bon: *The Psychology of Revolution*, p. 19.
18. Ibid., p. 105.
19. Ibid., p. 56-57.
20. Rude, pp. 107-108.
21. Hutton, J. H.: *Caste in India*, p, 136.
22. Oeuvres, p. 52, referred to by Friedrich, p. 85.
23. Ibid., 111, i, 242; 11, ii, 334-5 (Friedrick, p. 86).
24. Macauliffe, M. A.: *The Sikh Religion*, i, p. 244.
25. Gupta, Hari Ram: *History of the Sikh Gurus*, i, p. 84.
26. *The Punjab Past and Present* (Oct. 1979), p. 468.
27. S. R., pp. 134-35; Gupta: *History of the Sikhs*, i, pp. 57, 60.
28. S. R., pp. 134-35.; Ibid, p. 81.
29. Roberts, p. 97.
30. Ibid., p. 57.
31. *Time* (Weekly magazine, Tokyo), Oct. 17, 1979, p. 21.
32. Nizami, Khalid Ahmad: *Some Aspects of Religions and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, p. 93.
33. Ibbetson, Sir Denzil: *Punjab Castes*, See. 437.
34. Wilson, H. H.: *J. R. A. S. (1856)*, pp. 254-255; Monier Williams: *J. R. A. S. (1886)*, pp. 129, 138.
35. Keitk, A. B.: *The Religion and Philosophy of Vedas and Upanishads*, Vol. 32, p. 475.



36. Bhartia Vidya Bhawan: *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, p. 514.
37. Irfan Habib: *Punjab Past and Present* (1976) p. 95; Rose, ii, p. 359.
38. Ibid., p. 97.
39. Ibbetson, Sir Denzil: *Punjab Castes*, sec. 440.
40. Ibbetson, Sec. 428.
41. Bougle, p. 10 (Cf. Sherring: *Hindu Tribes and Castes*, iii, pp. 218, 235).
42. Rude, p. 83.
43. Roberts, p. 10.
44. Rude, p. 95.
45. Ibid., p. 96.
46. Rude, p. 104.
47. Ibid., p. 130.
48. Ibid., p. 134.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 136.
51. Rude, pp. 155, 158, 159.
52. Edwards, pp., 226-128.
53. Rude, pp. 86-87.
54. Ibid., p. 132.
55. Brinton, pp. 105-106.
56. Roberts, p. 68.
57. Ibid., p. 101; Lefebvre, Georges: *The Coming of the French Revolution*, Trans. by R. R. Palmer, p. 45.
58. Irvine, *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. 63 (1894), p. 124.
59. Prinscp. Henry T. *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, p. 24.
60. Cunningham, p. 159.
61. Imadul-Saadat by Syed Ghulam Ali Khan, p. 71; See also II Chapter, sub-heading: '*Based on Power*'.
62. Brinton, p. 270.
63. Ibid.
64. III Chopter, Sub-heading: "Based on Power".
65. Forster, Vol. i, p. 329.
66. Ibid., pp. 330-31.
67. Sinha, N. K.: *Rise the Sikh Power*, p. 110.
68. Prinsep, p. 23; Wilso, I. R. A. S. (1846), p. 50; Cunningham, pp. 94-96' Malcolm, p. 222; Polier, *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, p. 197.
69. Forster, 1. p. 330.
70. Brinton, p. 24.
71. Hagopian, p. 66.
72. Scott, G. B. *Religion and Shost History of the Sikhs*, p. 35.
73. Ellul, pp. 17-22.
74. Roberts, pp. 26-27; Brinton, p. 269.
75. Rude, p. 287.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., pp. 287-88; Roberts, pp. 94-95.
78. Robert, p. 106.
79. Ibid., p. 105.
80. For details see the same sub-heading in the previous chapter.
81. Ibid.
82. Calvert, p. 97.
83. Boggs, James and Grace Lee: *Revolution and Evolution in die Twentieth Century*, p. 110.

84. Ellul, pp. 43-44.
85. Tocqueville, p. 5.
86. Ibid., p. 152.
87. Rude, p, 46.
88. Ibid., p. 36.
89. Rude, p. 36.
90. Roberts, p. 35; Lefebvre, p. 2.
91. Macauliffe, Max Arthur *The Sikh Religion*, i, p. 379.
92. II Chap.; sub-heading 'Purposive and Fixed Direction'.
93. Hutton, p. 124.
94. H. R. Gupta, *History of Sikhs*, Vol. i, pp. 143, 264; Griffen, pp. 24-25; *Calender of persian Correspondence*, ii, p. 35.
95. Ibid., p. 143.
96. Sikh Revolution Chapter xviii.
97. S. R., pp. 154-165.
98. Bhangu, p. 385.
99. Gupta, H. R.: *History of the Sikhs*, pp. 264, 143; Griffin, pp. 24-5; *Calender of Persian Correspondence*, ii, p. 35.
100. *Rebatnama*, pp. 45, 65, 72.
101. Ibid., p. 92.
102. Lefebvre, Georges: *The Coming, of the French Revolution*, pp. 114-115.
103. Rude, pp. 166-67.
104. Haqiqat, I. H. Q., March 1942, sup., p. 13.
105. Early European Accounts, p. 188; Griffin: *Ranjit Singh*, p. 71; Malcolm: *Asiatic Researches* (1812), p. 239.
106. Gupta Hari Ram: *History of the Sikhs*, ii, p. 39.
107. Forster, i, pp. 312-13; Gupta, Ibid., pp. 39-45.
108. Malcolm, p. 246; Forster, pp. 312-13, Gupta. Ibid., pp. 8-10, 27-32, 71-72, 82-83, 176-77; 261, Bhangu, pp. 232-35; Polier, *Punjab Past and Present*, Oct. 1970, p. 237; *Calender of Persian Correspondence*, ii. p. 351.
109. Tocqueville *Oeuvres*, 1, ii, 267, cited by Friedrich, p. 92.
110. Rude, p. 46.
111. Macauliffe, Max Arthur: *The Sikh Religion*, i, p. 60.
112. S.R., pp. 117-25.
113. Friedrich, pp. 85, 110.
114. Lefebvre, p. 99.
115. S.R., pp. 138-42.
116. Bhangu, pp. 304-305.
117. Rude, pp. 166-67.
118. Roberts, pp. 103-105.
119. Lefebvre, p. 99.
120. S.R., pp., p. 186.
121. Ibid., p. 186.
122. Hari Ram Gupta, *The Sikh Gurus*, Macauliffe, v, pp. 95-96.
123. Bhangu, pp. 261, 436.
124. S.R., pp. 178-79; Bhangu, p. 215.
125. Roberts, p. 225.
126. Brinton, p. 277.

