

ESSENTIALS OF SIKHISM

DALJEET SINGH

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To
Master Gurbax Singh (Grandson),
Miss Payal K Singh, Miss Bani Singh,
and Miss Sukhmani Singh (Grand Daughters)

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Sikhism is a system radically different from the Indian Bhakti Creeds with which it has often been confused. Although quietist mystics and saints appeared the world over in all ages and countries, yet none of them had ever accepted social responsibility or used force for a righteous cause, which are the basic concepts of the Sikh Philosophy. The author elucidates all the Sikh Concepts in this context in a forceful manner. He clarifies the misconceptions made about Sikhism in an effective and logical way. While comparing the fundamentals of Sikh Theology with the other religious systems, he relies on the authoritative writings on the other religions and quotes profusely from the Sikh Scripture.

In short, this work is an attempt to give a comparative picture of Sikh concept and doctrines, so that their reality is brought in sharp focus, and their significance and implications in the overall structure of Sikhism are grasped by the reader easily.

Following a bright academic record, the Author competed successfully for the Civil Services and retired as Secretary and Commissioner Education, Government of Punjab in 1969. Since then he has devoted himself to the study of Comparative Religion and Sikhism in particular. His Works include a number of books and numerous papers on the Religion of Guru Nanak. He has delivered Guru Nanak Memorial Lectures and Guru Tebh Bahadur Commemorative Lectures at the Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab. Among the living scholars, he is the most authentic and prolific exponent of Sikhism. His views on Sikh Theology are sound and unchallenged, being based entirely on the doctrines in the Guru Granth Sahib and the lives of the Gurus.

SECTION I
METHODOLOGY

PREFACE

After a two year study of Guru Granth Sahib I started writing notes on its important concepts. My understanding of them revealed that Sikhism was a system radically different from the Indian Bhakti creeds with which it was often confused. For, although quietist mystics and saints had appeared the world over in all ages and countries, yet none of them had ever accepted social responsibility, or used force for a righteous cause. Therefore, I wrote a paper on the concept of Naam in Guru Granth Sahib, and sent it to my friend, late Dr. Prem Nath, Head, Department of Philosophy, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He was happy to go through it, and wanted me to publish it, since it expressed a new and logical picture of the identity and theology of Sikhism. Thereafter followed my ventures in Sikh Studies.

The papers in this volume are divided into three sections. In the first section is a paper dealing with the problem of religious studies in the present academic world, where the materialist philosophies quite often form the base of Social Science disciplines. The second section comprises thirteen articles, namely, 'Idea of God in Sikhism', 'Naam in Sikhism', 'Yaisnavism, Yedanta and Nathism', 'The Sikh World-view', 'Sikh Theory of Evolution: Haumain, and Problems of Hermeneutics', 'The Concept of Maya in Sikhism', 'Sikh Bhakti and Hindu Bhakti' (Reproduction of a paper contributed at a Seminar organised by the Council of World Religions at Sri Nagar in July 1988), 'Guru Nanak -The Prophet of a Unique Ideology', 'Sikh Religion and Politics', 'Gurmukh', 'A Critique and a Clarification of Sikhism', 'The Idea of Freedom and Responsibility', and 'Sikhism - Its Identity'. The third section has a paper under the Caption 'Sikhism and Inter-Religious Dialogue'.

The selection of papers in this volume has primarily been made in order to clarify, in the light of Gurbani, topics about which some confusion has arisen, or which are fundamental to the Sikh thesis. Many a time one finds scholars saying that Sikhism has Vedantic, Bhakti, or Islamic affinities. There is a fundamental failing in such views. A

religion is not a cultural or social growth. Every religion has esoteric and exoteric aspects. So far as the spiritual, ontological or esoteric roots of a religion are concerned, those are entirely its own. It is these roots that shape its personality. The exoteric aspects of a system naturally have their relation to time and space. The difference between a spiritual and a social system is, that the former draws its sap from the realm of the numenon, and the later from the world of the phenomenon.

In order to enable the reader to have a clear understanding of Sikhism, an attempt has been made to give a comparative picture of Sikh concepts and doctrines, so that their reality is brought in sharp focus, and their significance and implications in the overall structure of Sikhism, are grasped. Another aspect that is sought to be emphasised, is that Sikh history of the Guru period is an extension, demonstration or a product of the Sikh ideology; and neither of them can be understood in isolation. Just as the Ten Masters working over a period of 240 years, are a unique feature of Sikhism, this unity of Sikh ideology and the lives of the Gurus, is an essential aspect of the Gospel of the Gurus for its authentic interpretation.

In this venture my profuse thanks are due to my brother-in-law, Professor Jagjit Singh, and my friend, Dr. Kharak Singh, for their help in writing and compiling these papers. For, in matters of ideology, discussion with knowledgeable persons always leads to clarity and precision. I should also like to express my gratefulness to my wife, Sardani Amarjit Kaur, for her continued assistance in my work, studies and preparation of these essays.

127, Sector 9,
Chandigarh

Daljeet Singh

CHAPTER I

ISSUES OF SIKH STUDIES

It is a welcome sign that in the last few decades interest in the study of Sikh religion, its institutions and history has grown both in India and abroad, both among Sikh and non-Sikh scholars. It is indeed a healthy development. But, partly because of the variant background from which scholars are drawn and partly because of the methodologies of study followed by them, a few problems have to be faced and solved. In this brief article we shall consider a few of them.

The first problem that has arisen concerns the methodology adopted in the study of Sikhism. This issue relates not only to the study of Sikhism, but also to the study of other religions, or of religion as such. In fact, the problem is ontological in nature. It is basic to almost every religion that there is a Spiritual Reality that is different from the empirical reality we perceive with our senses. Irrespective of the fact whether or not the phenomenal reality is considered to be real or not, the Spiritual Reality is regarded as more real or true. It is the description and definition of this Reality by a religion that form the very basis of the study of that religion. Answers to questions whether that Reality is creative, attributive or otherwise, determine the structure of a religion and furnish valid clues to its study and classification. For example, no student of the *Guru Granth Sahib* can fail to understand that for the Gurus, God is not only Creative and Attributive but He is also Immanent, reveals Himself to man, and operates in history with His Will. The Gurus have repeatedly emphasized these aspects of God. Guru Nanak says, "O Lalo, I say what the Lord commands me to convey."¹ Similarly, the scriptures and the basic doctrines of every religion define Reality in their own way and no study of any religion would be true or even valid unless that definition is kept in view. It is, therefore,

axiomatic to say that the study of the ontology or the spiritual base of a religion is essential to the proper understanding of it and its development. Yet it is this very issue that raises the first problem.

Since the advent of science and more particularly since the last century, materialistic philosophies have gained considerable relevance. In fact, in the fields of sociology, economics, political science, psychology and history, it is the materialistic interpretations that are by and large accepted as valid. Each of these social sciences has developed its own particular discipline and methodology of study. As all these studies relate to the phenomena of the empirical world, either taking little account of or denying the transcendent world, their world-views are from the point of view of religion, partial or lopsided. Seen from the angle of social sciences, there is substance in the argument of these scholars of phenomenology that the acceptance of the existence of transcendence is an uncalled for assumption that would knock off what they consider to be their scientific basis. The argument has validity in the field from which it emanates. But, the confusion and the fallacy arise when this argument is carried to the field of religion. For, by its very definition, the study of religion involves the study of the transcendent or the spiritual. Therefore, in the study of religion it would be an equally uncalled for assumption to accept that there is no transcendent element. For many a religion believes that the transcendent is also immanent and operates in history. Accordingly, religion has developed its own methodology and principles of study leading to a world-view which is holistic and comprehensive instead of being limited and narrow. In fact, the denial of the spiritual element would not only vitiate the study of religion, but would also rule out the very meaning or need of such a study. It is in this context that we quote Dr. Hannad Arenett who after invoking the age old view of Parmenides and Plato about the existence of the supra-sensual world writes, "Meanwhile, in increasingly strident voices, the few defenders of metaphysics have warned us of the danger of nihilism inherent in the development; and although they themselves seldom invoke it, they have an important argument in their favour; it is indeed true that once the super sensual realm is discarded, its opposite the world of appearances as understood for so many centuries, is also annihilated. The sensual, as still understood by positivists, cannot survive the death of the super sensual. No one

knew this better than Nietzsche who, with his poetic and metaphoric description of the assassination of God in Zarathustra, has caused so much confusion in these matters. In a significant passage in *The Twilight of Idols*, he clarifies what the word God meant in Zarathustra. It was merely a symbol for the super sensual realm as understood by metaphysics; he now uses instead of God the word true world and says: "We have abolished the true world. What has remained? The apparent one perhaps? Oh no ! with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one."² It is obvious that the study of religion, its institutions and history cannot be kept limited to the study of its phenomena because such a study in order to be complete must essentially embrace the study both of its spiritual and empirical aspects. In this context Dr. Huston Smith writes, "Ninian (Smart) approaches religion from the angle of phenomenology and the social sciences, whereas, a philosopher, find phenomenology confining. Ontology is too central to be bracketed."³

This observation is particularly valid in the case of the study of a religion like Sikhism in which the Gurus establish an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. In fact, transcendence is fundamental. Every couplet in the over fourteen hundred pages in the *Guru Granth Sahib* stresses that there is a higher level of Reality than the physical reality we perceive with our senses, and, unless we work in tune with that Reality, our problems of conflict, disharmony and war will not be solved. The Guru clearly envisages three stages of the progress of life, after God had expressed Himself. "First, He manifested Himself; second, He created the individuality; third, He created multifarious entities; and fourth is the highest level of the God-conscious being who always lives truthfully."⁴ And, it is this destiny of man, the Guru exhorts him to fulfil. "O man, you are supreme in God's creation, now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."⁵ This is Guru's thesis in the *Guru Granth*. According to it, real knowledge comes from the area of the transcendent. He is the Teacher who enlivens man's spiritual dimension and gives him a universal consciousness and a discriminatory vision. This realm is noetic. It was the knowledge thus gained that made Guru Nanak change radically almost every religious doctrine that stood accepted in the earlier three thousand years of Indian history. Against the world being illusory, delusive (*Mithya*, *Maya*) or a place of suffering or misery, he called it real and

meaningful; against asceticism, monasticism and Sanyasa, he accepted the householder's life and full social participation and responsibility; against celibacy and woman being sin-born, he gave religious sanctity to marriage and equality to women; against the rigidity of Varn Ashram Dhanna and the institution of caste and pollution, he stated that yoga lies not in one-point meditation but in treating all men as one's equal; against withdrawal from life and taking to renunciation and Sanyasa, he stressed that he knows the way who works and shares his earnings with others. There was nothing new in the social milieu to warrant this radical thesis. And, yet, scholars employing the methodology and tools of social sciences say: Guru Nanak contributed no new religious thought; Sikhism is hardly a religion; it is a combination of Vaisnavism and Nathism, two cults recommending celibacy and withdrawal from life, and accepting caste discrimination or that it is a peasant faith. For the Guru, God is the source of truth, knowledge and energy; that way alone we can explain the revolutionary activities of Muhammad and Guru Nanak. That is why in Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism God is given the symbol of Light and in Islam and Sikhism he is called "Truth". For the man of faith the door to truth is through the spiritual dimension of man. For the social sciences the only reality is the physical world and science constitutes the exclusive door to its secrets, the mystic world being just unexplored area of darkness. But, for Guru Nanak, unless man wakens his spiritual dimension, he cannot know reality nor live a truthful and harmonious life in this world; for, spirituality forms the base of all moral life. Schweitzer, while surveying the entire field of western thought, comes to the dismal conclusion that there is no trace of the ethical in the reflective thought of man. That is why for the social sciences morality is just a defense mechanism or a reaction formation in response to environmental impacts, religion too being a similar behavioural phenomenon without any separate or independent roots.

It is in this context that William Nicholls feels that the culture and consciousness of the modern secular universities are unsuitable to interpret the culture and consciousness of the authors of scriptures, "In so far as we adopt the culture of the secular university, we are systematically in opposition to the texts we are studying. In so far as we take our texts seriously, and are successful in interpreting the intention of their writers,

we are in opposition to the university and its culture.⁶ Nicholls cites the following typical case of distortion by Morton Smith who is blind to the colossal spiritual energies generated by Christ and the phenomenal response he had over the centuries in shaping history and men. "A striking example of this limitation may be observed in the work of one of the most brilliant and respected present-day scholars. Morton Smith.

His recent book, *The Secret Gospel*, begins as a piece of literary detection which compels admiration, but it takes a startling nose dive at the point that it comes to the historical substance of the matter. On the basis of a second century source of doubtful provenance, which he prefers to more central sources on no other apparent ground than that it was secret, Smith believes he has unmasked the truth about Jesus—he was really a magician, and perhaps one who used homosexual practices in his rites of initiation. The fact that this theory is shocking to the susceptibilities of the believer is not an argument against its truth. After all, many simple Christians will be almost as disturbed by the growing consensus of scholarship that Jesus was thoroughly Jewish and had no thought of founding a new religion. What is more to the point is the total inability of such a theory to explain how such a person could also have been the originator of the lofty spiritual teachings to which both the Gnostic and ecclesiastical traditions bear witness.⁷ What needs to be emphasized is that religious phenomena or history is intimately related to, if not the product and expression of, its spiritual base. Both components have to be studied together one cannot be fruitfully studied in isolation of the other. No wonder Nicholls writes, "Thus, it can seem somewhat ludicrous to watch scholars in religious studies abdicating a function they alone can perform and bowing down to the latest theories in anthropology, which seem unable to recognize in religion anything beyond a highly abstract code for ordering data and uniting and separating bits of information. Even if it has to be acknowledged that religions may perform such functions, to suppose that this exhausts their role is to betray a crass failure to enter the outlook of other human beings, for whom religion was and perhaps still is a living reality, opening doors on to the spiritual dimension and raising their existence to a higher level.⁸

We do not say that an anthropologist or sociologist should not study religion, but it would only be an anthropologist's or sociologist's view of religion by the use of his own

methodology. Whereas the anthropologist is entitled to express his point of view about a religion, the reader is also equally entitled to know that the study is by an anthropologist by the use of an anthropologist's methodology. Because, from the point of view of the man of religion, such studies would be limited in their scope, partial in their vision and inadequate as a study of man in the totality of his being and functioning, i.e., of his spiritual and empirical life.

