

THE RELIGION OF THE SIKH GURUS

BY

TEJA SINGH M. A.

formerly Professor of History
Khalsa College, Amritsar.

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THE RELIGION OF THE SIKH GURUS

GURU Nanak (A. D. 1469-1533); the founder of Sikhism and its first Guru, was born at Talwandi (Nankana Sahib) in the Punjab & passed away after an eventful career. He travelled widely in India and is said to have visited Persia, Turkestan, Iraq, and even Mecca, Nanak preached liberal doctrines, religious as well as social, and tried to harmonize Hinduism and Islam by his life and teachings. He composed many religious hymns which formed the nucleus of the *Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. He was followed by nine other Gurus in succession, under whom Sikhism gradually developed and received its final shape.

Angad, the second Guru (1538-52), invented the Gurmukhi alphabet, the sacred script of the Sikhs, Amar Das, the third Guru (1552-74), tried to organize the new sect and develop its teachings. He started the institution of *Langar* (common kitchen) to abolish caste-distinctions. Ram Das the fourth Guru (1574-81), son-in-law of Guru Amar Das, founded the city of Ramdasapur, which later came to be known as Amritsar, and started the construction of Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple) there. He established friendly contacts with the Moguls.

Arjan, the fifth Guru (1581-1606) the youngest son of Guru Ram Das, compiled the *Adi Granth* (the

nucleus of the (*Granth Sahib*) in 1604 and spread Sikhism. Under him the Sikhs began to acquire wealth and power and increased their trade and political contacts with other States, both within and outside India. He was the first Guru to introduce the new dress befitting the status of the Guru who was now the secular head of the Sikhs in addition to being the spiritual. His fame and growing power roused the envy and fear of Emperor Jahangir who began to harass the Sikhs and their Guru Har Gobind, the sixth Guru (1606-45), the only son of Guru Arjan, completed the process of change in dress and wore two swords, one denoting the spiritual (*Faquiri*) authority and the other secular (*amiri*). He built the first Sikh stronghold for the protection of the Sikhs and the Hindus, and to his standard flocked the Sikhs. He was the first Guru to take up arms against the Moguls. Har Rai, the seventh Guru (1645-61), grand son of Guru Har Gobind, entered into relations with Dara Shukoh, elder brother of Aurangzeb and came into conflict with the latter, who held the Guru's son Ram Rai, who had gone to negotiate peace, as a hostage. Therefore, on the death of Har Rai, his second son, Har Krishan, became the eighth Guru (1661-64) at the age of five. He too was summoned to Delhi by the Mogul emperor and died there at the age of eight. Teg Bahadur succeeded him as the ninth Guru (1664-75). In his time there were schisms among the Sikhs. Never the less he was able to spread Sikhism. But the intolerance of Aurangzeb

led to his seizure and execution at Delhi in 1675.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru (1675-1708) son of Guru Teg Bahadur, was the last of all the Gurus. Born at Patna in 1666 he became the Guru at the age of nine. He founded the Khalsa, the militant Sikh theocracy, to fight the intolerant Moguls and infused new life and vigour into the Sikhs by introducing the baptism of the sword and adding the suffix 'Singh' (Lion) to their names. He organized them into a well-knit religious and social body, abolished the succession of Gurus, and placed the *Granth Sahib* in the place of the Guru. Two sons of his became martyrs to the Sikh cause and he himself suffered untold hardships, fighting for the cause all his life, until, in the end, he was treacherously assassinated by a pathan at Nanded in Hyderabad. His has been a wonderful life of noble character, valour and self-sacrifice, and his unique personality has a great inspiration, secular as well as spiritual, to all Indians in general and to the Sikhs in particular.

Almost all the Gurus composed religious songs and hymns which have been collected in *Guru Granth Sahib*. The *Granth* also includes the compositions of other saints' several Hindu and some Muslim. The songs and hymns are set to music and are in different Rags (tunes), as they are called. The teachings of the Gurus are embodied in their different works, which are incorporated in *Guru Granth Sahib*.