## CHAPTER 5

### Religious Basis

We have, so far, covered two points. One, that the Sikh Revolution was both a social revolution and a political revolution. Second, it compares favourably, in its revolutionary potential, with one of the topmost secular revolutions in world history. What remains to complete our thesis is to confirm that it was the product a purely religious inspiration, and not of other factors common to the genesis of secular revolutions.

#### 1. Other Factors

Beside the role of ideology, the other determinant causes of revolutions, to which scholars of political science have attached great importance, are social and class conflicts, and the alienation of the intelligentsia.

Hagopian is supported by Ellul and Wach in that class struggle is a modern phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In India, in any case, it is caste relations that predominated over class interests. "Even if there are no antagonisms of economic interests a profound estrangement usually exists between the castes, and often deadly jealousy and hostility as well, because the castes are completely oriented towards social rank."<sup>2</sup> Class conflicts could lead to revolutions, because, due to the fluidity of class relations, there was the possibility, at least in theory, of the clash of class interests polarizing into hostile camps. But, the rigidity of caste relations did not permit such a polarization. Rather, the irony of it is that the lower castes cling to their caste obligations more steadily than the upper castes.<sup>3</sup> Revolutions seem more likely when social classes are fairly close together than when they are far apart. Untouchables very rarely revolt against a God-given aristocracy.<sup>4</sup>

The position as regards the alienation of the intelligentsia is equally clear. At no time in Indian history was there an intelligentsia class, independent of the ruling and priestly castes, which could be regarded as a separate political force to reckon with in the way it was in Europe. In India *pariah* intellectualism is non-existent.<sup>5</sup>

It has already been noted that revolutions are never spontaneous; they are made. Social and economic distress, however acute, does not by itself lead to a revolution, unless it is wedded to a revolutionary purpose and harnessed by a leadership committed to that purpose. "Since latent conflict produced by various orders of stratification will not automatically reach revolutionary proportions, important variables will include what makes conditions perceived as tolerable at one point as perceived intolerable at another."<sup>6</sup> It was the intelligentsia in Europe who were the first to perceive: that a particular *status quo* was unbearable and called for a drastic change; and it is they who spread their discontent to the masses, thus leading to a revolutionary situation. They also, determined the goal that a movement pursued and provided leadership to it, in order to make best of a revolutionary situation. Thus the role of the intelligentsia in Europe was crucial, and it is for this reason that Edwards has called "The transference of the allegiance of intelligentsia" as a master-symptom of a revolution.<sup>7</sup> Brinton, too, regards the desertion of the intellectuals as one of "the most reliable symptoms (of a revolution) one is likely to meet."<sup>8</sup> In Europe, the intellectuals had a long tradition, going back to the Greek Culture, of taking keen interest in the social and political welfare of the people. The publication of *Social Contract* helped in spreading the ideas of liberty and

equality which resulted in The French Revolution; and Berdyaev has traced various groups of Russian intelligentsia who became the seed bearers of the Communist Revolution.

“There was no such parallel in the whole of Asia before the impact of European civilization. “... there have been no revolutions in Asia and Africa until this century (i.e. the twentieth century)... Revolution has come to Asia because Europe has come to Asia...”<sup>9</sup> China witnessed civil wars, rebellious, secessions, and *Coup d’ etats*; but until the European revolution came, there had been no revolution China.<sup>10</sup> “In other words, the problem of rebellion only seems to assume a precise meaning within the confines of Western thought. It is possible to be even more explicit by saying, like Schler, that the spirit of rebellion finds few means of expression in societies where inequalities are very great (the Hindu caste system) or, again in those where there is absolute equality (certain primitive societies). The spirit of revolt can only exist in a society where a theoretic equality conceals great factual inequalities. The problem of revolt, therefore, has no meaning outside our accidental society.”<sup>11</sup> Hence the outstanding contribution of the Sikh religion and its revolution, which arose in an ancient and rigidly and religiously entrenched caste society. In fact, we believe that this revolution could only be brought about only by a new religious thesis which questioned the very basis of the religious sanctions given to the caste ideology. Of India, therefore, one need not even mention it. Excepting the Sikh movement, none of the avowedly anti-caste movements of the medieval period (including those of the Lingaysts, the Chaitanayaites, and the radical Bhakatas) probably even realized that the caste society was an integral part of the caste system; and, as such, a break-away from the caste society (i.e. the Hindu society) was an indispensable pre-requisite for getting rid of the caste system.<sup>12</sup> In any case, not one such movement ever followed a plan or a consistent course to cut itself away from the caste society. To attempt to bring about a plebeian political revolution was not even dreamt of.