There is also another related point. In the study of religion it is not only necessary to know the methodology the author is using, but it is important to know who the writer is and what is his own faith or training. Unlike as in science, religion is also the study of the inner life of man. It is, therefore, relevant and necessary to know about the religious belief and background of the writer, i.e., whether or not he accepts the existence of the transcendent or the supra-sensual elements. It is in this context that Dr. Noel Q. King writes, "One general conclusion which I draw from a long study of the critics, of which the above is a sketch, is that it is most important to remember the personality and circumstance of the critic. In a Natural Science like chemistry it may not be necessary to know anything about the human being who is writing. In any subject which entails human subjects, the work must be put into a personal context. Accordingly, one feels every work of critical scholarship should have a government Statutory warning that its consumption may be deleterious to the soul's health. If it is to do with religion, it should also have a statement of ingredients, including the religious standing of the writer. If he or she is a believer, it is necessary to know this, so that the critical reader can allow for bias. If he or she is not a believer, we should have some indication of that too, lest the disillusionment or enlightenment of a post-Christian, a post-Jew or a post-whatever should give the critic rosy-coloured spectacles or a jaundiced outlook.⁹ Let us quote C.G. Jung about objectivity of Sigmund Freud, "There was no mistaking the fact that Freud was emotionally involved in his sexual theory to an extraordinary degree. When he spoke of it, his tone became urgent, almost anxious, and all signs of his normally critical and skeptical manner vanished. A strange, deeply moved expression came over his face, the cause of which I was at a loss to understand. I had a strong intuition that for him sexuality was a sort of numinosum. This was confirmed by a conversation, which took place some three years later (in

1910), again in Vienna. I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, 'My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.' He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, 'And promise me this one thing, my dear son, that you will go to church every Sunday.'¹⁰ It is strange that Freud, who was basing his theories on and interpreting the dreams of others, including those of Jung, was curiously enough anxious to conceal his own and his private life. The motive for such concealment could hardly be academic or scientific. Jung writes, "Freud had a dream-I would not think it right to air the problem it involved. I interpreted it as best I could but added that a great deal more could be said about it if he would supply me with some additional details from his private life. Freud's response to these words was a curious look - a look of the utmost suspicion. Then he said, 'But I cannot risk my authority.' At that moment he lost it altogether. That sentence burned itself into my memory; and in it the end of our relationship was already foreshadowed. Freud was placing personal authority above truth."¹¹

We quote the instance of another great man. It is well known that the followers of Ramanuja, a philosopher of Bhakti, are very particular that the food they eat is undefiled. Therefore, the rule had been that if while cooking or eating the food another person cast a glance on it, the entire food was thrown away and the food cooked and eaten again. This being the Vaisnava culture, let us record what Mahatma Gandhi, a protagonist of the Hindu tradition, writes, ".....but for years I have taken nothing but fruit in Mohammedan or Christian household.....In my opinion the idea that interdining and intermarrying is necessary for national growth is a superstition borrowed from the West. Eating is a process just as vital as the other sanitary necessities of life. And if mankind had not, much to its harm, made of eating a fetish and an indulgence, we would have performed the operation of eating in private even as we perform other necessary functions of life in private. Indeed the highest culture in Hinduism regards eating in that light and there are thousands of Hindus still living who will not eat their food in the presence of anybody."¹² It is not our object to deride anyone, but we wish only to show that cultural or personal prejudices die hard, and these consciously or unconsciously colour one's vision. It cannot, thus, be denied

that in the study of religion objectivity of vision can, at best, be only limited. It is, therefore, essential to know of the background, beliefs and predilections of the author in order to enable the reader to assess and appreciate the value of his views and the slant of his vision. In scientific studies the data and facts are mechanical, quantitative and special that are generally measurable by fixed and accepted yardsticks. Even in that field we have come to a stage where the observer's relative position in space and time affects his measurement and inferences. In the matter of religion the difficulties of unbiased assessment are far too great because here the field of study is primarily the emotional, the moral and the spiritual life of an individual or his society. An illustration would be relevant. Two ideas are intimately connected with the martyrdom of Christ, namely, that of the act of redemption and of the resurrection of Christ. Howsoever one may view these ideas, it would, indeed, be impossible to understand and interpret the moral base and development of Christianity without accepting their validity, the deep faith and response they inspired and the abiding influence they exercised on the early Christian society. In the same way, it is fundamental to the Sikh religion, as stated by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus in their hymns, that God had revealed Himself to them and that their hymns embody the commands of God. Therefore, in spiritual matters the genuineness of an idea is indicated by the spiritual and moral faith it evokes in the hearts of the people concerned. We do not urge that a sociologist or an anthropologist is debarred from evaluating religious matters and developments. But, the man of faith has also the right to know the writer's belief, i.e., whether he is an atheist, a materialist, an evolutionist, a Marxist or a sociologist. We shall specify our point still further. W.H. McLeod, while evaluating the originality of the religious thesis of Guru Nanak, writes that it is misleading to suggest that he originated a school of thought or a set of teachings.¹³ As against it Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, the Muslim philosopher and scholar, finds in the entire panorama of Indian religious history only two tall persons, namely, Lord Buddha and Guru Nanak.¹⁴ These contrasted assessments might be explained by the fact that whereas McLeod has for many years been a part of a local Christian missionary organization in the Punjab, for Muhammad Iqbal, Guru Nanak is the only man of God in India, who like Prophet Muhammad combined the spiritual life and the empirical life of man and started a religion of the 'deed',

proclaiming and preaching the Oneness of God and the brotherhood of man. Another student of cultural history, H.S. Oberoi, views Islam and Sikhism in altogether a different light. "Sikh religion is first and foremost a peasant faith. Sociologists have often spoken of how Islam is an urban religion, Sikhism may be spoken of as rural religion. When dealing with the beliefs, rituals and practices of the Sikhs - be they religious or political-it is always worthwhile to constantly remind ourselves that we are fundamentally dealing with the peasantry and the world-view of this social class has historically always been very different from other social classes. A lot of knotty issues to do with Sikh studies would become easier to solve if we stop applying paradigms that have developed out of the study of urban social groups -merchants, middle-class or city workers-and deploy concepts that relate to the day-to-day life of the peasantry."¹⁵

In the above context, two points can hardly be overemphasized, namely, what is the methodology of study a scholar is using and what are his personal belief and background, i.e., whether the study, examination or interpretation is under the discipline of sociology, anthropology or religion.

Next is the issue of breaking the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. In most religions for one reason or the other, this dichotomy exists; and it is more so in the Indian religions in which asceticism, monasticism, celibacy and ahimsa are almost the essential features of the religious life. In India, Guru Nanak was the first person to break this dichotomy, and proclaim a religion of life-affirmation, with emphasis on moral life of man. Monasticism, asceticism and celibacy had become such essential symbols of the religious life that the Naths questioned Guru Nanak how he was claiming to follow the religious path while living the life of a householder. Similar doubt was expressed by Sant Ram Dass of Maharashtra when he found the Sixth Guru riding a horse armed like a Warrior. The Guru's reply was clear and categoric. He said that Guru Nanak had given up mammon but had not withdrawn from the world, and that his sword was for the defence of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. In short, it is the Sikh doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri* which looks odd to votaries of pacifist religions. Outside India Moses and Prophet Muhammad broke this dichotomy and each created a religious society that not only

sought to tackle the socio-political problems of man but also sanctioned the use of force for a moral purpose. On account of this difference between the pacifist and non-pacifist religions and the consequent differences in conditioning by the respective traditions, persons like Toynbee are critical of the socio-political activities of Prophet Muhammad and Indians like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Jadunath Sircar are critical of the militancy of Guru Gobind Singh. In contrast we have already quoted the eulogy of Muhammad Iqbal in admiration of the lofty religious proclamation Guru Nanak made in India. Similarly, it was Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim Sufi saint, who was so inspired by Guru Gobind Singh that he not only sent his followers and sons to fight for the cause of the Guru, but two of his sons actually sacrificed their lives while fighting in the army of the Guru. The annals of man hardly record another instance of this kind where a saint of a living religion should sacrifice his sons for the cause of a man of God of a different religious faith, especially while his co-religionist should be the ruling emperor of the day. We, therefore, wish to emphasize that scholars drawn from the pacifist cultural background so often fail to understand the Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination, or the doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri* and the saint-soldier, logically following from the ideology of Guru Nanak that combines the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This is exactly the reason that despite the ideological basis explained by the sixth Guru himself, scholars with the pacifist background try to find extraneous but fantastic reasons for militancy on the part of the Sikh Gurus while pursuing a righteous cause. This is what some western scholars write. "The indigenous elements in Sikhism are largely those customs of the tribes of Jats, who made Sikhism their own, and the marginal elements are those of the Nath Yogi tradition, which with Vaisnava Bhakti was primarily responsible for the Sant synthesis."¹⁶ "The teachings of Nanak do not have a direct causal connection with the later growth..... which should be understood largely in terms of the historical events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."¹⁷ Little do these scholars realize that tribal traits of character have never given rise to new religious ideologies. It is a significant fact of modern scholarship that whereas not a single Muslim scholar finds the least discontinuity between the ideology of first Gurus and the later Gurus, it is only some scholars drawn from the pacifist traditions that discern any discordance between the ideology of Guru

Nanak and that of Guru Gobind Singh. And, since both in India and the West most of the scholars are drawn from the pacifist background and traditions, this is the second problem concerning Sikh studies.

Partly related to the first two problems is the third issue arising from the increasing secularization of modern life. For the last over two centuries religion has been virtually excluded from the socio-political life of the Western countries. The position in the Communist countries is also the same. Keeping the danger of secularism in view the representatives of North American Churches suggested: "The American view was that there are three realities: Christianity, other religions, and secularism, and that these three realities can be either allies or enemies. It was argued that Christians had to choose whether they were to ally themselves with the other religions against secularism. The Americans, especially the Boston Personalists who were leading the debate at that time, took the view that secularism is a common danger for all religions and, therefore, there must be an alliance of all religions to fight secularism. European theologians, particularly Barth, Brunner, and Kramer took a totally different view. They maintained that secularization, not secularism, is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas."¹⁸

The rise of modern national state is something which Toynbee laments: "This transfer of allegiance from the Western Christian Church to parochial Western secular states was given a positive form-borrowed from the Graeco-Roman Civilisation-by the Renaissance." "On this political plane the Renaissance revived the Graeco-Roman worship of parochial states as goddesses." "This unavowed worship of parochial states was by far the most prevalent religion in the Western World in A.D. 1956."¹⁹ This has led to a contradiction. For, where there is a war between two national states, the churches of the opposing states pray to God for the victory of their own state, thereby bringing into ridicule the very institution of religion and the Church. We have already stated that in Sikhism the integral combination of the spiritual life and the empirical life of man has led to the doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri*. But, an outsider while reading a paper at an academic conference on Hindu and Sikh religions, views the issue quite differently. He says, "Sikh scholars see the

miri-piri concept as an inseparable whole in the religious order. Non-Sikhs have come to see a religion-politics linkage in Sikhism and deduct the root cause of the current crisis in Punjab to this."²⁰ Another scholar is critical of the Sikhs for their anxiety to maintain a separate religious identity. He writes: "But when it comes to the Indians belonging to religions which originated within India, such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, many a Hindu regard -them as downright unpatriotic or unspiritual or both, if they wish to maintain their distinct identity from the Hindus."²¹ In a similar strain another scholar questions the relevance- and role of religion in the field of social reform or justice. He writes, "Untouchability has been abolished by political legislation. Government steps are persistently being taken to uplift the castes considered backward so far. As such, the very point against which original Sikhism had reacted no longer remains a point of contention. Moreover, the problem of social inequality and the consequent demand for justice no longer remains a province of religious organization. It is the government agencies who have to look into the problem in order to eradicate social inequality and provide social justice. As such, the problem has shifted its locale from the religious to the political."²²

We have given the above examples to indicate that men of religion feel that in view of the growing secularization of modern life and a consequent tendency to encroach on the religious field, it is not only necessary that religion should be studied with the tools of its own discipline, but that the funding and functioning of such academic studies should be kept free from the influences of the modern state and its secular life.



SECTION II
IDEOLOGY

IDEA OF GOD IN SIKHISM

The concept of God is the fundamental which forms the entire structure and world-view of a religious system. God has been described in numerous ways, but there are seven significant aspects which need particular mention in order to explain the concept of God in Sikhism. The understanding of these aspects is extremely essential, because these have a far reaching effect and consequence in governing the life of the Sikh and in following the significance; origin and course of Sikh traditions, institutions and practices.

Creator

God is the Creator (Creator-Person) of the universe which is His creation. The universe is in time and space and is changing and becoming. God is not identical with the universe. The Creator is different from the creation which is limited and conditioned. God is uncreated, free and unlimited and thus different from His creation. God is not the material cause of the universe. But, no independent Prakriti is assumed. He creates everything.

The Universe is not illusory or unreal. Since God is limitless and Omnipresent, the creation is in God but not God. The very concept of a Creator-God implies a universe as the creation of God and different from Him: "God created the world of life and planted Naam (Immanent God) therein."¹ "The Self-Existent God manifested Himself into Naam. Second came the creation of the world. He permeated it and reveals in His creation."² "He created all, fills all, and is yet separate."³ There are many hymns in the Guru Granth which mention that God was there even before He created the universe, He being Transcendent Himself starts the creation. "He is the Sole-creator. There is no second one."⁴ "For

millions of aeons the Timeless One was by Himself." "God was by Himself and there was nothing else."⁵ "There was no love or devotion. Nor was His creative power in operation."⁶ Again, in answer to the question of the Yogis, "When there was no sign and no form, where was the Word (Sbabad or Logos) and how was He identified with Truth?"⁷, the Guru replied, "When there was no form, no sign, no individuation, the Word in its Essence abided in the Transcendent God; when there was no Earth, no sky (Time or Space) the Lord permeated everything. All distinction, all forms, then abided in the Wonderful Word. No one is pure without Truth. Ineffable is this gospel."⁸

The Gurus say that before He created Form, He was all by Himself; before He was Immanent He was Transcendent only; and yet all immanence, expression, creativity, were inherent in Him and so was His Word, in essence. "In the religion of Truth, God creates perpetually, watches His creation with a Benevolent eye. He is happy about it and deliberates over it, directing it with His Will."⁹ It means God is Ever-Creative. He has been called Ever-New, Ever-Fresh and Blooming (Nit-navan, Navtan).

The above gives a clear idea of the creative activity of God and the cosmological aspect of His creation which is distinct from Him.

Transcendent and Immanent

God is both Transcendent and Immanent. He is both in the universe and outside it. The Self-created or Transcendent God was always there.