GOD AND HIS NAME

The aim of life, according to the Sikh Gurus, is not to get salvation or a heavenly abode called paradise, but to develop the best in us which is God; If a man loves to see God, what cares he for salvation or paradise ?' (Nanak's *Asa*). 'All men hanker after salvation, paradise, or Elysium setting their hopes on them every day of their lives. But those who live to see God do not ask for salvation; the sight itself satisfies their minds completely' (Ram Das in *Kalyan*).

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

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

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

In the ambrosial hours of the morn, meditate on
the grace of the true Name :

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

'We should worship the Name, believe in the Name, which is ever and ever the same and true' (*Sri Rag* of Nanak). The practice of the Name is prescribed again and again in the Sikh scriptures, and requires a little explanation.

God is described both as *nirgun* (*nirguna*) or absolute, i.e. without attributes and *Sargun* (*Sarguna*)

personal, i.e. with attributes. Before there was any creation, God lived absolutely in Himself; but when He thought of making Himself manifest in creation. He entered into the realm of relation. In the former case, 'when God was Himself self-created, there was none else; He took counsel and advice with Himself; what He did came to pass. Then there was no heaven, or hell, or the three-regioned world. There was only the formless One Himself: creation was not then' (*Gujri-Ki-Var* of Amar Das). There was then no sin, no virtue, no Veda or any other religious book, no caste, no sex' (Nanak's *Maru sohle XV*, and Arjan's *Sukhmani*, XXI). When God became *Surgun* or manifest. He became what is called the Name : and in order to realize Himself. He made nature wherein He has His seat and is diffused every where and in all directions in the form of love' (Gobind Singh's *Jap 80*).

In presenting this double phase of the supreme Being the Gurus have avoided the pitfalls into which some people have fallen. With them God is not an abstract idea or a moral force, but a personal Being capable of being loved and honoured, and yet He is conceived of as a Being whose presence is diffused all over His creation. He is the common Father of all fashioning worlds and supporting them from inside. But He is never born, He has no incarnation. He Himself stands for the creative agencies, like Maya, the Word, and Brahma ; He Himself is Truth, Beauty, and the

eternal yearning of the heart after Goodness (*Japji*). In a word, the Gurus have combined the Aryan idea of immanence with the Semitic idea of transcendence, without taking away anything from the unity and the personal character of God.

O I give me give some intelligence of my beloved.
am bewildered at the different accounts I have
of Him.

O happy wives, my companions say something of
Him.

Some say that He is altogether outside the world;

Others that He is altogether contained in it.

His colour is not seen ; His features cannot be
made out.

O happy wives, tell me truly—

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

—Arjan's *Jaitsri*

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

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

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

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

—Teg Bahadur's *Dhanasri*

Guru Nanak's *Asa-di-Var*, in its preliminary stanzas, lays down the fundamentals of Sikh belief about God. It is a trenchant clear cut monotheism. God is called the 'indweller of nature', and is described as filling all things by an art that is artless' (XII. 1-2). He is not an impotent mechanic fashioning pre-existing matter into the universe. He does not exclude matter; but includes and transcends it. The universe too is not an illusion. Being rooted in God who is real, it is a reality : not a reality final and abiding, but a reality on account of God's presence in it (II. 1). His will is above nature as well as working within it and in spite of its immanence. It acts not as an arbitrary force, but as a personal presence working most intelligently' (XXX, 2). The first thing about God is that He is indivisible one, above every other being, however highly conceived, such as Vishnu. Brahma, or Siva (1), or as Rama and Krishna (IV. 2). The second thing is that He is the highest moral Being (II. 2), who has inscribed all men with His Name or moral presence (II). He is not a God belonging to any particular people. Muslim or Hindus but is the dispenser of life universal' (VI). The ways to realize Him are not many but only one (XII. 3), and that way is not knowledge, formalism (XIV.2 : XV. 1-4), or what are conceived of as meritorious actions which establish a claim to reward (VIII. 2), but love (XIII. 2) and faith (XIV. 2). the aim being to obtain the grace of God (IV. 2; V. 2: VIII. 2: XIII. 1),

The only way of worshipping Him is to sing His praises (VI. 1 : VII: IX: XII 2: XIX. 2: XXII. 3) and to meditate on His Name (II: VIII. 1: IX, 2: XVI. 1).*

UPLIFT OF MAN BASED ON CHARACTER

This life of praise is not to be of idle mysticism but of active service done in the midst of worldly relations. 'There can be no worship without good actions' (*Japji*). These actions however, are not to be formal deeds of co-called merit, but should be inspired by an intense desire to please God and to serve fellow-men ;

Without pleasing God all actions are worthless.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I say, Nanak, if you exert yourself in action, you will be saved.