One reason is obvious that there never developed in Asia an intelligentsia who would take an active, interest in the social and political welfare of the people in the manner the intellectuals in Europe did. For the same reasons, or for some other, there never existed a popular base or a movement for securing and consolidating democratic, political and civil rights. “It is indeed in the realm of European and especially Western European Christian culture that we find the strongest tradition of autonomy of the major institutions of the cultural; political and social orders...”<sup>13</sup> There is not even a hint in India of concepts and institutions such as *habeas corpus* in England, the American constitution of 1789, or the *Charte* of France. “In fact, for the Inca and the pariah the problem of revolt never arises; because it has been solved for them by tradition before they had time to raise it...the answer being that tradition is sacrosanct.”<sup>14</sup> The “*Karma*” doctrine “excluded for ever the rise of social criticism, of rationalistic speculation, and abstractions of natural law type, and hindered the development of any sort of idea of human rights.”<sup>15</sup>

“In India, the literate class was confined practically to the priestly circles... the Brahmins, and the Jam and Buddhist monks. Secondly, they focussed their attention almost wholly on theological issues. We do not come across their having shown much interest in the secular problems of the people, much less in those involving political struggle. There is not a single recorded line in the huge corpus of Brahmanical classical literature which unequivocally concedes human equality, as such, distinct from conceding religious plurality. Without unrestricted commensalism, no medieval free citizenry in Europe could have been possible. But, in India, restrictions on free commensalism between different castes is fundamental to the caste system.”<sup>16</sup>

We, therefore, should not try to judge Asia via Europe. The environmental factors which mould history are so different in the two cases, that any attempt to fit in Asian history in the framework of European political and social concepts and conditions would be highly incongruous. All the great leaders of Asia, Budha, Jesus and Muhammad, who made appreciable impact on the mass of the people, were prophets inspired by a religious revelation, and their followers, too, were sustained by a religious faith. For the genesis of the Sikh Movement, too, we have to look in this direction.

## 2. Beliefs and Faith

As already referred to briefly, Le Bon Gustave has shown 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>17</sup> “Beside the rational logic which conditions thought, and was formerly 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 impulse of our conduct.”<sup>18</sup>

The power of the French Revolution “did not reside in the principles which for that matter were anything but novel...which it sought to found. The people care very little for institutions and even less for doctrines. That the Revolution was potent indeed; that it made France accept the violence; the murders, the ruin and horror of a frightful civil war, that finally it defended itself victoriously against a Europe in arms, 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 tattered demoralized soldiers of the Convention. Like all apostles; they were ready to immolate themselves in 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.”<sup>19</sup>

“Rational logic can point to the abuses to be destroyed, but to move the multitude its hope must be awakened. This can only be effected by the action of the affective and mystic elements which give men 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 hand of ages and led to the worst excesses.”<sup>20</sup>

As there can be no revolution without involving the multitude, affective, mystic and collective logic applies to them all; although the form beliefs and faith assume may be different indifferent cases.

“A political or religious belief constitutes an act of faith elaborated in 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 the faith. The absurdity of his belief matters little, for him it is a burning reality.”<sup>21</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.”<sup>22</sup> Mohammed transformed the petty and impotent tribes of Arabia into a formidable nation. Not only did the Christian revolution transform manners, it also exercised, for a space of two thousand years, a preponderating influence over civilization.<sup>23</sup> This mystic aspect of all revolutions has escaped the majority of the historians.<sup>24</sup> Revolution cannot be clearly apprehended unless it is considered as the formation of a religious belief. They (beliefs) impose themselves on men apart from reason, and have the power to polarise men’s thoughts and feelings in one direction. Pure reason had never such a power, for men were never imposed by reason.<sup>25</sup> The religious form rapidly assumed by the revolution explains its power of expansion and persistence it possessed and has retained. Tocqueville wrote: “The French Revolution was a political revolution which operated in the manner of and assumed something of the aspect of a religious revolution.”<sup>26</sup>

“Among the most important factors of history one was preponderant.....the factor of beliefs.”<sup>27</sup> And, the most profound expression of faith is found in the certitude of a Prophetic experience.

### 3. Prophetic Religion

Max weber, who is rightly regarded as the father of Sociology of Religion, draws a clear distinction between Prophets, on one hand, and all other leaders of religion like reformers (‘renovators of religion’) and priests, on the other hand. The most essential characteristic of Prophethood is the “Call”, the “Message”, the “Mission”, or the “Mandate” which a prophet receives as revelation consequent of a direct communion with God or Divinity. “We shall understand ‘Prophet’ to mean a purely individual bearer of *Charisma*, who, by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.”<sup>28</sup> “For our purpose here, the personal call is the decisive, element distinguishing the prophet from the priest.....the prophets claim is based on personal revelation and *charisma*.”<sup>29</sup> “It is characteristic of the prophets that they do not receive their mission from any human agency.”<sup>30</sup> The prophet “is never to be found where the proclamation of a religious truth of salvation through personal revelation is lacking.”<sup>31</sup> “The consciousness of being the organ, instrument, or mouthpiece of the divine will is characteristic of the self interpretation of the prophet.”<sup>32</sup>

“The second characteristic of a prophet (founder of religion) is that his “message” is essential in that it establishes a religious ideal and a scale of values derived from his experience. It creates, apart from the effect of personal *charisma*, an objective centre of crystallization for a variety of sociological developments.”<sup>33</sup> Prophets are bearers of religious—ethical revelation.<sup>34</sup> “The moral, social and political Ideas of the prophet 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 civic and moral order which is meant to reflect the divine will.”<sup>35</sup> “They (prophets) were in each case, in their own way, deeply concerned with following out an experience which became decisive in their lives, and which determined their own attitude towards God, toward the world, and toward men. From the psychological and historical stand-point, the Jesus, who wandered about in Galilee, was a revolutionary, a reformer and a prophet.”<sup>36</sup>

Another very important feature of prophethood, relevant to our subject, is that the prophets feel impelled to fulfil the mandate they feel they are charged with by the Divinity. “The idea of a mission implies consciousness of its mandatory character. Jesus was conscious of being sent by the Father; Mohammad was the messenger of Allah.”<sup>37</sup> Whereas the life of the great leaders was

concentrated on the promulgation of their religious message, Mohammad set himself the task of establishing a concrete political and social order.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. Prophet Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak was a prophet, as he had no person as his Gurus and had a direct revelation from God; as he was charged with a mandatory mission; and as he was impelled by a compulsive urge to work ceaselessly for fulfilling his mandate.