(a) Transcendent: While time and space, force and change are the aspects of the becoming universe, God is Eternal, Self-existent and cannot be conceived or explained in empirical terms. His being Limitless and Timeless cannot be understood in terms of space and temporal time. He is beyond space and beyond time. The first Guru describes the state of God when there was no universe of time and space. It only shows God's Transcendent character. In Sidh Gost(i), in answer to a question as to where was the Transcendent God before the stage of creation, Guru Nanak replied, "To think of the Transcendent Lord in that state is to enter the realm of wonder. Even at that stage of Sunn (Void), He permeated all that Void."¹⁰ The Guru, in effect, means that to matters that are beyond the spacio-temporal world, it would be wrong to apply the

spado-temporal logic, and yet man knows of no other logic or language. Perforce, he has to be explained, howsoever inadequately or symbolically, only in terms of that language. That is why the Gurus have cautioned us against the pitfalls and inadequacy of human logic to comprehend the Timeless One.¹¹ He is Entirely Different. All the same, the Guru has mentioned the state when the Transcendent God was all by Himself and there was no creation. "When there was no form in sight, how could there be good or bad actions. When God was in the Self-Absorbed State, there could be no enmity or conflict. When God was all by Himself, there could be no attachment or misunderstanding."¹² "For millions of aeons the Timeless One was by Himself. There was no substance or space, no day or night (i.e. no time), no stars or galaxies, God was in His Trance."¹³ That state of God is not to be envisaged in terms of limitless space or time but in terms of spacelessness and timelessness, i.e. something beyond the categories of space and time, something beyond a relative world. Actual space and time are the dimensions of a becoming, relative or changing universe. With these categories we understand and assess the Universe in which we live. The nature of God transcends all known categories with which we describe the universe. The Gurus again and again describe Him as Wondrous, Infinite, Unfathomable, Unknowable, Indescribable, Ineffable and Immeasurable by human categories of thought and perception. We at best can only assess things by our own standard and measures which are of a limited and relative character, being the categories of a becoming universe. We, therefore, cannot completely comprehend God who is beyond us and unconditioned and unfettered by those dimensions and limits. God, who is the Creator of these limitations, cannot be judged by the yardstick of those created limitations within which we move, perceive, conceive, live and assess. Ultimately the Guru calls Him Wondrous the Wonder of Wonders, i.e. He is beyond description and comprehension or, 'Wholly Other' as described by Otto. "The mind alone can never know Him".

(b) Immanent: The Immanent aspect of God has been variously described as His Will that directs the Universe, His Word that informs the universe and His Naam that not only creates the entire universe but sustains and governs the creation. According to the Gurus, God creates the universe, then becomes Immanent in it, being at the same time Transcendent. "He that

permeates all hearts (Immanent) is Transcendent too."¹⁴ "He pervades and is yet detached."¹⁵ He creates all, fills and is yet separate."¹⁶ "Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and yet is separate from it."¹⁷ In Sikhism God is believed to be both Transcendent and Immanent. In Islam God is supposed to be only Transcendent, even though the Immanent aspect of God appears to be recognised when it is said, "God is nearer to you than your jugular vein". In Christianity, the Immanent aspect of God is clearly accepted and emphasized. This Immanence of God does not mean that God has two stages; but it is only a symbolic way of expressing God's connection with the world. Naturally, when the world is not there the question of His Immanence does not arise. That is why when there was no form, the Word (immanence) in essence abided in the Transcendent God."¹⁸

The Gurus' statements about the Immanence of God are just to emphasize the spiritual and meaningful character of life and the universe and its capacity for relationship with God. They envisage only one God which has various characteristics as indicated in the Mul Mantra. Just as the Transcendent and Immanent aspects of God, all description of Him seeks to define only one and the same God. The term Transcendent describes Him as "Wholly Other". The Immanent aspect indicates the same God's love for his Creation. As in any theism, in Sikhism the Immanent aspect of God, called His Naam, Will and Shabad, is of great importance. On the one hand, it gives relevance, authenticity, direction and sanction to the entire moral and spiritual life of man and his institutions and goals. On the other hand, it emphasizes God's capacity for revelation and nearness to man and His deep and abiding interest in the world. It is almost impossible to conceive of a theistic system without the Immanence of God. It is on the assumption of the Immanence of God that most of the theistic institutions are based. In any system where God is only Transcendent, all moral and spiritual life and yearning would become pointless, irrelevant and superfluous.

Here a few words of clarification. When we say that God is both Transcendent and Immanent, it does not at all mean that there are two parts or phases of God. It is the Transcendent God who is everywhere, in each heart, place and particle and near the vein of the neck. It is He who is both *sargun* and *nirgun*. "The same God is *sargun* and *nirgun*, nirankar and Self God

Absorbed (*Sunn Samadhi*).¹⁹ "God is near, no far away."²⁰ "He is in the Creation, He is the Ek Omkar and no Other who permeates everywhere."²¹ The Gurus repeatedly emphasize that He is One and we only give Him different names. But it would be highly inappropriate to confuse the Gurus' concept of sargun and nirgun (i.e. One Transcendent cum Immanent God) with the Advaitic connotation of these terms as also of Ishvara. These Advaitic concepts have distinct connotation of phases, stages or transformation. These have been clearly repudiated by the Gurus by their concept of One God. Shankra deems Ishvara to be a lower stage of God which has to be transcended to reach the higher stage of Brahm. For Ramanuj a God is virtually pantheistic. The world, souls and Ishvara are three eternal principles. The world and souls are the body and qualities of Brahm. The three eternal principles of Ishvara, souls and the world constitute the Brahm, which is an entirely different concept from that of the One Creator, God of the Gurus, who is simultaneously Transcendent, Immanent and Everything. The Gurus never accept the Advaitic concepts of sargun and nirgun. Similarly in the hymn of Sach khand, the Guru calls the nirankar as One who resides, deliberates, creates and directs. He is Benevolent, Gracious and is delighted to see His Creation. But nirankar literally means the "Formless One" and similarly, has distinct Advaitic meanings. The hymn referred to above repudiates all those concepts and adds that Sach khand, the abode of God, is full of endless numbers of forms, universes and regions.

By the above two examples we wish to convey that it would be extremely erroneous and misleading to introduce old Indian or Advaitic concepts and meanings while interpreting the ideas and terms of the Gurus. In their hymns, they have made every term and concept used by them unambiguously clear. The Guru Granth is the best authority and 'interpretation to understand and convey the meanings of the concepts and terms used by the Gurus.

God of Attributes

The third aspect of God as flowing from the Immanent character of God is His being the 'Ocean of Attributes, Values and Virtues'. This aspect of God is of extreme significance to the validity and direction of moral life in the universe. Since all attributes are only relative, a God of Attributes indicates and lays

down the standard and ideals for which man has to work. God has been described as full of all values, as Father, Mother, Friend, Brother, Enlightener, Protector, Shelter of the shelterless, Loving, Benevolent, Beneficent and Helper of the poor and weak, etc., "My Lord is ever fresh new; He is always benevolent."²² "You are my Mother, You are my Father, You are my Protector everywhere."²³ "He relieves the sufferings of the downtrodden; Succour of the succourless."²⁴ "God is eyes to blind, riches to poor, ocean of virtues."²⁵

This theistic aspect of the Immanence of God is extremely important and inextricably links God with the universe. It establishes beyond doubt the character and direction of God's Will and Immanence. This leads to four important inferences. First, Attributes and Values can have a place only in a becoming, relative or spacio-temporal world since all perfection is static and all qualities are relative. A God of Attributes has thus a meaning only in relation to the changing world of man. Evidently, for the expression of attributes, a changing universe is essential, and becomes an integral part of the plan of God. In other words, God and universe are conjoint and interlinked, the latter depending on the former, because it is impossible to think of a God of Attributes or His Immanence in the absence of a relative or changing world. This is why, when God was by Himself, the question of 'love and devotion', of good or bad actions or of saved or Saviour, could not arise, there being nothing other than Him. Secondly, and this is the most important inference, virtues and attributes emphatically indicate, apart from the standards of ethical values and moral life, the direction in which human efforts should be made because these point out the purposes for which the Will of God works. Thirdly, it indicates the benevolent and perpetual interest of God in man and the universe. It, in a way, gives status and authenticity to life and the universe which is decried or downgraded in many other religious or mystic traditions. In addition, there is the benevolent character of God; since not only is He the Creator and Sustainer of it, He nurtures and develops it with a loving care. This gives optimism, hope and confidence to man in the achievement of his ideals and goals; because man knows the direction in which he should move, and he has also the assurance that there is someone to guide and help him with love in the achievement of those goals, God "rewards even an iota of good."²⁶ "God helps the erring, it being His Innermost Nature."²⁷

"He rewards your efforts and acknowledges your deeds; Life of life."²⁸ "God rewards all efforts to become divine."²⁹ "If you go one step towards God, He comes near you by ten steps, says Bhai Gurdas. All this shows the encouragement and aid received by man in his journey towards his goal. It also ensures a logical and deep interest of God in His created world and beings. This aspect of God is the most significant for man since it gives prominent meaning to life and full assurance of God's help for direction and aid in man's march towards his goal. God has also been called the "Enlightener" (Guru or guide) of man. Lastly, it gives validity and spiritual sanctity to moral and ethical life in the world. In many religious systems moral life is deemed only an entanglement in the world, and at best some systems accept it as a preparatory method of purity for the spiritual life to be attained. But, in Sikhism this Attributive aspect of God gives spiritual character to moral life per se. This is a fundamental implication of God being a God of Attributes.

God of Will

The Gurus' God is a God of Will, everything is governed by His Will. This is the burden of so many hymns in the Guru Granth. "Everything happens within the ambit of His Will."³¹ The concept of a God of Will also points out and emphasizes some of the aspects of God mentioned already. He being a God of Will the entire universe is created, sustained, and moved according to His Will and Purpose. A God of Will naturally presupposes that He wants the universe to move not chaotically but with a Purpose. Just as in the case of a God of Attributes, God's Will too can be exercised only in a changing world and towards a goal since the very idea of Will implies a direction and an aim. This, too, re-emphasizes the same features and points as stated in regard to a God of Attributes, namely, God is guiding life towards a direction and purpose. The direction is governed by the Attributes of God and the Purpose is to evolve a God-centred man from a self-centred individual. God being, in this view, a God of Will, the highest goal of life is 'naturally to carry out His Will. The superman thus becomes on this earth the instrument of God's Will and Creativity.' Here a word of explanation. A God of Will does not at all mean a deterministic world, because God is creative and all movement in life is towards a creative freedom.

God does not Incarnate

Another concept about God is that He does not come into the human form and is not born, nor incarnates. In the Mul Mantra God has been mentioned as one who never takes birth or form. The fifth Guru says, "May that mouth bum which says that God has incarnated."³² "God alone is not born of a woman".³³ "The Lord incarnates not."³⁴ "God is self-existent, without form and incarnates not."³⁵ The Gurus have definitely decried belief in the theory of incarnation, and in order to dispel such ideas, have stated that He created countless Brahmas, Shivas, Krishnas and Ramas.³⁶ Here too the idea that God never takes the human form has a distinct meaning and import. First, it shows that God is "Wholly Other" than man. For a God that is Transcendent and Unknowable, the question of His taking the human form does not arise. Secondly, all pantheistic and life implications as flowing from the idea of a God who takes human form have to be shed. Besides, the concept has three other corollaries, too. First, that man can never become God. This also involves that God and man are not identical but are different. Secondly, that the aim of spiritual effort is not merger in God as under some systems, but the ideal of man is to have a union or relation with Him. This, therefore, has a crucial significance in determining the human goal and in showing that the entity of man is distinct from that of God, and the two can never be one. Thirdly, it shows that spiritual activity is not stopped after the final achievement, and the superman has a role to perform in carrying out the Will of God. Consequently, so long as the universe is there and the Will of God is in operation, the activities, role and duties of the superman too do not come to an end.

God of Grace

In the Mul Mantra, God is called Gracious and Enlightener. A God of Will and a God of Grace have a meaning only in a becoming world wherein alone His Grace and Will can operate. In addition, it also stresses the love and benevolence of God towards man and the universe which are different from Him. For a Gracious being can bestow his Grace only on something other than Himself. It has been emphasized again and again that all "final approval of man is an act of Grace of God."³⁷ "All merits, miracles, intuition, penance, goodness are of no avail; only

Grace works".³⁸ "Myriads of good actions, heroic acts and losing life are vain without Grace."³⁹

The Grace aspect of God also fortifies the truth of the other implications as described earlier in relation to a God of Will and Attributes. In addition, it implies that God is Wholly other, Free and Creative. He is not governed by any empirical law known to us. His activity is therefore incomprehensible except in terms of His Grace or Freedom.

God with Personality

Another aspect of God is His Personality. In fact, the heading of a couple of hymns is specifically given as: "That Person" (So Purakh), wherein He is described "That Person is Pure that God Person is Pure, God is Fathomless and Limitless".⁴⁰ A God of Will, Freedom, Grace, Purpose and Attributes, i.e., a Controller, and Director of the Universe, can be conceived only in terms of a Personality. In the hymn of Sach khand, God is mentioned as Creating and Deliberating. He is Benevolent and is Delighted with His Creation. The emphasis on prayer and love towards God is there in almost all the hymns of Guru Granth. This can only mean that God is a Being with a Personality, to whom prayer can be directed and devotion and love expressed. Thus, the Creator, a God of Will, of Grace and of Attributes, who is Immanent in the world and controls it, can be conceived only as a God of Personality. Evidently these aspects of God are only in relation to the world. Nor is a God of Personality conceived in terms of the limited personality of man, who is a finite being in a becoming universe.

The Gurus describe numerous attributes of God, including social, political, aesthetic, metaphysical, ethical and moral ones. But, we have mentioned only these salient aspects and features of God, as would be very relevant to our discussion. True, He is wholly beyond our description, but the above is only a symbolic and inadequate way of expressing His Nature. Every student should be greatly concerned with these ideas, and concepts of God in understanding the ideological and practical implications of Sikhism. Many of its distinguishing features are deeply and directly connected with these theological aspects and concepts of God. They have a far-reaching effect in shaping and governing the life of the Sikh and the course of Sikh institutions, ethos and tradition.

CHAPTER III

NAAM IN SIKHISM

Introductory

1. Every religion has its world-view on which are based its concepts about Reality, the place of man in the universe, ethics and human goals. All students of Sikhism know that the concept of *Naam*, is fundamental to the gospel of the *Guru Granth* and the entire structure of its theology. In fact, Sikhism has often been called the *Naam Maarga* or the way of *Naam*. It is in this context that we shall endeavour to trace the salient features and implications of this concept which, we believe, holds the key to the understanding of the message of the Sikh Gurus, their religious and social ideas, and their world-view.

2. At the outset, we should like to make one point clear. This is about the language and the various traditional terms used by the Sikh Gurus. Since they were conveying their message to the mass of the people, both Hindus and Muslims, with a view to evoking a response in the very depths of their hearts, they have, for obvious reasons, used in their hymns the then current words and symbols from Indian languages and Persian and Arabic languages. And yet, one thing is patent even from a cursory study of the *Guru Granth* that the Gurus have, as was essential for the proper understanding of a new gospel, made the meaning of each concept, symbol and term employed by them unambiguously clear. Many a time the meaning of such words is entirely their own. Accordingly, we have refrained from tracing the meaning of *Naam* to its traditional usage and background. In fact, such an exercise could be even misleading and wasteful. We shall, therefore, base our arguments and inferences about *Naam* on the hymns in the *Guru Granth* and the accepted facts about the lives of the Sikh Gurus.