Serve your God and remember Him, leaving all your pride of self

—Arjan's *Gauri Mala*

The Guru laid the foundation of man's uplift, not on such short cuts as *Mantras*, miracles, or mysteries but on man's own humanity, his own character, as it is character alone--the character already formed--which helps us in moral crises. When we are face to face with an evil, we have to decide quickly. Temptations allow us no time to think. We cannot then consult a religious book or a moral guide. We must decide on the spot and at once. And this can be done only if virtue has so entered into our disposition that we are habitually drawn towards it, and anything evil, though pleasant for the time being has no attraction for us. It was for this reason that the Gurus did not think it sufficient to lay down rules of conduct in a book for

the formation of character they also thought it necessary to take in hand a whole people for a continuous course of schooling in wisdom and experience. This is the reason why in Sikhism there have been ten founders, instead of only one.*

Before the Sikh Gurus, the leaders of thought had fixed certain grades of salvation for men, attainable according to their different capacities, whom they divided into high and low castes. Some people belonging to the favoured classes developed in them a few good qualities to a very high degree, while others, left to themselves, degenerated. The Gurus did not want to have such a lop-sided growth. They wanted to give opportunities of highest development to all classes of people.

There are lowest men among the low castes.

Nanak, I shall go with them. What have I got to do with the great ?

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

It is mere nonsense to observe caste and to feel proud over grand names†

*Sikhism is sometimes considered to have been founded by all the ten Gurus, since it was gradually evolved over a period of about two centuries, each Guru from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, contributing his share to its development.

†*Sri Rag* of Nanak see also Arjan's *Jatsri-Ki-Var*, VII; Amar Das's *Bhairon*.

Some work had already been done in this line. The *Bhagats* (*bhaktas*) or reformers in the middle ages tried to abolish the distinction between the high class Hindus and the so-called untouchables, by taking into their fold such men as barbers, weavers, shoemakers, etc. But the privilege of equality was not extended to men as men, but to those individuals only who had washed off their untouchability with the love of God. Kabir a weaver, and Ravidasa, a shoemaker, were honoured by kings and highcast men, but the same privilege was not extended to other weavers and shoemakers. Who were still held as untouchable. Ravidasa took pride in the fact than even 'the superior sort of Brahmans came to bow before him' (Ravidasa in *Rag Malar*): but the other members of his caste were not so honoured.

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

Recognize all human nature as one.

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

The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful the Hindus and the Muslims have developed themselves according to the fash-

ions of different countries.

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

--Gobind Singh's *Akal Ustat*

Such a teaching could not tolerate any idea of caste or untouchability, Man rose in the estimation of man. Even the grovlling slaves of the so-called higher classes came be fired with a new hope and courage to lift themselves as equals to the best of humanity;

Women too received their due. 'How can they be called inferior', says Guru Nanak, 'when they give birth to kings and prophets ?' Women as well as men share in the grace of God and are equally responsible for their actions to Him (*Asa-di-Var, XIX*) Guru Har Gobind called woman the conscience of man *Sati* was condemned by the Sikh Gurus long before any notice was taken of it by Akbar (*Amar Das's Var Suhi VI*) :

The spirit of man rose with the belief that he was not a helpless creature in the bands of a being with an arbitrary will, but was a responsible being endowed with a will of his own, with which he could do much to mould his destiny, He has already existed before he is born here. He inherits his own past as well as that of his family and race. But he is given a will with which he can modify the inherited and acquired tendencies of his past and determine els present conduct. If this were not so,

he would not be responsible for his actions. This will again, is not left helpless or isolated, for if, through the Guru's word, it be attuned to the supreme will, it acquires a force with which he can transcend all his past and acquire a new character.