Guru Nanak claims that “he saw his Lord (God) face to face.”<sup>39</sup> “Lalo, I convey the truth as I receive it as a revelation from the Master (God).”<sup>40</sup> It is recorded in the earliest Sikh tradition that Guru Nanak received his revelation at a particular moment of his life when he disappeared for three days at the bank of a rivulet named Baen.<sup>41</sup>

When he reappeared, the first words he uttered were “No Hindu, No Mussalman”<sup>42</sup>, i.e. he stood for (or he would work for) universal humanity and not for factions. This is the mandate Guru Nanak received as consequence of a direct revelation from God. The earliest Sikh tradition elaborates this point as follows: “Then people asked him, Nanak, earlier you were something else (i.e. Hindu), now you have become different. There is one path of the Hindus, and the other that of Mussalmans; which path do you follow? Then Baba Nanak said, “There is no Hindu no Mussalman; which of these paths can I follow? I follow God’s, path. God is neither Hindu nor Mussalman. I follow God’s right path.”<sup>43</sup>

Guru Nanak has himself elaborated the social and political Implications of his mandate as follows: “Call every one exalted; let no one appear two thee low.”<sup>44</sup> “We are all the children of one Father (God).”<sup>45</sup> “Religion consisteth not in mere words; he who looks upon all men as equal is religious.”<sup>46</sup> “O foolish man, don’t take pride in caste-status; This pride leads to many an evil.”<sup>47</sup> “According to the Hindus, foul, is the oblation of the chandal, and vein 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>48</sup> “There are lower castes among the low castes, and some absolutely low. Nanak seeketh their company; what hath he to do with the high ones? For, where the lowly are cared for, there is thine (Gods) Benediction and Grace”<sup>49</sup>

These are the humanitarian values on which the egalitarian Sikh Panth is founded. It is clear from the wordings of the quotations itself that these values flow from Guru Nanak’s direct experience of the Divinity. Men are equal because all of them are the children of one father; pride of caste is bad because it deprives one of the flavour of God: and Guru Nanak seeketh the company of “the lowest of the low” because thereby the Grace of God is bestowed.

Another important feature of prophethood, we noted was that, “The prophet reacts vigorously against all disturbance or perversion of the civic and moral order which is meant to reflect the Divine will.”<sup>50</sup> So did Guru Nanak:—

“They who have strings on their necks eat men, recite the Muhammeden prayers; and use knives to cut men’s throats.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, he condemns both Hindu and Muslim exploiters. Again, “Riches cannot be gathered without resort to sinful mean.”<sup>52</sup> In this way he denounces the institution of property. About the rulers and the administration of his times, he says: “Greed and sin are the rulers and the village accountant; falsehood is the master of the mint. Lust, his minister, summoneth and examineth men, and sitteth on judgement on them. The subjects are blind and

without divine knowledge, and satisfy the judges greed with bribes.”<sup>53</sup> “The kings are like leopards. The courtiers like dogs; For they awaken those that sleep in Gods peace. The kings servants tear (the docile subjects) with their nails; sand, like curs, lick up all the blood they spill. But, hark, where men are to be judged (at the Lords court); Their noses will be chopped off, for God will trust them not.”<sup>54</sup>

How vigorous is this a denunciation of the social and Political order of his times!

The third important feature of prophethood we noted, is that the prophets feel an irresistible urge to fulfil their mission because of its mandatory character. When Guru Nanak received his mandate, he left his hearth and home, and, taking a low-caste Muslim as his companion, he started on his life-long career of spreading his message. For this purpose, he travelled far and wide, from Bangla Desh in the East to Baghdad in the West, and from Tibet in the North to Sri Lanka in the South. The impact Guru Nanak’s universal humanitarianism made on the Muslim mind is judged best by the tribute Sir Muhammed Iqbal.....the founder-poet of Pakistan.....pays to him—

The nation paid no heed to the message of Gautam, and did not recognize the value of its  
single-piece diamond;  
Ah! the unlucky ones remained strangers to the true call,  
The tree is unaware of the sweetness of the fruit it bears  
He revealed the mystery of life,  
But, India was too absorbed in the pride of its speculative philosophy;  
It was not a society whom the light of truth could illuminate,  
God’s mercy rained, but the land was unprepared;  
Ah! for the Sudra, Hindustan is a land of sorrow,  
The heart of this country is devoid of human sympathy;  
The Brahmin is even now intoxicated with the wine of his injunction,  
The flame of Gautam is alight in alien societies;  
The light came to this house of idols after a long time,  
The house of Azar was illuminated by the holy light of Abraham;  
Then, originated in the Punjab a call for the unity of God (Tauheed),  
A man of perfection woke Hind from its world of dreams.<sup>55</sup>

## 6. Transition to Militancy

It has to be repeated that a revolution aims at nothing less than the abolition of a system of stratification; and any entrenched stratification system might be amenable to marginal reform but would not surrender without a struggle when its very existence is at stake. That is why recourse to violence is essential rather than accidental to a revolution.<sup>56</sup> In this regard, we quote watch at some length.

An epoch in religious history is marked by the rise and growth of the founded religions. Although the traditional cults can boast of charismatic religious leaders too (American, Indian and African religions), their prophets; revolutionary ideas and activities notwithstanding, tend on the whole to maintain the spirit and often times, the forms of tribal or national faith. As a result no opposition is created in principle to the established powers which have been sanctioned by tradition. The founders, on the other hand, were forced to begin completely *de nouveau*, guided by their creative religious experience. They had to rethink the very principles to which they and their followers were to be oriented.<sup>57</sup> Another view considers the state to be the incarnation and embodiment of evil and



is therefore prepared actively to oppose it. Extremists are prepared to shed blood if necessary to destroy the authority which interferes with the newly gained religious conviction, whether by threatening freedom of worship, or by insistence upon an official cult which monopolize the religious scene, or by other demands.”<sup>58</sup> Calvinism made it a religious obligation to defend the faith against tyranny by the use of force. The obligation to bring about a revolution on behalf of the faith was taught by the religions, that engaged in wars of missionary enterprise, like the sects of Madhists and the Sikhs.<sup>59</sup>

Guru Nanak condemned the caste system, the rulers and the administration of his times, because these could not be reconciled with the humanitarian mandate he had received. His successors continued to extend the founders mission. But, when Jahangir decided to stop the Sikh faith (what he called ‘*dukan-e-batil*’ i.e. false shop), Guru Arjan accepted martyrdom because: “I bear all this torture to set an example. The true test of faith is the hour of misery.”<sup>60</sup> As Goodman has put it; “They (saints) would disobey and rebel whenever it was possible, for it was “their bounden duty to maintain the cause of God with all (their) might.”<sup>61</sup>