3. Let us now try broadly to indicate how *Naam* has been used in the *Guru Granth* where it appears in a majority of hymns. The Sikh Gurus have given the word *Naam*, a distinct and significant meaning which is far different from that of mere 'Name' or 'psychic factors' as understood in '*Naam-Roopa*' in the traditional literature.¹ The basic definition of *Naam* is contained in the *Sukhmani* and in some other quotations from the *Guru Granth*, given below:

- (i) '*Naam* sustains all regions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, all skies and stars, all forces and substances, all continents and spheres. *Naam* emancipates those who accept it in their heart. He, on whom is His Grace, is yoked to *Naam* and he reaches the highest state of development.'²
- (ii) '*Naam* is the Creator of everything. To be divorced from *Naam* is death.'³ 'All is created by *Naam*.'⁴ '*Naam* gives form to everything and through *Naam* comes all Wisdom or Light.'⁵
- (iii) '*Naam* extends to all creation. There is no place or space where *Naam* is not.'⁶
- (iv) '*Naam* is the 'Nine Treasures' and Nectar (*amrita*). It permeates the body.'⁷
- (v) '*Naam*, the immaculate, is unfathomable, how can it be known ? *Naam* is within us, how to get to it ? It is *Naam* that works everywhere and permeates all space. The perfect Guru awakens your heart to the vision of *Naam*. It is by the Grace of God that one meets such an Enlightener.'⁸

4. From the above verses it is clear that the Gurus do not use the word *Naam* in any restrictive sense, of its being a psychic factor or mere consciousness, but refer to it as the Highest Power, creating, informing, supporting and working the entire creation. In short, *Naam* is the Reality, supporting and directing the created worlds or the entire cosmos. There are numerous verses in the *Guru Granth* where *Naam* and God have been described synonymously. Both, *Naam* and God have been mentioned as "the Creator of the Cosmos" as "the Sustainer of the Universe", as "permeating and informing all things, beings, space and interspace" as "the treasure of virtues values", as "the support of the supportless" as "the giver of Peace and bliss", as "eternal", "perfect" and "unfathomable", as the "Friend", "Master" and "Emancipator" of man. The highest state of man is

mentioned as the one when he lives and works in tune with God or *Naam*, often called God's *Naam*. We, therefore, find that God and *Naam*, are real, eternal and unfathomable. The Sikh Gurus have repeatedly emphasized, as is also stated in the very opening verse of the *Guru Granth*, that God is one *Ek Oamkaar*, and no second entity, as in the case of the Sankhya system, is at all postulated. The Guru says, "My Lord is the only One. He is the only One, (understand) brother, He is the only One".⁹ This unambiguously brings out that God and *Naam* are one and the same, and the latter may be called the immanent or qualitative aspect of God, since God has been described both as unmanifest (*nirguna*) and manifest (*sarguna*).

5. In view of the above, we should define *Naam* as the Dynamic Immanence of God or the Reality sustaining and working the manifest world of force and form. It is on the basis of these fundamentals that we should like to trace and understand some important concepts and conclusions, ideas and institutions, trends and traditions in Sikhism, and its socio-religious way of life.

6. ***Naam and Cosmology***: The Guru writes, "The Self-existent God manifested Himself into *Naam*. Second came the Creation of the Universe. He permeated it and reveals in His creation."¹⁰ "God created the world of life, He planted *Naam* in it, and made it the place for righteous action."¹¹

7. Thus, according to the concept of *Naam* and the hymns quoted earlier in this regard, God created the world and in His immanent aspect, as *Naam*, is informing and working it. Only one entity, namely, God, is envisaged and the world, in time and space, is His creation, the same being supported and directed by *Naam*. Let us see if this cosmological view is also supported by other verses in the *Guru Granth*.

8. In the very opening verse of the *Guru Granth*, God is described as the Sole-One, His *Naam* as Real, Creator-Lord... Timeless Person, One that is not born, Self-existent¹². The Gurus have clearly described at a number of places that there was a stage when the Transcendent God was by Himself; and it is later that He started His Creative Activity. In *Sidh Gost*, in answer to a question as to where was the Transcendent God before the stage of creation,¹³ Guru Nanak replied, "To think of the Transcendent Lord in that state is to

enter the realm of wonder. Even at that stage of sunn (Void), He

permeated all that Void."¹⁴ The Guru, in effect, means that to matters that are beyond the spacio-temporal world, it would be wrong to apply the spacio-temporal logic, and yet man knows of no other logic or language. Perforce, he has to be explained, howsoever inadequately or symbolically only in terms of that language. That is why the Guru has cautioned us against the pitfalls and inadequacy of human logic and language to comprehend the Timeless One. All the same, the Guru has mentioned the state when the Transcendent God was all by Himself and there was no creation. The Gurus say, "When there was no form in sight, how could there be good or bad actions? When God was in the Self-Absorbed state, there could be no enmity or conflict. When God was all by Himself, there could be no attachment or misunderstanding. Himself He starts the Creation. He is the Sole-Creator, there is no second One."¹⁵ "For millions of aeons the Timeless One was by Himself. There was no substance or space, no day or night '(i.e. no time), no stars or galaxies; God was in His Trance."¹⁶ "God was by Himself and there Was nothing else... There was no love or devotion, nor was His creative Power in operation...When He willed, He created the Universe."¹⁷ The same idea is expressed in these words, "When He willed, the creation appeared."¹⁸ Again, in answer to the question of the Yogis, "When there was no sign and no form, where was the Word (Logos) and how was He identified with Truth ?"¹⁹ The Guru replied, "When there was no form, no sign, no individuation, the Word in its Essence abided in the Transcendent God; when there was no earth, no sky, (Time or Space) the Lord permeated everything. All distinction, all forms, then abided in the Wondrous Word. No one is pure without Truth. Ineffable is this gospel."²⁰

9. In short, the Gurus say that before He created Form, He was Formless; before He was Immanent, He was Transcendent only; and yet all immanence, expression, creativity, were inherent in Him and so was His Word, in essence.

10. In the jap(u), where a picture of the realm of creativity is given, the Guru writes, "In the region of Troth is God where He perpetually creates and watches the universe with His benevolent eye, deliberating and directing according as He Wills."²¹ Further, it is stated, "In the region of Creativity (*Karam*) only God's Power or Force is at work."²² Again, "Of the region of construction or effort, the medium of expression is form. Here most fantastic forms are fashioned, including consciousness,

perception, mind, intellect."²³ Further still, "Innumerable creations are fashioned, myriads are the forms, myriads are the moons, suns, regions."²⁴ These hymns also indicate how the process of creativity, or a becoming world started and is being sustained and directed by a benevolent God.

11. In all the above quotations from the *Guru Granth*, the same idea is expressed, namely, that God is the Sole Entity; who in His Creative Urge has produced the Cosmos, which He, in His immanent aspect, *Naam*, is sustaining vigilantly and directing benevolently, according to His Will. In the created world no other entity, like *prakriti* in Sankhya and other dualistic systems, is assumed. While the world is Real and is directed by Immanent God, at no stage is the separate independent existence of matter accepted directly or by implication.

12. Metaphysical implication of *Naam* : We have seen that according to the concept of *Naam* and the hymns already quoted in this regard, God created Himself and *Naam*, and at the second place was created the universe. Further, that this universe is being sustained and directed by God as *Naam* or His Immanent aspect. This concept of God being the Sole Entity and being the Creator God (*Karta Purakh*) is so fundamental in the Sikh theology that it is mentioned in the very opening line (*Mul Mantra*) of the *Guru Granth* and in the beginning of almost every section and sub-section of it. Both the doctrine of *Naam* and the *Mal Mantra* clearly point out the theology of Sikhism being monotheistic. Let us, therefore, try to see whether this conclusion of ours is correct, and whether many of those hurriedly-begotten views about Sikhism being pantheistic, Vedantic, Sankhyic, Yogic or Buddhistic have any validity. A few of the reasons supporting our conclusion are as under:

- (i) Throughout the hymns of the *Guru Granth*, nothing is more significant than the acceptance of Creature-Creator relation between man and God. Invariably, God has been addressed as 'Thou', 'Mother', 'Father', 'Brother', 'Beloved', 'Lord', or 'Husband'. In fact, a majority of the hymns in the *Guru Granth* are in the form of prayers, addressed to God. In the Sikh tradition, two things are firmly established, having the sanction of the Gurus. First, every ceremony, religious or social, ends with an '*ardaas*' or supplication to God, invoking His Grace. Secondly, at the time of initiation ceremony (*Amrit* ceremony), a Sikh is enjoined upon to recite or hear daily *Jap(u)*, *jaap(u)*, *ten*

Sawayaas, Sodar(u), Rahraas and Sohilaa, besides reading or hearing of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Rahit Maryaada*, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1970, p. 35.) We thus see that both in the hymns of *Guru Granth*, and the Sikh tradition and practice, this Creature-Creator relation is never forgotten. So much so that the Guru calls himself as "the lowliest of the low"²⁵ and never does he mention another person as 'That is Thou'. According to tradition the fifth Guru declined to include in the *Guru Granth* a hymn by a contemporary saint, Bhagat Kaanhaa, saying, "I am He, O, I am the same,"²⁶ because this hymn was felt by the Guru to be evidently contrary to the Sikh thesis that man is not and can never be God though he can be His instrument.

- (ii) The arguments advanced to show the Creature-Creator relation in Sikhism and the importance of Prayer, *mutatis mutandis*, apply also to God having a Personality. We need hardly state that this idea of Personality in Theism is not analogous to the idea of limited personality in man, who is a finite being. In the very opening line of *Guru Granth*, God is mentioned as the Creating Person, the Timeless Person (*karta purakh, akaal moorat*). In fact, in all devotional and mystic religions the idea of Personality of God is inherent, since devotion involves God and a devotee.

In Sikhism the idea of the Will (*hukam, razaa*) of God in relation to the created world is as fundamental as in other theistic religions, like Christianity and Islam. In fact, both the words 'hukam' and 'razaa' used in the *Guru Granth* are Arabic in origin. The idea of Will is inalienably linked with the idea of Personality of God, the Creator, who alone can have a Will. In reality, we know that Will and *Naam* are virtually synonymous, both being the Immanence of God. While this point will be elaborated later on, it is well-known that in Sikhism the highest ideal for man is to 'carry out the Will of God'²⁷ or to link oneself with *Naam*.

Another fundamental characteristic of Sikhism showing the Personality of God is His Grace. One of the chief points made out in the *Guru Granth* is that nothing happens without God's Grace. While it is stated in the hymn of *dharam khand*, which lays down man's duties in life, that man's assessment will be

entirely according to his deeds'²⁸ it is clearly mentioned that final 'approval will be only by God's Grace'.²⁹ The idea of Personality, Will and Grace of God, being basic to Sikhism, this too underlines its theistic character.

- (iii) The verses quoted earlier mention Nature as the Creation of God and not His Emanation or Extension. Obviously, nature is a changing or becoming world, limited by space and time and cannot be eternal like God, who is beyond Time (*akaaal moorat*). Whereas God is Self-Existent or Self-created (*swai bhang*), nature is the creation of God. While everything in nature is changing, i.e., is born and dies, God is never born (*Ajoooni*). That is the reason that in Sikhism the doctrine of incarnation (avatarhood), or God taking the human form, is strictly denied and is considered heretical; so much so that Guru Gobind Singh described such an idea as an accursed one, he being only a mere servant of God.³⁰ This is also in line with the hymns in the *jap(u)* quoted earlier. Here the world is upto the Region of Creativity (*karam khand*) initiated through the medium of energy or power (*jor*). As indicated in the hymns of *saram khand* and *gyaan khand*, a fantastic multiplicity of forms, shapes and things, including the moulding of consciousness, sense perceptions, mind, intellect, etc., are described. Everyone knows that in Sikh theology the highest form of being is, the mystic (*bhagat*). In *jap(u)* the Guru distinctly mentions, or rather limits, the presence of these God-conscious or God-filled beings (*jin maih Raam rabiaa bharpoor*) only upto the Region of Creativity, but never beyond it, i.e. not in the Region of Truth or God (*§ach khand vase Nirankaar*). The Universe is the creation of God but not identical with God, which is the basic distinction between Monotheism and Indian monism or pantheism.
- (iv) At a number of places in the *Guru Granth*, the Guru has described symbolically the state of God when the creation was not there. All this indicates that God is Transcendent as well, and that He is not co-terminus or identical with His creation. Not only does the creation not exhaust God, but He is both prior to and Transcendent to His creation. And God's transcendence could be envisaged only under a monotheistic system and never in

pantheism.

- (v) An argument has been raised in favour of the supposed pantheistic character of Sikhism because of the Gurus' frequent mention of the immanent character of God in the created world. The Gurus have clearly emphasized the transcendental character of God by saying that the world was created in time and space and the Transcendent God had been there while the world was uncreated, and, for that matter, God's immanent character was unexpressed. We refer to the hymn quoted earlier in this regard. It is also stated that the Word was in God when there was no Universe or Form. The expression of *Naam* was prior to the creation of the Universe i.e. 'God manifested into *Naam* and at the second place the world was created.' As stated already, *Naam* is mentioned as the Creator and Director of the world. It is true that the Guru quite often mentions God as informing the universe. But in no scripture has the distinction between the Transcendent and the Immanent aspects of God been made more clear than in the *Guru Granth*, because God's Immanence has been given separate names, i.e. of *Naam*, Will and Word. Evidently, all immanence can be expressed only in relation to the realm of creation, i.e. when God's immanence as *Naam* creates, sustains and moves the world of name and form; when God's immanence as His Will controls and directs the becoming world; when His Immanence as His Word informs and supports the created universe. In other words, in the *Guru Granth* both the transcendent and the immanent aspects of God are clearly specified and distinguished so as to avoid any confusion or hasty conclusion that Sikhism is pantheistic. We have already seen that in Sikhism immanence of God in relation to the becoming world does not exhaust God and that is why God's immanent aspect has almost invariably been called His *Naam*, His Will, His Word. True, in a number of places, the Guru describes God as informing the river, the fish, the boat, and everything. Perhaps, it is such verses as these that have led some to the superficial conclusion of Sikhism being pantheistic. But, all these verses are only a symbolic or another way of expressing the immanence of God. In modern monotheistic theologies including Christian and Islamic, God's Transcendence and His Immanence in the created world are accepted. Even in Islam,

God's Immanence is referred to as, "Is He riot closer (to you) than the vein of thy neck."³¹ Such verses as these do not at all indicate anything beyond the immanence of God, or anything contrary to it. Obviously, God's immanence (His *Naam* and Will) is manifested and exercised only in relation to the created and becoming world. This description of His immanence and its operation, metaphoric as it is, can mislead no one to any erroneous inference, especially because the Gurus have clearly stated that the immanent God in the universe does not exhaust God and He is transcendent too. "He that permeates all hearts (Le. Immanent) is Unmanifest too."³² "He is pervading everywhere (Immanent) and yet He is beyond everything, beyond pleasure and pain (Transcendent)."³³ "He informs everything and yet is separate too."³⁴ "Having created the world, He stands in the midst of it and yet is separate from it."³⁵

- (vi) One of the chief objections to any pantheistic theology in the West is the lack of any ethical content and impact in any such view of the universe. Pantheistic philosophies, whether in the East, as in the case of Upanishads, or in the West, as in the case of Spinoza and Schopenhauer, lead to pessimism and fatalism, and lack of moral effort and responsibility on the part of the individual. The disastrous ethical consequences of pantheistic doctrines, including monism that downgrades the reality of the phenomenal world, are too well-known to be detailed here. In this context, we may like to see what is the ethical content and impact of the doctrine of *Naam*. In no religious system is the emphasis on ethical conduct greater than in the *Guru Granth* where "truthful living or conduct has been declared higher than Truth itself".³⁶ In the Jap(u), the Guru says that man's final assessment and approval before God will depend entirely on his deeds in this world.³⁷ Further, 'egoistic conduct' has been called 'the opposite of *Naam*',³⁸ which, as we find, involves selfless and virtuous conduct, *Naam* being the treasure of all virtues. Similarly, moral living is stressed, since the ideal in life is 'to carry out the Will of God', God's Will and *Naam* being virtually synonymous. Judged from the emphasis on virtuous life (the matter will be detailed while dealing later with the subject of goal, ethics, etc.) and moral responsibility in Sikhism and its anti-deterministic view, we should evidently conclude that Sikhism is monotheistic and

not pantheistic.