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

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

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

--Ram Das in *Asa*.

The fish may run against the current of the river or along with it, just as it likes, but it cannot escape the river itself. Similarly, man may run counter to what is considered good or moral, but he can never escape from the pale of God's will (*Japji II*).

Then who is responsible for his actions? Man himself. We learn from the first *Sloka of Asa-di-Var's* seventh pauri (stanza) that man is given free will, which leads him to do good or evil actions to think good or evil thoughts, and to go in consequence to heaven or hell ;

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

Of his free will he befools himself or becomes
wise. In the next *Sloka* we read ;

Self-assertion gives men his individuality and
leads him to action.

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

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

It comes to man from the will of God and de-
termines his conduct according to his antecede-
nts.

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

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

Nanak says ; Hear ye all, this is the way to cure
the disease.

The source of evil is not Satan, Ahriman, or
any other external agency. It is our own sense of
ego placed by God in us. It is the overweening sense
of self that grows as a barrier between God man
and keeps him wandering from sin to sin 'The
bride and the bridegroom live together, with a
partition of ego between them (Ram Das in
Malar).

The infinite is within us 'engraved in our being'. It is like the light of the sun ever present, but shut out of our sight by the cloud of ignorance and selfishness. We sin as long as this light remains hidden from us, and we believe our own self to be everything to us. Regeneration comes when at the call of grace, we begin to subject our tiny self to the highest Self, that is, God, and our own will is gradually attuned to His supreme will, until we feel and move just as He wishes us to feel and move.

Really the problem of Good and evil is the problem of union and disunion with God (*japji*, XXIX). It is, however, so designed in the case of man that whenever he wishes he can come back to the bosom of his father 'God' and resume his position there. Guru Nanak says in *Maru* :

By the force of union we meet God and enjoy
Him even with this body ;
And by the force of disunion we break away
from Him ;

But, Nanak, it is possible to be united again.

When we come into this world, there are in us divine things, which serve as forces of union, and also evil tendencies, inherited from our past lives, which serve as forces of disunion and draw us away from God towards moral death. Says Guru Nanak in *Maru* :

Man earns his body from the union of his
mother and father.

And the Creator inscribes his being with the gift of the spirit and progressive tendencies.

But led away by delusion he forgets himself.

This teaching about the freedom of will and progressive tendencies' raises the spirit of man, and gives him a new hope and courage. But the temptation of evil is so strong and the human powers for resisting it are so weak that stumbles at each step, and yet it is expected of him that 'He should always speak the truth and never tell lies' (Farid). He should beware even of an 'unconscious sin' (Teg Bahadur), and 'He should not step on the bed of another's wife even in a dream' (Govind Singh).

These commands cannot be fulfilled simply with the strength of knowledge and inherited tendencies. Then what is to be done ?

The prophets of the world have given many solutions of this problem. Some get round the difficulty by supposing that there is no evil. It is only a whim or a false scare produced by our ignorance. Some believe in the efficacy of austerities, still others in alms given in profusion to overwhelm the enormity of sin. There is again, a higher sort of teachers who inculcate the love of some great man as a Saviour. What was the solution offered by the Sikh Gurus ? They saw that, although it was difficult for a man to resist evil and to do good with his own powers, yet if he were primed with another personality possessing

dynamic powers, he could acquire a transcendental capacity for the purpose. This personality was to be the Guru's.

THE GURU IN SIKHISM

The way of religion, as shown by Sikhism is not a set of views or doctrines, but a way of life to be lived according to a definite model. It is based not on rules or laws, but upon discipleship. In the career of the disciple, the personality of the Guru is all along operative, commanding his whole being and shaping his life to its divine issues. Without such a personality there would be no direction in the moral forces of society and in spite of a thousand kinds of knowledge, 'there would still be utter darkness' (*Asa-di-Var 1*). There would be no force to connect men with men and them with God. Everybody would exist for himself in moral isolation, like spurious sesames left desolate in the field' with a hundred masters to own them (*ibid*) It is the Guru who removes the barriers of caste and position set up by men among themselves and, gathering them all unto himself unites them with God.*

Such a creative personality must be perfect, because 'men take after him whom they serve' (Amar Das in *Var Bihagra*). If the ideal person is imperfect, the society and its individuals following him will also get imperfect development. But

*Nanak, the true Guru must be such as to unite all men (*Sri Rag, I*).