It was this idea of defending the cause of God with all might that mediates the transition from resistance to revolution in the, history; of political thought.<sup>62</sup> Guru Arjan’s decision to defend the faith by accepting torture and martyrdom was a turning point in Sikh history; which laid the foundation of Sikh militancy. “The Chaise (Khalsa) of the Sikh Gurus owes its existence to the protests of Nanak.”<sup>63</sup> Had Guru Arjan submitted, or become indifferent, to the prevailing unjust, social and political order, the Sikh movement would probably have met the same fate as that of (the Radical Bhaktas or of that of the schismatic Sikh sects like Udasis and Prithias, etc. Guru Arjans decision to accept martyrdom was deliberate and impersonal. He could escape death by letting his followers pay the fine; but he made them desist by threatening to excommunicate them if they did so. It was impersonal, because he was duty bound to follow the prophetic mandate Guru Nanak had received and charged his successor with.

## 7. Prophet Guru Gobind Singh

Guru Hargobind was the first Sikh Guru to raise the banner of armed Sikh revolt against the Mughal empire, but it was Guru Gobind Singh, the last Guru, who created the Khalsa to oppose the state tyranny. As our main purpose in this chapter is to show that the Sikh militancy was the product of the religious experience of the Sikh Gurus, we would confine ourselves to pointing to, without entering into details,<sup>64</sup> some salient features of Sikh militarisation:

(a) Guru Gobind Singh had direct revelation from God in pursuance of which he created the Khalsa. In his own words:—

“As God spoke to me I speak,  
The divine Guru sent me for religions sake;  
On this account I have come to the word—  
Extend the faith everywhere;  
Seize and destroy the evil and the sinful,  
Understand this ye holy men, in your souls.  
I assumed birth for the purpose  
Of spreading the faith, saving the saints,  
And extirpating all tyrants.....”<sup>65</sup>

So, the revolutionary mission Guru Gobind Singh followed was Gods own mandate.

(b) Guru Gobind Singh describes Gods attributes as: “Thou bestowest happiness on the good;..... Thou scatterest sinners.”<sup>66</sup> “God ever cherisheth the poor, saveth saints, and destroyeth enemies.”<sup>67</sup>

Again, it is in pursuance of Gods attributes that Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa in order to fight tyranny (as God “scatterest sinners”), and to capture political power for the plebeian masses (as God “cherishes the poor”).

(c) Guru Gobind has made it clear, in his own words, that he was but continuing the mission of the previous Gurus.<sup>68</sup> In other words, there is no dichotomy between the mandates received, by Guru Nanak and. Guru Gobind Singh. It is recorded in Guru Granth Sahib that Guru Nanak’s spirit (*Jot*) permeated his successor, Guru Angad, and that Guru Angad’s spirit permeated his successor, Guru Amar Das, and so on.<sup>69</sup> Bhai Gurdas has elaborated the same theme in his Vars.<sup>70</sup> Guru Gobind Singh told the Khalsa at the time-of his passing away: “It was prophetically ordained that there should be only ten Gurus; I am the last. Henceforth, wherever five of the Khalsa meet, there will my spirit, that of all the Gurus, be with them.”<sup>71</sup> This became a cardinal belief of the Khalsa which became the source Of that mysterious tie of the Khalsa, which was one of its prominent features. What is to the point for us here is that this was a purely religious faith, which greatly contributed, besides the ideology, to the continuity of then Sikh mission.

(d) When Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa, he ended his address with the slogan:

“Wahi Guru ji ka Khalsa  
Wahi Guru ji ki Fateh.”

It means, “Khalsa belongs to God, and so does Victory belong to Him.” This slogan became the motto of the Khalsa for all time to come. It is repeated on all occasions and ceremonies, especially at the time of baptism ceremony, and as a form of daily greeting among the Sikhs.

This motto has a number of implications. It generated a spirit of everlasting optimism and humility; optimism because the egalitarian and the plebeian cause of the Khalsa, being God’s own cause, was bound to succeed, sooner or later; and humility because all victory of the Khalsa was Gods victory and by His Grace. It involved no personal credit for the participant. Further, the Khalsa, being Gods army, were committed to the Gods revolutionary cause for all time. In other words, the commitment of the Khalsa was, in theory atleast, universal in character and not bound down to a particular era of history.

(e) The final test of a faith is martyrdom and how the Khalsa lived upto its faith has been indicated in the third chapter. What we have to emphasize here is that it was a purely religious faith. The Gurus followed their religious experience and the Sikhs followed them as they had implicit faith in the Gurus. Even the aspiration and the struggle for political power was motivated and sustained by the faith that Guru Gobind Singh had blessed the Khalsa with sovereignty and hence it was bound to be fulfilled.<sup>72</sup>

What is of very great significance, to prove our point, is the wedding together of revolutionary and ethical ends and means, resulting in the creation of, what have been termed as “soldier-saints”.

The debate on “ends and means” remains unresolved and leads no where. Camus has, however, clinched the issue thus: “Absolute non-violence is 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>73</sup> Revolutionaries need no lessons that adherence to absolute non-violence cannot lead to the abolition of hierarchical unjust systems; but what is really hard is how to control the quantum of force used so as not to destroy the living community.

Guru Gobind Singh wrote to Aurangzeb that when all other means fail it is legitimate to have to recourse to sword.<sup>74</sup> So long he was alive, he never allowed any excess against his opponents; rather, he complimented Bhai Kannhya for serving water to the wounded Sikhs and Muslims in the battlefield, without making any discrimination.<sup>75</sup> Even after him, we have to repeat the testimony from non-Sikh sources that the Sikhs would not strike at an enemy who laid down arms or fled from the battlefield.<sup>76</sup> The Mohamadan author of *Fatubat Nama-i-Samadi* corroborates Qazi-Nur-ud-Din on this point that, “if a woman falls into their hands (i.e. of the Khalsa), they look upon her as their mother.”<sup>77</sup> Forster states that the Khalsa derived its strength from the forbearance of sensual pleasures.<sup>78</sup> We do not mean to convey that the conduct of every member of the Khalsa was always upto this mark. That would be too much to expect in human affairs. What the evidence given above shows for certain is that a serious attempt was made by the Khalsa to live upto the ideal of “soldier-saints”.