- (vii) There is a philosophic controversy whether or not mysticism of all kinds is monotheistic or pantheistic. Sikhism is undeniably based on mystical experience. But so are religions like Christianity and Islam which are fanatically monotheistic. It is well-known that many of the great Christian and Muslim mystics have been dubbed as heretical because their description of their mystical experiences could be misconstrued to support a pantheistic view of God, even though these mystics were devotedly religious and deeply reverential to their respective Prophets. Hence, the controversy hardly affects our argument.

13. True, some symbolic descriptions in the *Guru Granth*, which when seen out of their context and not seen against the overall background of Sikh theology and the overwhelming scriptural evidence to the contrary, could be misconstrued to suggest pantheistic inferences. But, such a view would obviously be not only far-fetched, but also opposed to the general thesis of the Gurus and the concept of *Naam*. The metaphysical implication of the doctrine of *Naam* clearly gives a monotheistic Import to Sikhism, which view we find is unmistakably in accordance with the accepted concepts in the *Guru Granth*.

14. *Naam*, and the Reality of the World and Interest in Life:

The greatest implication of the doctrine is in its proclaiming the dynamic reality and authenticity of the world and life. "God created the world of life and planted *Naam* therein, making it the place of righteous activity."³⁹ "God created the world and permeated it with His light."⁴⁰ Since *Naam*, God's Immanence, has not only created the world but is also supporting, controlling and directing it, the same cannot be unreal or illusory. In fact, *Naam*'s immanence in this world guarantees its being a place of righteous activity and not being a fruitless, unwanted or capricious creation. In one form or the other, this idea about the reality of the world gets repeated expression and emphasis in the *Guru Granth*. "True are thy worlds, true are Thy Universes, true Thy forms, Thou createth. True are Thy doings. This world is the Abode of the True One and He resides in it."⁴¹ "True is He, True is His Creation."⁴² "Human body is the Temple of God."⁴³ "Beauteous, O Farid, are the garden of earth and the human body."⁴⁴ "Deride not the world, it is the creation of God."⁴⁵

15. It naturally follows from this doctrine that the world is real and God is greatly interested in it, since - He has created it, He 'revels in His creation,⁴⁶ and is sustaining and directing it. In the jap(u) God is described as 'perpetually creating the world and benevolently nurturing His creation.'⁴⁷ 'God is the one, who works through winds, waters and fire.'⁴⁸ 'This emphatic assertion about the authenticity of the world is a clear departure from the Indian religious tradition, and is, for that matter, radical in its implication. The Gurus were extremely conscious of this fundamental change they were making, and that is why, both in their lives and in their hymns, they have been laying great and repeated stress on this aspect of their spiritual thesis, lest they should be misunderstood on this issue. Living in this world is not a bondage (*bandhan*) for them but a great privilege and opportunity. Not only is God benevolently directing the world in which He is immanent, but each one of us is 'yoked to His task and each is assigned a duty to perform.'⁴⁹ All this clearly indicates God's or *Naam's* plan and purpose in His creative activity.

16. This idea is also clear from the Gurus' reference, again and again, to God's Will, working in this becoming universe. The very idea of a God of Will clearly presupposes and implies, a direction, and a goal in the creative movement. The persistent interest of God in the creative movement is also obvious from the fact that the Guru calls Him 'the Protector' (*raakhaa*), 'Father' (*pitaa*), 'King-emperor' (*Padasbah*) and a 'Just Administrator' (*adlee*). In the jap(u) also, the Guru emphasizes the idea that God adjudges each according to his deeds in this world.

17. *Naam* has been described as the 'Treasure of Virtues and Qualities'. As a loving God with social and other attributes, He has been referred to as 'Father and Mother' (*maataa, pitaa*), 'Brother' (*bharaataa*), 'Friend' (*mittar*), 'Helper of the poor' (*gareeb nivaaj*), 'Shelter of the shelterless' (*nithaaviaan daa thaan*), 'Help to the Helpless' (*nidhiriaan di dhir*), 'Remover of suffering and pain' (*dukh bhanjan*), 'Merciful' (*raheem*), etc. God with attributes leads to three inferences. First, qualities have a meaning only in relation to a spatio-temporal world, since all perfection is static and all qualities are relative, capable of expression only in a changing universe. We have already seen that when God was by Himself and the world was not there, the question of good or bad, saved or saviour, love or devotion did not arise. *Naam*, being the source of all virtues, the world becomes an essential and

integral part of the plan of *Naamj* since without a world for expression there could be no Will and no attributive aspect of God. Thus, *Naam* and the world are conjoint. Secondly, qualities in *Naam* indicate clearly- and this is the most important aspect-the direction of the progress and the ideal to be pursued by man in this world. Thirdly, all this ensures a logical and deep interest of *Naam* in the empirical world, since its attributive expression can be made only in it. That is also exactly the reason why the Gurus' call the world real. Consequently, their message and mission also relate to this world, wherein alone these can be fulfilled. For the same reason, the Sikh Gurus' deep interest in all aspects of life, including socio-political aspects, can be directly traced to *Naam*, whose devotees they were. No feeling or prayer is expressed with greater depth and intensity than the one for the 'gift of *Naam*'. Now, *Naam* being the Benevolent Supporter and Director of the world, what can be the gift of *Naam* to the devotee, except that of an enlightened, loving and creative Interest in the world and in its development. How can one claim to be a devotee of *Naam* and ask for its gift or link with it, and, yet, decline to toe the line of *Naam*, namely, of nurturing and furthering the process of creativity and construction in the world rather than becoming an ascetic or a drop-out. That is why the Gurus have strongly condemned all ascetic and escapist practices. They say, "One reaches not Truth by remaining motionless like trees and stones, nor by being sawn alive."⁵⁰ "In vain are yogic practices, without *Naam* life is a waste."⁵¹ "All Yogic austerities, rituals, trance, etc., are in vain; real yoga is in treating alike all beings."⁵² "O Yogi, you are sitting in a trance, but you discriminate and have a sense of duality. You beg from door to door, are you not ashamed of it ?"⁵³ "Jainic asceticism", or "even if the body is cut into bits, does not efface the dirt of ego."⁵⁴

18. What kind of life the Gurus recommended, would be detailed while dealing with the subject of goal, but it would be pertinent to quote here the Guru's dictum that "by despising the world one gets not to God."⁵⁵

19. In Buddhism, *Nirvana* and *Samsara* are opposite entities.⁵⁶ In fact, in all Indian traditions, except in the case of the saints of the Bhakti movement, worldly life had normally to be given up in order to pursue the spiritual ideal. But according to the *Guru Granth* it is not

Naam and Samsara that are opposed, but *Naam* and *Haumain* (Egoism)⁵⁷, it is not worldly activity, as such, that has to be given up, but it is only egoistic and selfish activities that have to be shed.⁵⁸ Otherwise, belief in a God of attributes, which involves expression in the world of man, becomes meaningless.

20. The best understanding of the kind of interest in life the Gurus recommended for their disciples is gained from the lives they lived themselves. We shall revert to this point in a little detail while dealing with the issue of goal. Suffice it to say here that the Gurus, in harmony with the ethics of *Naam*, went in for full participation in life. For them it would have been incongruous, on the one hand to call life as real and on the other hand to fight shy of taking up the challenges of the socio-political life of their times.

21. All this was an ideological, deliberate and clear departure from the Indian religious tradition and the Gurus gave a firm lead on this new path. While eulogizing the role of Sikh Gurus in this regard, N. Ray laments the abject surrender to the vicious status-quo on the part of the saints of the Bhakti movement.⁵⁹

22. ***Naam* and Ethics:** On the one hand, *Naam* being (a) the Sustainer and Director of the universe, (b) opposed to egoism (*haumain*) and (c) the treasure of all qualities, lays down the standard of its ethics and, on the other, points out that the universe is the plane and place where the qualities of *Naam*

have to be expressed, so as to counteract and remove the vices of egoism and the practice of a sense of duality. Egoism involves separatism, selfishness, and individualism leading to the vices of greed, anger, pride, passion, conflict, wars, etc. 'The removal of duality is the way to God',⁶⁰ *Naam* being the opposite of ego, the same has been indicated as the only remedy for egoism, pain and frustration.⁶¹ In the same context the Gurus have mentioned two sets of people-one, the self-faced (*manmukh*) or egoistic, following the ethics of egoism and selfishness, and the other, the supermen or God-faced (*gurmukh*), following the ethics of *Naam*, in all phases of human activity. The ethics of *Naam* chooses its duties, virtues and value-system as consonant with the standard of *Naam* or a unitary view of life. Following are some of the verses in the *Guru Granth* condemning egoism and duality and instead recommending the virtues and spirit of *Naam*

so as to avoid and eliminate the vices of egoism:

"In the grip of *maya*, we grab what belongs to others."⁶²

"Man gathers riches by making others miserable."⁶³

"Human passions, ego, duality lead us away from God."⁶⁴

"God does not come near a person, hard of heart and with a sense of duality."⁶⁵ "Some people shun meat but devour men."⁶⁶ "With

God, only the deeds that one does in the world are of any avail."⁶⁷

"Good, righteousness, virtue and the giving up of vice are the ways to realize the essence of God."⁶⁸ "God's riches belong to all and it is the world that makes distinctions."⁶⁹

23. Thus, the entire progress of man is from being an egoist to being a man of *Naam* by shedding the ethics of egoism and accepting the ethics of *Naam*, i.e., from being self-centred to being God-centred.

24. ***Naam* and Human Goal** : It is in the field of human goals that the world-view of *Naam* and its logic make a basic departure from the traditional Indian view on the subject. On this problem the Gurus' view have not only been made clear and precise in their doctrine of *Naam* and throughout the *Guru Granth*, but these have also been emphasized and exemplified by their lives which embody an unambiguous lesson on the issue. We shall, therefore, attempt to consider the subject now from all the three angles, namely, of (a) the doctrine of *Naam*, (b) other tenets and principles laid in the *Guru Granth*, and (c) the lives that the Gurus led so as to lay down the ideal for others to follow:

(A) *Naam*, the Ever-Creative Immanence of God, is engaged in directing the universe, which is real, to become a qualityful world. Every student of *Guru Granth* knows that the burden of a large number of prayers and hymns therein, is a request for the gift of *Naam*, or to be linked with *Naam*, e.g. "I am beholden to Him who enlightens me with *Naam*."⁷⁰ "My Guru makes *Naam* permeate in me."⁷¹ "Let me not forget *Naam*, rest is all greed."⁷² "I beg from you for the gift of *Naam*."⁷³ "He reaches the highest stage whom God benevolently yokes to His *Naam*."⁷⁴ "To ask for any boon other than *Naam* is to invite pain."⁷⁵ "To be imbued with *Naam* is the essence of true living." "Pray, link me to God."⁷⁶

Accordingly, the highest ideal under the *Naam Marga* is to be yoked or linked to *Naam* in order to take the world of man to a qualityful goal. In this context, the significance of a God of attributes

has already been explained. Naam being the opposite of egoism, this progressive movement is towards an ideal in which selfishness and egoism disappear and qualities of *Naam* are practised. And to be linked to *Naam* only, means being its instrument and sharing the responsibility of this creative and qualityful development in the world. One imbued with *Naam* not only takes part in the world without a sense of duality and selfishness but also strives to create a beautiful world of harmony and quality. Egoism is supposed to be the cause of all pain, suffering and conflict which hinder development towards the goal. As against it, the practice of *Naam* and its ethics, namely, the unitary view of life, is both the ideal and the sovereign remedy for all ills and evils (*sarab rag kaa aukhad Naam*), and the way to human development. "Destroy evil and you become a perfect man."⁷⁷ "Give up evil, do right and you realise the essence of God."⁷⁸

(B) Let us see if the same ideal is prescribed otherwise too in the *Guru Granth*. In answer to a specific question as to how to remove the wall of falsehood obstructing man's progress to become an ideal or a true man, the Guru gives a categorical reply: "By working according to the Will of God."⁷⁹ Again the same ideal of deeds (not of words, rituals, asceticism or even of yogic discipline) is prescribed in the hymns of cosmography, quoted earlier about the role of man on earth. It is pointed out that "all assessment is made in accordance with the deeds and doings of man By His Grace only the righteous get the insignia of God's approval."⁸⁰ In Sikhism, God is the Creator of the Universe and invariably the prayer, and direction is to be of service to Him. "May I have millions of hands to serve Thee. Service is the way to cross the hurdles of life."⁸¹ "Be ever alert in the Service of God. Serve God every moment and relax not."⁸² This in effect means to be of service in the universe, which is the authentic creative activity of God, who is directing it towards a goal and with a purpose. This service in the universe is really the selfless and qualityful service of all who have to be looked upon alike."⁸³ The Guru says, "Where there is egoism, God is not; where there is God, there cannot be any egoism."⁸⁴

In the *Sidh Gost*, Guru Nanak has very clearly specified his mission and goal and thrown full light on the issue as to how he would lead his followers across. He says, "With the help of other God-conscious persons, I shall help man to remove his alienation from *Naam* and God and assist him to cross the difficult hurdles in life."⁸⁵ Guru Nanak

has thus clarified as to what he means by 'carrying out His Will' and executing God's mission of creating a society of God-centred men. The Guru says, "The God-man achieves the goal and makes all others do so."⁸⁶ That is exactly the reason why the Gurus have likened themselves to a 'servant of God', a 'solider in God's Legion', or a 'wrestler in the cause of God'. The world being the authentic creation of God, supported by His immanence, the service of God means only the service of His creation, namely, this world, this life and man. It is in this light that the Guru's hymns, in the *Sidh Gost* and elsewhere have to be understood.