‘those who serve the saved ones will be saved’
(*Majh III*).

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

God does not die, nor do I fear death.
He does not perish, nor do I grieve
He is not poor, nor do I have hunger.
He has no pain, nor have I any trouble.
There is no destroyer except God.
Who is my life and who gives me life.
He has no bond, nor have I got any.
He has no entanglement, nor have I any care.
As He is stainless, so am I free from stain.
As He is happy, so am I always rejoicing,
He has no anxiety, nor have I any concern.
As He is not defiled, so am I not polluted.
As He has no craving, so do I covet nothing.
He is pure and I too suit Him in this.
I am nothing : He alone is everything.
All around is the same He.
Nanak, the Guru has destroyed all my superstitions and defects.

And I have become uniformly one with Him.

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

THE GURU IN THE SIKH AND IN THE PANTH

This transformation comes not only through a close association with the Guru, which is advocated in many other religions, but through the belief that the Sikh (sisya, the disciple) incorporates the

Guru. He fills himself with the Guru and feels linked up with an inexhaustible source of power. 'The Khalsa', says Guru Gobind Singh is my other self, in him I live and have my being'. A single Sikh, a mere believer, is only one; but when he takes Guru Gobind Singh into his embrace, he becomes in the Sikh parlance equal to 'one lakh and a quarter' (*Sava lakh*). His nature is so reinforced in every way that, although hundreds may fall round him, he will stand as a garrison of the Lord of hosts', a host in himself--a host of 'one lakh and a quarter'. He will keep the Guru's flag always flying. Whenever tempted, he will ask himself, 'Can I lower the flag of Guru Gobind Singh? Can I desert it? I, as Budh Singh of Kahan Singh, can fall; but can Guru Gobind Singh in me fall?' and will declare, 'No, never'. This feeling of incorporation with the Guru makes the Sikh strong beyond his ordinary powers and in times of emergency, brings him new hope and courage.

So far, we have considered what the Guru does for the Sikhs as individuals. We have seen how he strengthens their character and increases their power a thousandfold by filling their personalities with his own. In order to increase this power immensely more, the Guru made another arrangement. He organized them into *Sangats*, holy assemblies, and put his personality again into them. This led to a very remarkable development in the institution of Guruship, and no description of

Guruship will be complete without an account of this development.

The Sikh idea of religion, as we have seen, is something more practical than being merely mystic. It consists of *Nam* and *Seva*. To practise *Nam* (Name) means to practise the presence of God, by keeping Him ever in our minds by singing His praises or dwelling on His excellence, This is to be done not only in solicitude and alone, but also in public, where worship of the Name is made more impressive by being organized in the form of congregational recitations or singing. The other element is *Seva* or service. The idea of service is that it should be not only liberal, but also efficient and economical, that is, it should do greatest good with the least possible means. It should not be wasteful. For this purpose, we have to organize our means. In every work of practical nature, in which more than one person is engaged, it is necessary to resort to organization. As religion too- especially a religion like Sikhism whose aim is to serve mankind belongs to the same category, it requires organization of its followers as an essential condition of its success. It may not be necessary in the case of an individualistic religion, wherein the highest aim is to empty the mind of all desires, or to dream away the whole life in jungles or mountains ; but where religion consists in realizing God mainly through service done within the world, where men have constantly to deal with men to

promote each other's good, it is impossible to do without organization.

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

*In the coronation Ode of Satta and Balwand the following verses occur ;

Guru Nanak proclaimed the accession of Lehna as a reward for service. He had the same light, the same method; the Master merely changed his body'
'The wise being, Guru Nanak descended into the form of Amar Das'.

'Thou, Ram Das, art Nanak, thou art Lehna, thou art Amar Das'.