It is clear that the inspiration for this ideal of ‘soldier-saint’ and the will to translate this ideal into practice came entirely from the Sikh religion and faith, as secularism is not interested in sainthood. At any rate, we are not able to conceive of any other source of this ideal in the caste-ridden medieval and semi-civilized society of India.

It is significant that one other development of the “soldier-saint” ideal, we come across, also owes its inspiration to a religious faith. The crusader’s military style was described by St. Bernard in a sermon as follows:—

“A new sort of army has appeared. . . an army such as the world has never seen. It fights a double war; first, the war of flesh and blood against enemies; second, the war of the spirit against Satan and vice. Physical war is not rare or astonishing; spiritual war is common thing among many monks. But it is not usual to see men fighting in these ways at once. What can such soldiers fear, who have consecrated their lives to Christ.....? The soldier of Christ kills with safety; he dies with more safety still. He serves Christ when he kills, he serves himself when he is killed.”<sup>79</sup>

The parallel between the Christian crusaders and the Khalsa is quite close. Both were volunteers and not mercenaries; both dedicated themselves to what they conceived was God’s cause; and the Khalsa, like the Puritans, submitted itself to a daily religious discipline. The Singh who died in the cause of God or Guru or the Khalsa, regarded himself, and was regarded by other members of the Khalsa, as Mukat (i.e. a liberated soul) and as a Shaheed (i.e. a martyr).

## 9. Conclusion

In the previous chapters we attempted to substantiate that the Sikh Revolution was an egalitarian social revolution as well as a plebeian political revolution; and, also, that it compares favourably with the secular French Revolution. In this chapter, we find that the Sikh Revolution owes *its* genesis and development entirely to the religious experience and inspiration of the Sikh Gurus. The Khalsa is Gods army (*Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa*), and carries out Gods mission (*Wahiguru ji ki Fateh*). This concludes our thesis that true religion, is not only the mother of revolutionary values but has given direct birth to some revolutions. There is no doubt that religion has been distorted and misused for counter-revolutionary purposes. But, then, which other ideology has been immune to such distortions and misuse?

Footnotes:

1. Ellul, pp. 18-20; Wach, p. 214.
2. Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, p. 38.
3. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 43.
4. Brinton, p. 278.
5. Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 126-27.
6. Hagopian, pp. 98-99.
7. Edwards, p. 38.
8. Brinton, p. 279; Friedrich, p. 77.
9. Friedrich, p. 132.
10. Ibid., p. 129.
11. Camus, pp. 25-26.
12. *Perspectives*, pp. 31-36.
13. Robertson, p. 312.
14. Camus, p. 26.
15. Max Weber: *The Religion of India*, p. 144.
16. Max Weber: *The Religion of India*, pp. 35-39.
17. Le Bon Gustave: *The Psychology of Revolution*, p. 15.
18. Ibid.
19. Gustave, p. 18.
20. Gustave, pp. 23-24.
21. Le Bon Gustave pp. 26-27.
22. Gustave, p. 28.
23. Ibid., pp. 46-47.
24. Ibid., p. 89.
25. Gustave, p. 168.
26. Ibid., p. 168-69.
27. Ibid., p. 14.
28. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 46.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 51.
31. Ibid., p. 54.
32. Joachim Wach: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 347.
33. Joachim Wach: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 343.
34. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, p. 31.
35. Wach, p. 348.

36. Ibid., p. 342.
37. Wach, p. 343.
38. Ibid, p. 344.
39. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 397.
40. Ibid., p. 722.
41. *Janam Sakhi, Meharbanwali*, edited by Kirpal Singli, pp. p. 89.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Macauliffe, i, p. 274.
45. G. G., p. 611.
46. Macauliffe, 1, p. 60.
47. G. G., p. 1128.
48. Macauliffe, Max Arthur: *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. 1, p. 379.
49. G. G., p. 15.
50. Wach, p. 348.
51. Macauliffe, Vol. One, p. 240.
52. G. G., p. 417.
53. Macauliffe, Vol. One, p. 232.
54. G. G. (trans. Gopal Singh), p. 1229.
55. *Bange-i-Dara*.  
 Note: By a 'man of perfection' is meant Guru Nanak. *Tauheed* (unity of God) implies brotherhood of man.
56. Hagopian, p. 3.
57. Sikhism is included in the list of prophetic religions, Wach, p. 342.
58. Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 297-98.
59. Max Weber: *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 229-30.
60. Macauliffe, Vol. 3, pp. 94-95.
61. Goodman: *Superior Powers*, pp. 135-36: cited by Walzer, p. 112.
62. Walzer, p. 112.
63. Wach, p. 168.
64. For details, see S.R., pp. 180-182.
65. Macauliffe, Vol. 5, pp. 300-301.
66. Ibid., p. 286.
67. Ibid., p. 280.
68. Macauliffe, Vol. 5, pp. 294-95.
69. G. G. p. 966.
70. Bhai Gurdas, Var one, Pauri 45.
71. Scott, George Batley: *Religion and Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 31.
72. Bhangu, pp. 11, 20, 131.
73. Camus, p. 255.
74. *Zafernama*.
75. Macauliffe, Vol. 5, pp. 173-74.
76. *Jangnamah* of Qazi Nur-ud-Din, cited by Gupta: *History of the Sikhs*, i, p. 290.
77. Cited by Gurbax Singh: *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*, (Sept. 1972), p. 50.
78. Forster, Vol. 1, p. 333; Abinad Shah, Sohan Lal, Ali-ud-Din and Ganesh Das cited by Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, i, p. 195.
79. Cited by Walzer, p. 270.
80. Bhai Gurdas, Var 6, Pauri 3; Var 12, Pauri 2; Bhangu, p. 86.