Here we may lay stress on two very important and relevant points: (a) The Gurus have repeatedly indicated a continuing process of development, evolution and progress in the empirical world, and (b) They clearly point out that further progress from animal-men or egoistic men to super-men or God-centred men is not only possible, but is also aimed at. In the Hymns of cosmography, already quoted, an ascending order of creation, form, or evolution is indicated. The Gurus have stated that individuation was created by God⁸⁷ and 'slowly there has been growth from small organisms, insects, etc., to animals, and finally to the present animal-man, with his subtle sense of perception, discrimination reason introspection' "For several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births an insect, for several births a fish, animal, ...after ages have you the glory of being a man."⁸⁸ "...after passing through myriads of species, one is blest with the human form."⁸⁹ "God created you out of a drop of water and breathed life in you. He endowed you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom...From a sinner He made you virtuous and the lord of all beings. And now it is up to you to fulfil or not to fulfil your destiny."⁹⁰ Further progress of man or animal-man, as stated in the Hymn of dharam khand depends entirely on the deeds of the individuals. Till man came on the scene, it was not possible for life to outgrow its animal existence and alienation from God. So far, like other animals, man too has been living an animal existence. But, the Guru emphasizes the opportunity available to man to become a super-man, the highest ideal in the world of creation, and thereby be the humble but active agent of the Creative God as indicated in the hymns of *Sidh Gost*, quoted above. "Man with his egocentric individuality is basically an animal, with all animal limitations"⁹¹ and alienation from *Naam* or God. But he has the invaluable capacity to

come into his own by breaking this alienation and establishing a link with *Naam*.

The Guru again and again addresses man to give up his egocentric activity and instead to rise to his full stature and avail himself of this lone opportunity. "After ages, this invaluable opportunity of human birth is obtained, but one loses it for nothing; one loses a ruby in exchange for a piece of broken glass."⁹² "Among eighty-four lakhs of species, man is assigned the supreme position, whosoever misses the opportunity, suffers the pain of transmigration."⁹³ "Human birth is the epitome of fruitful effort, but man loses it for a trite."⁹⁴ "Human birth is precious."⁹⁵ "You have obtained the privilege of human body, now is your lone opportunity to meet God."⁹⁶ This is how we understand Guru Nanak's statements that his mission is, with the help of other God-conscious persons, to assist men to grow into supermen, so as to cross egoistic obstacles in the sea of life, and thereby to help the process of evolution and creativity to supermanship, flowering into a beautiful world. Hence the ideal is not only to be a superman oneself, but with the help of other supermen to convert all men into supermen.⁹⁷ And this physico-spiritual ideal, laid in the *Guru Granth*, can be reached only in this world by removing human alienation caused by the ego (*haumain*) which is opposed to *Naam*, and which can be removed only by a creative and altruistic living.

Already we have looked at this issue from another angle and concluded that *Naam* is conducting a qualityful movement expressible and aimed at fructifying in the world of man. In the background of Indian religions, this is the way to emphasize the importance of creative living in the world, as also of, what one may call this-worldly interest of God. To say that God has moral qualities does not mean an anthropomorphic description of God, but it is a metaphoric way of expressing the essentiality of virtuous conduct which alone secures progress as against the egoistic and individualistic activity of the self-centred man (*manmukh*), who generates forces of separatism, conflict, war and chaos. That is why the Guru also describes the God-centred men (*gurmukh*), the ideal in Sikhism, as having qualities of spontaneous beneficence, love, help to the poor, etc., essentially, the same qualities as of God. In short, in the case of God-centred man, his love of God is, in fact, transformed into God's love for man.

It needs to be clarified here whether the ideal in Sikhism is linkage

with God or merger in God. According to the Gurus, man, because of his individualism and selfishness, stands alienated from God's Immanence. Instead of serving God of attributes, man, in his ignorance and myopic vision, starts serving his own self and fails to rise to his full height of being a conscious and humble instrument of God's creative functioning in the world. In His Transcendence God's Being is all by Himself in a self-absorbed state, without sign of any visible form, devotion, love or creative activity. In that state God's Will, *Naam* or Attributes are not expressed since these work only in the created world.

Second is the state when God's *Naam* and Will are expressed and creative functioning in the universe goes on. To talk of merger in God in this state involves virtually a reversion to the first state of God being Self-absorbed. This is, therefore, a Contradiction in terms because while God is engaged in His Creative Activity, there can be no question of the cessation of this dynamic activity or merger of man in the Self-absorbed State. Besides, such an opposite process would be evidently Counter to the expressed creative Will of God. True, there are some hymns in the *Guru Granth* where merger with God appears to be indicated, but this merger or joining means only a link, as quoted earlier, with the Creative Immanence of God because merger involves loss of identity and can be possible only in a pantheistic creed and not in a theistic creed like Sikhism.

Below are quoted a few of the hymns which clarify the issue:

- (i) "His body and mind are imbued entirely with the hue of *Naam* and he lives always in the company of God; as one stream of water intermingles with another, in the same manner his light merges in the light of God."⁹⁸
- (ii) "The gurmukh is all admiration for the attributes of God; and he remains merged in God."⁹⁹
- (iii) "*Brahmgyaani* looks solely to God for all support." "God lives by the side of *brahmgyaani*." "*Brahmgyaani* is himself God."¹⁰⁰
- (iv) "He devotes himself to God with his whole being and remains merged in his God."¹⁰¹

All these and similar other hymns are significant because the idea of the superman's identity being different from that of God appears in the same hymn as containing, side by side, the idea of his apparent

merger or merger in God. Evidently, the Gurus would not give two contradictory concepts in the same breath. Therefore, the seeming symbols of merger only signify a link between the superman (*gurmukh*) and *Naam*, especially as in all these and other such hymns, the superman has been indicated as a functioning and separate identity.

We further amplify below to show that the interpretation stated above is the only one that can be accepted:

- (i) The Gurus do not lay two kinds of ideals for their disciples i.e. one of link with the Creative *Naam* or His Will and expressible, only in the created world, and the other of one's merger in the Self-absorbed state of God, even while the created world exists and is being dynamically worked by His Immanence. Nowhere in Sikhism is the least evidence or suggestion of two alternative ideals or duality of goals. Such a thing is contrary to the very fundamentals of Sikhism as expressed profusely in the *Guru Granth* and in the entire Sikh tradition which is not only anti-ascetic and anti-withdrawal from life, but stands for active participation in the world. Merger in the anonymity of Brahman may be the ideal in other Indian systems or salvation religions, where the world is either an illusion or of a lower category, or where participation in *samsara* is anti-spiritual, but it cannot be so where God is the Creator of this beautiful world which is the only field of His Will and Creative activity. The goal is not heaven or salvation but love of *Naam*. "Heaven cannot equal God's *Naam*. The god-faced has no desire for salvation." "I seek not power, nor salvation; pray, give me the love of God."¹⁰²
- (ii) In the *dharam khand* the Guru has clearly laid that for everyone on this earth the only ideal is of virtuous activity and deeds which alone meet God's approval. The same direction is given in the Guru's dictum: 'Higher than truth is truthful conduct or living.'
- (iii) In the Hymn of Cosmography, as discussed earlier, the superman is limited only to the region of creativity. He is not merged in his immanence, much less in his transcendence, where the question of the separate identity of the devotee does not arise. Any such suggested merger would even be contrary to the clear denial of incarnation of God (*avatarhood*) in Sikh theology.

For, a corollary of man's merger in God would be God's incarnation as man.

- (iv) Merger of the superman with God, without being His creative instrument, would inevitably involve the reabsorption of the Immanence or Will of God. This would virtually be a request for winding up all God's creative activity. Such an ideal might be logical in religious systems where human existence is not real and authentic, or is a bondage, or in dualistic creeds where the separation of the spiritual element from the material element (*Prakriti*) is sought. That is why in such systems, self-immolating asceticism and calculated other-worldliness or austerities have a logical and recognised spiritual sanction, but not so in Sikhism, where all such practices have not only been considered to be useless and superfluous, but are deemed positively harmful and unspiritual, especially when Guru's God is Creative and Attributive and wants His supermen to be the instruments of His Will and of His Progressive Creativity. This makes one point clear. The Guru's language being symbolic, link, merger, or joining, can never mean fusion, or loss of human identity of the superman, and, thus, cease to be a creative instrument of God's Will, plan and purpose in the created world. The ideal of simple merger or Nirvana (not Bodhisattvic) would not be the service of God or *Naam* or action according to His Will, but would rather be an anti-creative annihilation or spiritual suicide almost egoistic in its content.
- (v) The ideal of merger in God would be quite foreign to a monotheistic creed like Sikhism which in all its aspects is anti-pantheistic and casts on the individual, the responsibility of taking up God-centred activity instead of self-centred indulgence. Harmony with the will of God does not mean absorption into it but free cooperation with it. 'Our wills are ours to make them Thine.' In other words, 'Identification with the Divine Will on man's part really signifies an act of faith and freedom by which he makes the Divine End, his own end; it is not the recognition of the actual identity of his will with God's Will', writes Galloway.¹⁰³

We conclude that the superman, towards whom the evolutionary progress is directed, becomes the instrument of, or linked to *Naam*. This is the meaning of the ideal of one's being linked with *Naam* or

doing the. Will of God or being given the boon of *Naam*. The role of the God-faced is not only to be ever-creative and altruistic himself, but also to make the entire social fabric creative and virtuous. In Indian religious life it involves a radical shift from personal piety and salvation to man in general, whose uplift becomes the first and the highest love and priority in spiritual endeavour. Everyone is to be raised to the level of the superman and treated as equal. It is in line with this that in the *Guru Granth* the hymns of the Muslim and the Hindu saints are given the same status and sanctity as those of Sikh Gurus. This we have seen is the thesis of the *Guru Granth* and of *Naam*. Since all these ideals can be pursued by the superman only in the spacio-temporal world, it is obvious that any supposed ideal of merger, as in some other religions, is both foreign and contrary to the thesis of *Naam* and the Gurus. Just as in the case of the art of swimming, no training or test of it is possible outside the pool, similarly, whether a person is self-centred or God-centred, qualityful or otherwise, can be tested and authenticated only in this world of ours and that also from one's deeds and activities during his participation. Because the aim is to be the instrument of God and to fulfil the object of evolving supermen and making this world into a beautiful and qualityful place of supermen, i.e. to create God's kingdom on earth.

(C) Having come to the conclusion that according to the concept of *Naam* and the thesis of the *Guru Granth* complete participation in life is the ideal, we may see what kind of life the Gurus lived. The lives of the ten Gurus are the best pointer to the goal of human life set in the *Guru Granth*, since these constitute the clearest interpretation of their teachings. In the *Guru Granth* all kinds of social and political qualities have been attributed to God and the Superman. Accordingly, it was the demand of the very logic of the doctrine of *Naam* and the thesis of the *Guru Granth* that the Gurus should have taken full share in the life of their times. And we see that this is, as it should have been.

Apart from the eternal problems of man, with which the Gurus dealt in detail, students of history know that in the Gurus' times there were two malignant growths-the caste and the tyrannical political system. The Gurus never bypassed them as being too mundane to concern them. Regarding both these matters, the Gurus' role has been revolutionary. In their hymns they have forcefully condemned these

institutions: "The pride of caste leads to multifarious evils."¹⁰⁴ "Distinction of high and low, caste and colour, hell and heaven introduced by the Vedas are misleading."¹⁰⁵ "Kings are like tigers and courtiers like dogs and they prey upon peaceful citizens. The Kings' employees tear up innocent persons and the dogs lick up the blood that is shed."¹⁰⁶ "The Mughals are made the instrument of death. The people have suffered intensely, O God, art thou not moved ?If the strong mauls the strong, I grieve not. If the lion attacks the sheep, the master of the flock must answer."¹⁰⁷ Their protest against these evils did not rest at that. In the social institutions which the Gurus organised, caste had no place. Four of the five Beloved Ones (*Panj Piaaraas*) of the Guru, who were to lead the entire community of the Sikhs were from the *Sudras*. After the political execution of the Fifth Guru the Sixth Guru started regular military training and preparations in order to fight out the challenges of the oppressive political system. Execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur intensified the socio-political struggle against Mughal misrule. Two of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed their lives in war, while the remaining two were bricked alive. The Tenth Guru also had to lay down his own life in this struggle. It is not our object here to go into historical details or to assess the political impact of the Sikh movement. We need only to stress that as the result of their own thesis laid in the *Guru Granth*, the Gurus felt a spontaneous spiritual compulsion to organise and raise a revolt against the oppressive socio-political system.

25. Obviously, the lives of the Gurus fortify the conclusion we have already reached, namely, that the *Guru Granth* stands for complete participation in all creative and constructive aspects of life.

26. Way to *Naam* : Now, we come to the last question as to how to establish link with. *Naam*, how to become God-centred from a self-centred person, and what method of training to adopt on this, path. Just as the attributive God must work in the world, the training and transformation must also be in the world itself and not outside it. In the *Guru Granth* the following five modes of training have been referred to :

- (i) remembering God;
- (ii) keeping good company;
- (iii) developing a sense of discrimination;
- (iv) doing virtuous activities in the sense explained already;

and

- (v) avoiding vices.

It is not our object here to elaborate on these except (a) to clarify an ambiguity which, we feel, exists about remembering *Naam* and (b) to give a few statements of the Gurus on each of these modes.

- (a) **Remembering *Naam*:** There is considerable misunderstanding as to that constitutes the remembering of *Naam*. True, in the *Guru Granth* there is great mention of remembering *Naam* (*Naam japanaa*) and praise of God (*gift saalaah*). Accordingly, it has been said by some that this remembering, or what Trumpp calls "muttering", is by itself enough for one to link oneself with God. This remembrance is sometimes also understood to mean yogic practices for the achievement of the so-called bliss as an end in themselves. We are not only unaware of any hymns in the *Guru Granth* recommending such yogic practices or any tradition in this regard, but there are clear hymns against the use of such practices as means to spiritual achievement or as ends in themselves. True, there are numerous lines in the *Guru Granth* eulogizing *Naam* and its remembrance. But there are innumerable verses denying the utility of any mechanical means or mere repetition of words or hymns, e.g. "Everyone repeats God's name, but by such repetition one gets not to God."¹⁰⁸ "With guile in heart, he practices guile but mutters God's name. He is pounding husk and is in darkness and pain."¹⁰⁹ "One mutters God's Name, but does evil daily, in this way the heart is not purified."¹¹⁰ The important thing is the motivation behind praise and remembrance. Flattery, sycophancy and hypocritical utterances cannot be praised because the motive of such utterances is self-interest. Real praise involves admiration, love and devotion accompanied by an honest desire to follow as an ideal or imbibe the qualities of one who is praised, God in this case. Such praise is a pining for what we are not, with a humble desire to move in the direction of the ideal. Praise, thus, is a spontaneous acknowledgment of the Glory of God and the desire to please Him, not by mere words but by qualityful deeds. Similarly, remembrance or repetitive utterances

can be mechanical, magical, or ritualistic in nature. As against it, remembering can be a way to keep in mind one's basic ideals so that the frail human psyche does not falter or deviate from one's chosen direction and ideals. That is why, in the hymns of the *Guru Granth*, the reference is not at all to any mechanical repetition but to keep God in mind. Hence, the words used for the purpose are like *Naam* 'being or living in one's consciousness' (*man vasia*, or *kare nivaas*), 'enlightening one's being' (*kare pargaas*), 'imbued' (*ratte*) etc. This remembrance is like keeping the fear of God in one's mind while embarking on any activity or making any decision. It is not an end in itself and seeks no magical or compulsive effects, but it is a way of reminding oneself to take heart and courage to do the right. Just as in the case of 'doing the Will of God' and 'being yoked to *Naam*: 'remembering' is also inalienably linked with the subsequent decision to be made and activity to be undertaken. 'By dwelling on the Word, mind flows to serve others.' In short, the praise and remembrance of *Naam*, or keeping '*Naam* in heart' is just the means to recall the lesson and the ideal suggested by Attributive *Naam*. It is an humble attempt to seek the Grace and Light of the Guiding Star of *Naam*, to show to the weak and wavering psyche the path one has to tread and the direction in which one has to move in life. The conclusion is the same, namely, that all deeds and activities have to be in life which is the sole test of the earlier training, remembrance and preparation.