'The human race comes and goes, but thou, O Arjan, art ever new and whole'

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

Guru Gobind Singh in his *Vichitra-natak* says about the Gurus : 'All take them as different from one another; very few recognize them as one in spirit But only those realize perfection who do recognize them as one', See also the *Sadd of Sunder*, the *Svayyas* at the end of *Guru Granth Sahib*, and *Bhai Gurdas's vars* I.45-48; III.12; XX.1; XXVI.34,41;

The Gurus always signed themselves as *Nanak*.

and the Sikhs was more intense than has ever existed between the most romantic lovers of the world. But the homage paid to the Guru was made impersonal by creating a mystic unity between the Sikh and the Guru on the one hand, and the Guru and the word on the other.* Greatest respect began to be paid to the incorporated Word (scripture), even the Guru choosing for himself a seat lower than that of the scripture. The only form of worship was the meditation on, and the singing of, the Word,†

*The Guru lives within his Sikhs, and is pleased with whatever they like' *Gauri-ki-Var* IV). 'The Guru is a Sikh, and the Sikh who practises the Guru's word is at one with the Guru. (*Asa chant*, IV) See also Bhai Gurdas's *Vars*, 111. 11. IX 16 'The Guru is the Word and the Word is Guru' (*Kanara* IV).

†*Asa-di-Var* VI I. 'in this world the best practice is of the Word' (*Parbhati*. I) 'My Yoga is practised by singing. Thy hymns' (*Asa*, V). Sujan Rai of Batala, Writing about Sikhs in 1697; says in his *Khulasa-tut-twarikh*: 'The only way of worship with them is that they read hymns composed by their Gurus, and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments. In the Golden Temple, Amritsar, up to this time, nothing but continuous singing of hymns day and night by relays of singers is allowed.

The Sikh assemblies also acquired great sanctity, owing to the belief that the spirit of the Guru lived and moved among them. They began to assume higher and higher authority, until collectively the whole body, called the Panth, came to be regarded as an embodiment of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh himself received baptism from the Sikhs initiated by himself. After him, the Sikhs ceased to have any personal Guru. If we read the Sikh history aright the Sikh community, as an organized unit, would appear to have undergone a course of discipline in the hands of the ten Gurus, until its character was fully developed and the Guru merged his personality in the body of the followers thus reared. The Guru, as mentioned above worked with two things : the personal association and the word. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh the personality and the Word were separated. The Panth was invested with the personality of the Guru, and the incorporated Word became the Gyan (Janna) Guru (diverse intelligence or the Guru as knowledge). That is in simply words, the Khalsa Panth was to be the Guru, in future, not in supersession of the previous Guru, but as the authorized agency to work in their name, and it was invariably to guide it self by the teachings of the Gurus as found in the holy *Granth*. It is because of this that the Sikhs came to regard Guru Nanak and the Guru Panth with equal respect.

Amrit (*amrita*, nectar) or baptism was made the basis of this organization, All those who wanted to serve humanity through Sikhism must join the Panth as regular members, and receive its baptism as the initial step. All must have the same creed, which should be well defined and should not be confused with the beliefs and practices of the neighbouring religions. The Guru ordered that 'the Khalse should be distinct from the Hindu and the Muslim' (*Rahatname* of Chaupa Singh).

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

He who has full love and confidence in God, and does not put his faith, even by mistake, in fasting or in the graves of Muslim saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Yogis' places of sepulchre ;

He who only recongnizes the one God no pilgrimages, non-destruction of life. penances, or austerities :

And in whose heart the light of the perfect One shines--he is to be recognized as a pure member of the Khalsa.

—Gobind Singh *Svayyas*

Such a member of the Khalsa was to embody in himself the highest idal of manhood, as described by Guru Gobind Singh in his unpublished book, called *Sarb Loh*, Although the Khalsa was

designed by the Guru himself, yet the Guru was so charmed by the look of his own creation that he saluted it, in the book, as his own ideal and master. The Khalsa was thought fit enough to administer baptism of the new order even to the Guru and was consecrated as the Guru incarnate. As a sign that the Guru had placed himself eternally in his Sikhs, It was declared by him, If anybody wishes to see me let him go to an assembly of Sikhs, and approach them with faith and reverence ; he will surely see me amongst them' (*Prem Sumarag*).