## CHAPTER 6

### In The Caravan Of Revolutions

Ours is no way a treatise on revolution, but we would like to close with a few significant generalizations, on which there is general agreement, and which would help place the Sikh Revolution in a broader revolutionary environ.

#### 1. Dilemmas

A revolution faces hosts of problems, internal and external, but we are considering here only three major dilemmas which are “in-built” in the revolutionary process itself.

First:

As already seen, the use of force is essential rather than accidental to a revolution.<sup>1</sup> Because, any entrenched system of stratification, which a revolution must seek to abolish, might be amenable to reform, but would not yield without an armed struggle when its very existence is at stake. Absolute non-violence, is the negative basis of slavery.<sup>2</sup> In other words, to stick to non-violence means acquiescence in the unjust *status quo*, i.e. the negation of the main characteristic of a revolution itself. On the other hand, systematic violence positively destroys the living community.<sup>3</sup>

According to Brinton, the English, French, and Russian revolutions began in hope and moderation, reached a crisis in a ‘Reign of Terror’ and ended in something like dictatorship..... Cromwell, Bonaparte, Stalin.<sup>4</sup> This ‘Reign of Terror’ was particularly conspicuous in the French and Russian Revolutions Repression may partly be accounted by the internal and external foes a revolutions has to face and suppress. But, what is relevant for our consideration is that “Terror” is “The manifestation, in part atleast, of an effort to achieve intensely religious ends here on earth. The little band of violent revolutionists, who form the nucleus of all action during the Terror, behave as men have been observed to behave before when under the influence of active religious faith. Independents, Jacobins, Bolsheviks, all sought to make all human activity here on earth conform to an ideal pattern, which, like all such patterns, seems deeply rooted in their sentiments. Such an effort means stern repression of much that many men have been used to regarding as normal.....”<sup>5</sup> Limited repression, is, therefore, an unavoidable part of the revolutionary process itself; but, when there are no equally strong ethical restraints, and the cult of force is rather exalted into a cherished principle, repression easily runs riot into a ‘Reign of Terror’.

“Had the Sikh movement not taken to arms, the religious and political tyranny of a foreign regime, which felt it as its religious obligation to convert by force the whole Indian population to its faith would have been, to say the least, prolonged. As visualized by the Muslim sufi saint Bulleh Shah, had there been no Guru Gobind Singh the entire population would have been circumcised (i.e. forced to embrace Islami).<sup>6</sup> Nor could the plebeian political Sikh revolution have been brought about without overthrowing that regime. Sikhism does not believe in becoming the negative basis of slavery, oppression and exploitation.

The Sikh movement conformed very closely to camus’s rider in not using excessive force that kills the community. As cited earlier, Qazi Nur-ud-Din bears testimony to the fact that the Sikhs “never kill a coward and do not obstruct one who flees from the fields.”<sup>7</sup>

This standard of Sikh conduct was achieved not because the Sikh movement had to deal with its own kinsmen as opponents, as was the case in the Puritanical Revolution. It had to wage one of the toughest struggles in the history of revolution against the mightiest empire in the world at that time. Nor it was because the times, as such, were civilized. It is recorded in history that the Mughals tortured the Sikhs, whenever they fell into their hands, with the most barbaric methods available,<sup>8</sup> but the Sikh did not resort to such methods even in retaliation.

The Sikh conduct was not incidental. The Sikh movement made the maintenance of ethical standards an integral part of its militant programme. The Gurus had laid down the ideal: "To exercise forbearance in the midst of power; to be humble in the midst of honour."<sup>9</sup> Guru Gobind Singh wrote to Aurngzeb that he was taking to the sword only when no other alternative was left.<sup>10</sup> In the words of Chaupa Singh, Guru Gobind Singh said; "If the Sikh spirit is retained during *raj* (political sway) it would be a blessing; otherwise it would be a bane. It is difficult to keep alive the Sikh spirit along with *raj*. The sense of discrimination is lost."<sup>11</sup> As it so happens in human affairs, there was a one time lapse from this standard at the time of the conquest of Sirhind, (when the population in general, other than the Khalsa, joined for the purpose of plunder and revenge) but the main trend of Sikh history Unmistakably shows restraint and forbearance in the use of force.<sup>12</sup> Another very important contributory factor towards this restraint was that Sikhism is universal and did not resort to forcible conversions to its ranks.

Second:

All authorities on political science are very definite on this point that almost all revolutions, particularly those which sought to bring about a drastic change in a system of stratification, ended in political power getting concentrated in the hands of the state.<sup>13</sup> "And yet, the end result of every revolution has been a state power beyond the wildest dreams of the rulers of the old regime."<sup>14</sup> Brinton writes: "Politically the most striking uniformity to be noted in the period of convalescence is the ultimate establishment of a "tyrant" in something like the old Greek sense of the word, an unconstitutional ruler brought to power by revolution or *stasis*. This uniformity has been frequently noted; Cromwell, Bonaparte, Stalin, all seem to confirm it..... There is nothing very puzzling, about the phenomenon. After a revolution has undergone the crisis and the accompanying centralization of power, some strong leader must handle that centralized power when the mad religious energy of the crisis period has burned itself off. Dictatorships and revolutions are inevitably closely associated, because revolutions, to a certain extent breakdown, or at least weaken, laws, customs, habits, beliefs which bind men together in society; and when laws, customs, habits, beliefs tie men together insufficiently, force must be used to remedy that insufficiency. Military force is for short terms the most efficient kind of force available for social and political uses; and military force demands a hierarchy of obedience culminating in a generalissimo."<sup>15</sup>

This is the second dilemma which the revolutionary process itself, gives birth to. Starting in quest of liberty and equality, it ends in a tyrant. Almost "all the old Bolsheviks, the men who ruled Russia in the period of crisis, have by now been liquidated. Stalin in 1952 can hardly make any direct human contact with his revolutionary past."<sup>16</sup> The revolution, as they say, devours its own children.