- (b) **Company of God-faced Men:** The Guru writes: "Just as castor plant imbibes the scent of the adjacent sandalwood, similarly, even the fallen are emancipated by the company of true ones."¹¹¹ "In good company we become true and develop love for *Naam*."¹¹² In good company one becomes good."¹¹³
- (c) **Use of Reason and Sense of Discrimination:** In the Gurus' system, use of human rationality and sense of discrimination have a distinct and important place. Man's faculty of reason is without doubt an asset which other animals do not possess. Sikh theology being non-deterministic, man has a distinct moral freedom and responsibility in the choice of his actions and thereby to bring about his transformation. The Guru writes, "By use of discrimination or intellect one serves God. By discrimination one is honoured. By discrimination and study one understands things.

It is sense of discrimination that makes one charitable. This is the right way, rest is all wrong."¹¹⁴ "Man is blessed with the light of reason and discrimination."¹¹⁵ "One, in fear of God and discriminating between good and bad, appears sweet to God."¹¹⁶ "We know right from wrong and yet fall into the well with torch in hand."¹¹⁷

- (d) **Ethical and Creative Activities:** We have concluded already that only moral deeds in all fields of human activity are acceptable to God. God's interest in this development of man can be gauged from the fact that "He takes cognizance of and rewards even an iota of good deed,"¹¹⁸ it being 'His innermost nature to help the erring.'¹¹⁹ A few of the Guru's hymns on the issue are:

"Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (vision of basic unity" and reality) to sprout."¹²⁰ "With self-control and discipline, we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God."¹²¹ "Drive out lust and anger, be the servant of all, and see the Lord in all hearts."¹²² "Control your evil propensities and you become a perfect man."¹²³ "Good, righteousness, virtue and giving up of vice are the way to realize the essence of God."¹²⁴ "Control cravings and the light of wisdom into deeds."¹²⁵

27. We need hardly amplify the point except to say that the entire approach and the method of training have to be interconnected and simultaneous. The remembrance of God, good company and use of human rationality have to be the means to help man to undertake and do right kind of action and deeds, involving productive work, sharing of profits and looking upon and treating all alike. "The man incapable of earning a living gets his ears split (for wearing Yogic-Ear-rings) or one becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or Saint but begs for food from door to door. Never look upto such a person or touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living by hard work and shares his income with others,"¹²⁶ i.e. the training of man has to be in life and for life. "My whole being, body and consciousness, are imbued with *Naam*. True living is living God in life."¹²⁷ In the Guru's system the entire development has to be integrated, good actions leading to change in emotions and attitudes, and change in motives and approach resulting in good reactions and deeds. According to the Guru "without good deeds no worship is possible."¹²⁸

28. Here is an important word of caution. We are not at all denying the basic sanctity of the mystic approach and experience, or that the ultimate link with *Naam* involving the highest spiritual or suprasensory experience is an act of God's Grace. All we suggest is that according to the Sikh Gurus the seeker's way to seek God's Grace is through virtuous and non-egoistic deeds in life and that after the mystic experience, the compulsion for such deeds is even greater than before since one has to be the creative instrument of the Attributive *Naam*, dynamically directing and sustaining the world.

29. Conclusion: We have now come to the close of our discussion and recapitulate briefly our conclusions:

- (i) The Transcendent God expressed Himself in *Naam* that created the world.
- (ii) *Naam* is the Creative and Dynamic Immanence of God, supporting and directing the becoming universe towards (a) a qualityful goal and (b) the emergence of a society of supermen.
- (iii) Gurus' system is monotheistic, since God is both Transcendent and Immanent and the world is His creation.
- (iv) The world is proclaimed as authentic and the sole sphere of *Naam*'s deep interest and activity. It is not illusory or of a lower category of reality.
- (v) Accordingly, all human actions have a reality and validity and are immoral or moral, destructive or constructive, self-centred or God-centred to the extent they contribute or not to the ethics of *Naam* or a unitary view of life.
- (vi) The superman is both the knower and the executor of God's Will. After enlightenment, his duties and responsibilities, as the agent of *Naam*, increase and become more purposeful. He cannot be a silent spectator of this world, or a mere enjoyer of bliss; but his bliss lies in being yoked to God's purpose, giving meaning to life and hope and optimism to man i.e. in Sikhism the test, expression and goal of all mystic and spiritual endeavour is life and life alone.
- (vii) The way to establish link with *Naam* is through virtuous participation and deeds in all aspects of life which is the sole arena and test of spiritual and mystic activity both for men and supermen. It is not possible to have link with God by ritualistic,

ascetic or escapist practices or even so called salvation or merger.

30. The doctrine of *Naam* gives a clear clue to the understanding of the Sikh Theology and Sikh History. It also explains vividly the ten Gurus' attack on the socio-political institutions of their times, their martyrdoms and military preparations and struggle with a view to creating new socio-political organisations and institutions and how all these were the logical consequence of a single spiritual thesis and the continuous unfolding of a planned process, uninfluenced by local, social or political circumstances or the exigencies or accidents of history.



CHAPTER IV

SIKHISM, VAISNAVISM, VEDANTA AND NATHISM—A COMPARISON

Introduction

The subject of this paper is to understand the uniqueness of the Sikh Religion and why and how Guru Nanak in laying down the principles of his religion and pursuing his mission completely departed from the earlier Indian traditions. In this attempt we shall describe the essentials of Sikhism and briefly compare them with three of his contemporary religious systems.

Sikhism

The bedrock of every religion is the spiritual experience of its founder. Let us see what is the spiritual experience of the Sikh Gurus and how they define God. Obviously, it is this experience that forms the driving force of the mission of a prophet and determines his goal. Guru Nanak says, "O, Lalo, I speak what the Lord commands me to convey."¹ This means two things. First, that God is both Transcendent and Immanent, and, thus, operates in history. Second, that the Guru had a mission to perform. Guru Nanak calls God: "The Sole One, Self-existent and Immanent, Creator Person, Without Fear and Without Enmity, Timeless Person,"² Un-incarnated, Self-Created and Gracious Enlightener", "Benevolent", and "Ocean of Virtues". As to the character of spiritual experience, it is recorded, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord, He is All Love. Rest He is Ineffable."³ It is this definition of God as "Love" and "Ocean of attributes" that governs the entire structure of Sikhism and the growth of its history. It is in this background that Guru Nanak gave for his mission the call, "If you want to play the game of love, Come with your head on your palm."⁴ and Guru Gobind

Singh declared, "Let all listen to the Truth I proclaim, He who loves, attains to God."⁵ We have, thus, to see what are the doctrinal implications of the spiritual experience of the Gurus and their definition of God regarding the various issues we seek to understand. The metaphysical position of Sikhism being a monotheism is clear enough, but much more significant is the inference that the world is not only real but also meaningful. For, the Guru says, "True is He, true is His creation."⁶ "God created the world and permeated it with His Light."⁷ "God created the world of life and planted *Naam* in it, making it the place for righteous activity."⁸ Further, apart from the world being meaningful and a place for virtuous living, God has a deep interest in life and man. "God is eyes to the blind, milk to the child, and riches to the poor."⁹ "It is the innermost nature of God to help the erring."¹⁰ "This religious experience of the Gurus emphatically lays down the direction in which God wants man's spiritual activity to move. Altruism is, therefore, a direction and the methodology prescribed by the Guru both for the super-man and the seeker. For, "with God it is only the deeds in this world that count."¹¹ "Good, righteousness, virtues, and the giving up of vice are the way to realize the essence of God."¹² "Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (God) to sprout."¹³ God showers His Grace where the lowly are cared for."¹⁴ "It is by our deeds that we become near or away from God."¹⁵ And finally, the Guru clinches the issue when he says, "Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living."¹⁶ "The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk but by treating all alike, and as one's equal. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation or roaming all over places, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but by remaining God-centred while doing the affairs of the world."¹⁷ "By despising the world one gets not to God."¹⁸ In the *Japuji* the Guru pointedly asks a question as to what is the godly way and himself replies to it saying that by carrying out the Will of God one becomes a *Sachiaara* or God-man. And, God's Will is attributive, God being "All Love" and the "Ocean of Virtues".

The logic of the above approach of life-affirmation leads to a number of other inferences. Since love can be expressed and virtues practised only in life or social life, the Gurus clearly lived and recommended a householder's life. Except Guru Harkrishan who died at an early age, all the Gurus were married

householders. This inference from the thesis of the Gurus was not just incidental, it was clear and categoric. Because Guru Nanak not only bypassed his son Siri Chand, a pious Udasi, in choosing his successor, but the second and the third Gurus clearly excluded the recluses, ascetics or Sanyasis from the Sikh fold. In short, monasticism, asceticism and other-worldliness were clearly rejected. Instead, the worldly life was accepted as the arena for the practice of virtues for spiritual growth. Similarly, life-affirmation and the rejection of celibacy led to the second inference, namely, that the status of woman should be equal to that of man. The Guru says, "Why call woman impure when without woman there would be none,"¹⁹ and when it was she who gave birth to kings among men. This was the logic of Guru Nanak's path, against the one of celibacy and women being considered sin-born and therefore an impediment in the spiritual path. In Hinduism women were classed with *Sudras*, being generally regarded as unfit for the spiritual path.

Guru Nanak's system leads to a third inference as well, namely, the importance of work and production. He says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or a saint. Look not up to him and touch not his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others."²⁰ It is significant that after his long tours Guru Nanak worked as a peasant and started a *Langar* (free food for all and service at one platform) till the end of his days. This practice of earning one's own living continued till, after the Fifth Guru, organizational work of the *Panth* and confrontation with the Empire made the carrying out of a private profession impossible. It is important that all these doctrines of their religion were not only scripturally sanctioned but were also actually practised by the Sikh Gurus. This was very essential because, these doctrines being so radically different from, or even opposed to, the earlier religious traditions and trends, their import and importance would have been completely missed or misunderstood if these had not been visibly lived and demonstrated in practice. For example, it is significant that in order to establish the equality of man, and demolish the ugly caste discrimination, Guru Nanak's first act after his enlightenment was to take a low caste Muslim as his sole companion, emphasizing thereby that anyone who wanted to join his path had completely to shed all caste prejudices. That is also why while organizing local *Sangats* he

wanted them to meet together and run *langars* so as to eat together and share their food with the poor. For him this was the path to establish the brotherhood of man. The Guru not only recommended work and sharing of incomes but also deprecated the amassing of wealth. He says, "Riches cannot be gathered without sin but these do not keep company after death."²¹ "God's bounty belongs to all but men grab it for themselves."²² Just as in the Indian religious systems of his times monasticism, asceticism, celibacy and ahimsa went together with the acceptance of the caste ideology in the social field, similarly, in Guru Nanak's system all such ideas and institutions were rejected and instead a concerted effort was made to establish the brotherhood of man and give religious sanction to the life of the householder, the need of work, production and sharing, and the acceptance of all kinds of social responsibility. We have seen that the Gurus' experience of God being "Love" and their description of God being "Protector" (*Raakbaa*), "Just" (*Adli*), "Benevolent", "Helper of the weak", "Shelter of the Shelterless", "Destroyer of the Tyrant" enjoins a clear responsibility on the god-men to toe that line, namely, to live a religious life while accepting full social participation and responsibility. It is in line with this wholly radical religious thesis that the Gurus changed the entire methodology and the direction of the spiritual life. "The God-centred' lives truthfully while a householder."²³ The God-man has to be the instrument or the soldier of God in this world.

The acceptance of full social responsibility has other implications too. Everything that militates against an honest and righteous discharge of a householder's life has to be tackled. It is in this context that Gurus recommended the rejection of asceticism, monasticism and celibacy and the acceptance of a householder's life of work and sharing of wealth, and the elimination of caste distinctions. But, there is one thing more which most of us have failed to understand. In the life of man there are not only social pressures but there are also what modern life calls political pressures. Evidently, both are problems of living in a society. These societal problems the modern man has artificially divided into three sections, economic, social and political. In actual life these three kinds do not occur separately, nor can these be segregated to be dealt with separately. The religious man is confronted with all of them and it becomes his religious duty and responsibility to tackle

them and to resist and react against injustice and evil forces whatever be the quarters from which those should emanate. It is obvious that socio-political problems cannot be solved individually or by mere preaching; these can be dealt with only by a properly and religiously motivated society. It is equally plain that in order to counter and resist evil political pressures it may at sometime become necessary to use force in aid of a righteous cause. Here it is important to note that Guru Nanak as the prophet of this new religious thesis did three things. He laid the foundations of a society that was to be trained and motivated to react against injustice. Wherever he went, he organized local societies with faith in his system. He chose and appointed a successor to carry on the mission he had started. His was not a religion where the object was just personal salvation as an end in itself, or the salvation of a few. His was not a *Math* or *Khankah* for a few seeking only spiritual attainments. Guru Nanak taught, as was exemplified by his own life, that the spiritual man has a social mission as well. For that very reason it was he who clarified another principle of his religion, namely, his stand regarding Ahimsa. He says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat eating. They do not know what is flesh or non-flesh and what is sin or non-sin."²⁴ In this and other hymns he exposes the cant of non-meat eating, which was based on the principle of Ahimsa. He adds that there is life in every grain of corn or food we eat. In the context of Indian religions, this explanation was extremely necessary for a society for which he contemplated the course of action as indicated in his hymns. For, resistance to aggression or oppression cannot at times be done without the use of force. Therefore, for the execution of the religious mission of Guru Nanak it was essential to create a society, appoint a successor, and clearly eliminate the religious sanction to the curb of Ahimsa in the socio-political field. Thirdly, Guru Nanak clearly identified the socio-political problems of his times. The greatest problems were the tyrannical barbarity of the invaders, rapidly of the rulers, the corruption and misrule of the officials," and the hypocrisy and greed of the Mullahs and priests. On the-issue of cruelty, loot and murder by the invaders, he even criticizes the local rulers for their unpreparedness. Nay, he even complains to God for allowing the weak to be tyrannized by the strong. Very often the logic of this criticism has been missed. Guru's criticism was not an empty rhetoric. In fact, Guru Nanak was clearly

laying down the new ideology for high society and identifying the tasks to be accomplished by it. It is in this light that we have to understand the institutions of succession, its continuing even after the doctrinal base had been finalized and the scripture compiled by the Fifth Guru, and its closure by the Tenth Guru only after the creation of the Khalsa. The Sikh does not pray to God for *Moksha*, but he prays for millions of hands to serve Him. This religious thesis of the Gurus, as well shall see, is entirely different from the earlier Indian religious systems like Vaisnavism, Nathism and Vedantism in vogue in those times. Therefore, the Gurus by their personal examples and martyrdoms established the validity and the practicality of their religious system. In the absence of it, Sikhism could hardly have been understood, much less followed. In fact, Gurus' spiritual experience of God being all Love involves logically and correspondingly total responsibility towards all beings. In the Gurus' system it is simply impossible for the religious person and his society to avoid responsible reaction against injustice wherever it may occur. Sikhism accepts the "idea that specifically designated organized bands of men should play a creative part in the political world destroying the established order and reconstructing society according to Word of God."²⁵ Guru Nanak, thus, laid the foundations of the doctrines of *Miri* and *Piri* that later fructified in the form of the Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat. This doctrine of *Miri-Piri* or Saint-Soldier is so radical in the Indian context that Sant Ram Dass of Maharashtra had to be explained by the Sixth Guru himself that he was pursuing the religion of Guru Nanak and that his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. Similarly, the anti-asceticism and the householder's life of Guru Nanak looked so odd to the Naths that they questioned his very claim to be following the religious path. But, the Guru's reply to them is very revealing of his new thesis because he asserted that it is the Naths who did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path.