In the ranks of the Khalsa, all were to be equal. the lowest with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes. Women were to be baptized in the same way as men and were to enjoy the same rights, The Sarbat Khalsa or the 'whole people' met once at the Akal Takhat, Amritsar the highest seat of Panthic authority on the occasion of *divali* (*dipawali*) or Vaisakhi, and felt that they were one. All questions affecting the welfare of the community were referred to the *sangats*, which would decide them in the form of resolutions called *gurmattas*. A *gurmatta*, (gurumata the verdict of the Guru) duly passed was supposed to have received the sanction of the Guru and any attempt made afterwards to contrivence it was taken as a sacrilegious act.

FORMS AND CEREMONIES

This institution of the Khalsa entails a certain additional disciplinary outfit in the shape of baptismal forms and vows. Religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennoble individuals, but also binds them together to work for a high purpose in the world. Organization is a means of enlarging the possibility, scope, and effectiveness of this work. In order that an organization itself may work effectively, it is necessary that the individuals concerned in it should be able to keep up their attachment to, and enthusiasm for, the cause. This is where discipline comes in, which keeps up the spirit of individuals against flagging in times of trial, and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in moments of distress. This discipline, or what is called *esprit de corps*, is secured by such devices as flags, drills, and uniforms in armies, and by certain forms and ceremonies in religion. Man would not need them, if he were only a bundle of intellectual and moral faculties : but as he has also got sentiment and imagination without which the former qualities would remain inoperative, he cannot do without articulating his ideas and beliefs in some forms appropriate to his sentiment. Forms should be related to his inner belief as words are to their meaning tears to grief,

smiles to happiness and a tune to a song. It is true that sometimes words becomes meaningless, when we no longer heed their sense, or when the language to which they belong becomes dead. But there is no denying the fact that, when their inner meaning is real, and we are sincere about it they do serve as very helpful interpreters.

Sometimes, however, when the forms are determined, not by the necessity of uniformity, which is so essential for discipline but by local or racial causes, they narrow the applicability of the ideal and create division and exclusiveness, whereas they should have helped men to unite. When the spirit in which they had been originally conceived of dies out, they become mere handicaps to religion, It was such forms that Guru Nanak asked people to leave. Destroy that custom', he said, 'which makes you forget dear God, (*Vadhans-ki-Var*). But the Sikh forms were neither conceived of in a spirit of exclusiveness, nor were they regarded as essential to the advancement of individual souls. They were prescribed merely to serve as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community, and any man who likes to serve humanity through the Sikh Panth can use them. The Sikhs, who are the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh and whose religion is surcharged with his personality find the

uniform worn and ordained by him as a real help in playing their part as units of the Panthic organization. This help comes from the appeal made to sentiment by the process of association with an ever-living personality that is itself a symbol of the highest personality. As is God, so is the Guru, and as is the Guru, so must be the follower. Wearing short drawers (*Kachh*) which ensures briskness of movement at times of action and serves as an easy underwear at times of rest, an iron ring (*Kara*) on his right arm as a sign of sternness, and constraint, and a sword (*kirpan*) by his side as an instrument of offence and defence and as an emblem of power and dignity,* the Guru presented an impressive picture of a simple but disciplined soldier. He however, combined in him the saintliness of the old *rsis* with the sternness and strength of the knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept long hair (*Kes*), which all the world over has always been associated with saintliness a comb (*Kangha*) was a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These are the forms with which the Sikhs are invested at the time of their baptism, in order that they may look exactly like their master, as they are to behave exactly like him.

From the history of the Sikhs in the past as well as in the present, it is quite evident how

*Charity and *Kirpan* are the symbol of self-respect (*pakhiano Charitra*, 322),

effectively these baptismal forms, with the accompanying vows of purity, love, and service, have aided them in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of greatest trials. While keeping the Sikhs associated with their Guru and maintaining his spirit amongst them, they have not produced any narrowing effect on their beliefs or modes of worship.