There is ample testimony from European sources that the Khalsa, particularly the Akalis, were very circumspect in not allowing political power to become the preserve of a minority.<sup>17</sup> Scott compares the Akalis with the "Fifth monarchy Men", who watched their leaders with the jealous eyes lest they should assume absolute power.<sup>18</sup> In fact, this trait of the Khalsa in its misapplication

became a major factor which contributed to the chaotic conditions in the Missal period. But, we are here concerned only with the positive aspect of the problem. The institution of Sarbat Khalsa, where in every member of the Khalsa could participate in the decision making process of the Panth on absolute equal terms, was an obvious attempt for sharing political power by one and all. This democratic Sikh spirit continued to struggle for its survival haphazardly during the period of Missals and Ranjit Singh; and finally, when it revived in the form of The *Panchas* (i.e. Committees of five), it was soon engulfed by a superior civilization.

Third:

The third dilemma, and a serious one, faced by all revolutions, without exception, is that the revolutionary idealism and fervour does not last long. The return to less heroic time after the peak period of a revolution has long been known to French historians as the Thermidorean reaction. All the revolutions had their Thermidors.<sup>19</sup>

“It would also seem that most men cannot long stand the strain of prolonged effort to live in accordance with very high ideals. The outsider in the crisis period is pushed to the limit of his endurance by interference with some of his most prized and intimate routines; the insider is held to a pitch of spiritual effort and excitement beyond his powers of endurance. For both sorts of men there would seem to be a limit to their social action as real as the limit a chemist finds for a chemical reaction. Human beings can endure for but a limited time the concerted attempt to bring heaven to earth, which we call the Reign of Terror and Virtue. Thermidor comes as naturally to societies in revolution is an ebbing tide, as calm after a storm, as convalescence after fever, as the snapping back of a stretched elastic band.”<sup>20</sup> “Within a few days of the guillotining of Robespierre and his most conspicuous followers, Parisians began to indulge publicly and with gusto in a whole series of pleasures denied them during the tension of the Terror..... One gets the impression that few phenomena in the course of the French Revolution were more genuinely “popular” and “spontaneous” than the revulsion from the restraints of the Terror. The people of Paris took Robespierres death as a signal that the lid was off.”<sup>21</sup>

So, the third dilemma of revolution is also in-built in the revolutionary process. The more radical the revolutionary aims and procedures are, the more stringent the curbs on social behaviour are there likely to be, followed by a more severe Thermidor.

The lapses from Sikh ideology and Sikh conduct in the post-revolutionary period of the Missals and Ranjit Singh should be judged against this background.

## 2. The Caravan

Besides the dilemmas faced by revolution noted above, the Caravan of revolutions moves extremely slowly and in a zig zag manner because of what is an even more fundamental problem. Structural changes of political and economic nature might be contrived by a revolution within a short period, but the second complimentary part of the revolutionary process, the change of human sentiments, attitudes, habits, etc., moves with a slowness almost comparable to the kind of change the geologist studies. “Now groups thoroughly disciplined into lives almost as unnaturally ascetic as those our Puritans, Jacobins, and Bolsheviks sought to impose have existed for relatively long periods. The Spartans contrived to support an almost heroic communism for several centuries. But this discipline of slow growth is intimately tied up with the behaviour in men that changes with geological slowness. A revolution cannot manufacture this kind of discipline overnight, and perhaps the violence (and here is meant rather spiritual violence than mere bloodshed) of the Terror is in



some sense an over compensation for the inability of the extremists to carry their ordinary brothers along with them. The Terror is desperate overshooting of the mark.<sup>22</sup>

There is no short-cut solution in sight to this problem of problems.....how to change human sentiments, attitudes and habits, especially on a mass scale; how to make men shed selfishness and become self-less; how to make people rise above narrow personal, family and group interests and own universal humanitarian causes; how to get out of ego-centeredness and merge ones identity into that of the universal-self.

The task before the revolutionists, therefore, is two-fold. To change the hierarchical stratification which is a great hurdle in ushering an era of true human equality and freedom. In this direction, the revolutionary movements of the twentieth century have made reasonably good progress. But, the second much more difficult task of changing man from within remains unsolved.

If past historical experience can be taken as a reliable guide, mankind is likely to continue its effort to change human nature. All the humanitarian religions have been concentrating on changing human motivation; to make man less selfish and less ego-centred; to instil in him the virtues of love, humility, and of human "liberty, equality and fraternity". Buddhism and Christianity influenced human conduct on an extensive scale not matched by any other movement; but the idea of non-violence remained a limiting factor. Islam has tried to stabilize the social equality it achieved in its own way. The Puritan and the Sikh revolutions made heroic efforts to put the ideal of "saint-soldier" (*Sant Sipahi*) into practice in order to reconcile the revolutionary methodology with the predominance of ethical and moral ideals. All these approaches hold their own distinct places in the caravan of revolutions.

Footnotes:

1. Hagopian, p. 3.
2. Camus, p. 255.
3. Camus, p. 255.
4. Brinton, p. 24.
5. Brinton, p. 283.
6. Hari Ram Gupta: *History of the Sikh Gurus*, p. 149.
7. *Jangnamah*, cited by Hari Ram Gupta: *History of the Sikhs*, i, p. 290.
8. Bhangu, pp. 226-27; Malcolm, p. 239; Haquiquat: I. H. Q., March: 1942, Sup., p. 13.
9. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 85.
10. *Zafarnama*.
11. *Rehatnama*, ed. Piara Singh Padam, p. 117.
12. Capital punishment was abolished in India only by Ranjit Singh, and it is probably an indication of the Sikh tradition of restraint in the use of violence.
13. Hagopian, p. 59; Camus, p. 8.
14. Hagopian, p. 59 (Bertrend de Jouvenal: *On Power*, p. 215, cited).
15. Brinton, p. 229.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
17. Forster, Vol i, p. 329.
18. Scott, p. 35.
19. Brinton, p. 226.

20. Brinton, p. 224.
21. Ibid., pp. 243-44.
22. Brinton, p. 209.

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Footnotes:

1. Based on works cited.

	chapter	Book page, line	Doc page, line
storeyed	5 the Sikh revolution	34,18	1,42
adoped	”	36,25	3,6
geni	6 Comparison	65,18	4,36
Schler	7 religiuos basis	86,38	2,10

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