What we wish to emphasize is that it is not just incidental, but it is the very logic of Guru Nanak's system that involved on the one hand the rejection of monasticism, asceticism, celibacy and Ahimsa and on the other hand led to the creation of an organized and disciplined society that accepted total social responsibility. It is in this context that we should understand and interpret the history of the Guru period. We shall revert to this

point at the close of our discussion. At present, let us give a brief outline of the three religious systems, namely, Vaisnavism, Vedantism; and Nathism, that were prevalent in the time of Guru Nanak. These systems, the Guru clearly found incongruous with his spiritual experience and he clearly rejected them and simultaneously started his own *Panth* in pursuance of his mission.

Vaisnavism

It is a generally accepted view that Bhagvatism arose as a non-Vedic cult which was for the first time included in the Hindu Complex as an alternative mode of *Moksha* in the *Bhagvad Gita* which is admittedly an eclectic compilation. The system is ritualistic and involves (i) visit to the temple, (ii) selection of material for worship, (iii) worship of the deity, (iv) muttering of the Mantras, and (v) Yogic meditation. Similarly, the worship of Hari involves (i) remembering and repeating the name of Hari, (ii) constant worship with devotion, (iii) salutation and resorting to the feet of Hari, and (iv) surrender of the soul with devotion. Two things are significant about this Bhakti; it is entirely ritualistic without any reference to socio-moral conduct. Secondly, it was accepted as only an alternative mode of *Moksha* which was given a low priority. In fact, the *Bhagvad Gita* does not prescribe a unified system. Apart from its different modes of *Moksha* being unintegrated into one unified whole, the metaphysical position is also quite incongruous because the dualism of Yoga and the pantheism of Upanisads exist side by side with the concepts of Vedic ritualism and mysticism. It is, thus, believed that the *Gita* was more concerned in bringing variant systems within the Hindu fold than with their integration into a systematic whole; and that the permission of *Shudras* and women to the path of devotion was allowed because the Buddhist had admitted them to their monasteries without discrimination. This is supported by the fact that the *Gita* gives full sanction to the discriminatory rigidity of the caste system. It says that the Lord created the four Varnas with their separate specified duties and that it was more meritorious to do, even though inefficiently, the duties of one's own caste than to do, even though efficiently, the duties of another caste. "The *Gita* brought about a compromise between the worldly life of allotted duties and the hermit's life of absolute renouncement." "On the one hand we purify our minds by non-attachment and yet, on

the other hand, we continue to perform all the ritualistic and other duties belonging to our particular caste or state of life, i.e., the prescribed stages of four ashramas."²⁶ Both in the *Bhagvad Gita* and the system of Ramanuja, Bhakti meant only *Upasana* or 'just meditation with a contemplative union with God as the goal. This Bhakti does not involve a devotional or personal love as later in the time of Sandilya or the Bhagvat Purana.

Later arose the theory of Avtarhood, namely, that God incarnates Himself in order to save man. This is a Vaisnava contribution to the complex of Hindu systems. It is believed, as in the eclectic character of *Bhagvad Gita*, that the doctrine of Avtarhood is only a way of absorbing heterodox and variant cults by declaring their gods to be the incarnations of Vishnu. Accordingly, founders of even dualistic systems like Sankhya and Jainism were also declared avtaras. In the long run twenty-three avtaras were declared, including Lord Rama, dwarf, man-lion, tortoise, Rsabha, Kapila, and others. While this doctrine enabled the absorption of heterodox creeds, and made the new entrants to accept the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmanical ideology of caste, it could evidently never make for the development of a coherent or unified religious or metaphysical system prescribing a uniform or integrated methodology or goals.

The next development in the course of Vaisnavism is the period of Sandilya and Bhagvat Purana. Alvar Saints appeared in the South and Saints like Tuka Ram, Ramanand, Chaitanya, Mirabai and others arose in the north, west and the east of India. Dr. Tara Chand believes that this new development which took place, quite often in the lower sections of the Hindu society, followed the influence and impact of Islam which was a non-hierarchical.

Though there are other exponents of Vaisnavism like Nimbarka, or Madhva who is a dualist, Ramanuja is considered to be the best of them. His system is pantheistic, Brahman being both manifest and unmanifest. The individual souls and the material world are the body or the attributes of Brahman. He accepts the presence of *ahankara* and explains human activity virtually on the basis of Sankhya. For him *Ishwara* exists in five forms, (i) As Narayana or Paravasudeva, wearing jewels and ornaments, he lives in Vakuntha on a throne surrounded by Sesa (serpent), Garuda and other delivered souls, (ii) As in four forms

including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship him, (iii) As in the Avtaras, fish, tortoise, swan and others, (iv) As the soul of each being even when it goes to heaven or hell, (v) As in the idols kept in the houses. Souls are of three kinds, (i) eternal souls like that of Garuda, (ii) the delivered souls, and (iii) the bound ones.

In his system Bhakti is integrated both with ritualism and Jnana Yoga which are also its essential components, It is significant the Ramanuja considers both Vedic ritualism and Brahm Vidya of Upanisads as of equal importance and validity, so much so that ritualistic acts have to be practised even by a Jnani. It is important to note that his Bhakti is open only to the three higher castes. To *Sudras* only the system of surrender or Prapatti is open. The caste ideology and the ideas of pollution are clearly accepted and practised. Brahmans only can be priests for the purpose of idol worship. The concept of pollution is so important that if while cooking or eating one's food another person casts his glance on it, the entire food has to be thrown away. Celibacy is recommended and women are considered sin-born. They are, therefore, not admitted as Vaisnavas.

In the Bhagvad Purana, nine modes of worship are suggested. These are all formal and ritualistic like listening to the praise of God, repeating the name of God, image worship, etc., without any insistence on socio-moral activity. Padma Purana prescribes seven modes of worship: (i) imprinting of marks on the body and forehead, (ii) repeating mantras, (iii) drinking water used for the feet of the idol, (iv) eating food offered to the idol, (v) service of the devotees, (vi) fasting on designated days of the lunar month, (vii) laying Tulsi leaves at the feet of the idol.

Both Vallabha and Chaitanya accept Bhakti as the sole method of *Moksha*. In the former system the modes of worship are all formal like singing the praises of God, Arti, image Worship, etc. Householder's life is allowed but the devotee visits the temple of the Guru for worship of the idol at fixed intervals. In the case of Chaitanya, Bhakti is an extremely emotional affair, involving ecstatic dancing and singing. While Chaitanya's devotees were from all castes, even Muslims, his followers, except for Bairagis, observed the caste system regarding cooking and other matters. It needs to be clarified that Karam Yoga

meant only ritualistic acts and not socio-moral deeds. In fact, because of the general insistence on celibacy, socio-moral activity is virtually excluded. Maitra, who had made a detailed study of the ethics of all Hindu systems writes that a common feature of the doctrine of the ideal life is "the conception of the ideal as a negation or at least as a transcendence of the empirical life proper and that this state is thus a super moral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral idea." It is transcendental state of deliverance from all struggles of life. It is generally and essentially a state of quiescence."²⁷

In sum, Vaisnavism has seven fundamentals. Its scriptures, as of all other Hindu systems, are the Vedas and Upanisads. It lays down the doctrine of avtarhood which is a Vaisnava contribution to the Hindu religion. The ideology of caste is accepted fully as also the idea of pollution. Its methodology of worship or devotion is clearly formal, ritualistic, contemplative, or intensely emotional without any reference to so do-moral life. Hooper, who has made a detailed study of Alvar Saints says that moral character is hardly a strong feature of their Bhakti. The reason for it is obvious. The entire approach is other-worldly and for liberation from the tangles of life. Consequently, this is also the reason that except in the case of Vallabhacharya, celibacy is the rule and the position of women is distinctly downgraded. Ramanuja denies Vedic studies to women. They were not allowed to mix with men for devotion nor allowed to become nuns. Shankradeva, a liberal saint, says, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of her captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this the wise keep away from the company of women."²⁸ He did not allow women to join even the religious functions of men. For she was deemed to be a temptress. Murti writes about Shankradeva that he was interested only "In establishing religious freedom and fellowship rather than social overhaul. To trouble about the improvement of social conditions, perhaps, deemed to him as little profitable."²⁹ Sixthly, Ahimsa is prescribed as a cardinal rule for all Vaisnavas. Seventhly, the goal is union with or merger in God or Brahman, though ritualistic duties are prescribed till the end of one's days. There is one more point for mention. In Hinduism the sexual or tantrik method is accepted as an alternative system of *Moksha* and a saint like Rama Krishna also accepts its validity.

Vedanta

Vedantism is a very mixed concept. Basically, Upanisadic thought is the Vedantic thought. This system which is mainly opposed to the earlier Vedic ritualism (Purva Mimansa) is in itself very variant. It can form the basis of materialism, antheism, monoism, i.e., of the world being the emanation of Brahman or of the world being just illusory and Brahman alone being real. That is why later philosophers like. Shankra, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka and others have all given divergent interpretations of the Upanisads. Because of the short space available, it will not be possible to indicate all the diverse views on the subject. We have already stated the views of Ramanuja, Vasisht Advaita. We shall here describe briefly the Upanisadic thought and the Vedanta of Shankra which is the most popular Vedanisc system.

It is necessary to note that the Upanisadic thoughts were not meant to be a religious system. These comprise teachings meant only for a small section or an elite most of whom had withdrawn themselves to the seclusion of the forest. The search was for an intuitional, blessed and ineffable mystic experience of unity or identity with Brahman. With the knowledge of it, they say, everything becomes known. Similies of a river merging into the sea, of a seed growing into an oak tree and of a whole of which everything is a part are given. This fundamental reality is not personal like God of theists to whom we pray with devotion and love. It is this that has led to the concepts of "That thou art", "I am Brahman", and of Katha Upanisad saying, "He who perceives diversity in this world suffers the death of all deaths", and of Brahman alone being real the rest being all false and illusory. Upanisads, thus, contain divergent and contradictory thoughts without any attempt to reconcile them into a coherent system. As to methodology, it is primarily meditational with the ideal of four ashramas. The last two ashramas of Vanprastha and Sanyasa are basically other-worldly and ascetic, involving disconnection with the delusive secular life. The final achievement is the result of one's own effort and not the gift of God or his grace. The *Jivan Mukta* has no role to play and is indifferent to all actions whether good or evil. The distinction of good and evil is transcended and it is a liberation from the conditions of worldly existence.

Later the authors of the Upanisads also accepted the validity of Vedic ritualism and its social commands regarding caste. As such, they became a component of the overall Vedic system and gained scriptural sanctity as a limb of the Vedas. Therefore, for any serious consideration of Vedanta, the above-noted factual position about the Upanisads, on which the various types of Vedanta are based, has to be kept in view. Hiriyana writes, "The diversity of teaching noticed in connection with the theoretical teaching of the Upanisads has its reflex in their practical teachings, both in regard to the ideal to be achieved and the means of achieving it."³⁰ For example, "one Upanisad alone mentioning three such different means of attaining immortality devotion to truth, penance and vedic study and ascribing them to three specific teachers."³¹ Secondly, it is also clear that the Upanisads and the sanctioned social system of the period give clear approval to the caste system. The Chhandogya writes that "the wicked are born again as outcasts, dogs or swine." "The Brihadaranyaka (VI. 2, 15-16) gives a similar account. The rules of punishment in Grih sutras and Dharmasutras are grossly discriminatory."³² It must be noted that "the rules of punishment are largely based on caste consideration, so that for having committed the same offence, a Brahman may pass unscathed, but a *Shudra* may even receive capital punishment."³³ "The period of Sutras witnessed the gradual hardening of the caste system in general and the deterioration of the position of Vaishyas and *Shudras* in particular." "The *Shudra* was denied the privilege of *Sanyasa* (renunciation)."³⁴ "We see in the Dharm Sutras the beginning of the formal theory of defilement resulting in the taboo of all contact on the part of a pure man of the upper castes with an impure man, namely, a member of the lowest caste."³⁵ "The Dharm Sutras show that the caste distinction has outstripped its proper limits and has even invaded the field of civil and criminal law."³⁶ Evidently, the Upanisadic mystic system, though other-worldly and meditational in its approach, accepts the ritualism and the caste ideology of the Vedas.

Shankara's view

Gaudapada and Shankra pursue that line of thought in the Upanisads which considers world to be just an illusion and Brahman alone to be real. Gaudapada writes, "The manifold universe does not exist as a form of reality nor does it exist of

itself." "Having attained to non-duality one should behave in the world like an insensible object."³⁷ All diversity according to Shankra is false (*Mithya*). Therefore, to work while accepting the phenomenal existence of the world is sheer Avidya. The goal is to realize the truth of Brahman alone being real and to deny the world. Ishvara and individual souls are parts of Brahman. Man is ignorant since he does not realize that all change in the world is without any meaning or validity, thereby denying the very basis of all socio-moral life. Shankra says, "I am not born how can there be either birth or death for me? I am neither male nor female, nor am I sexless. I am the Blessed peaceful one, who is the only cause of the origin and dissolution of the world."³⁸ All changes in the world are due to Maya which is neither real nor unreal nor related to Brahman. All methods of devotion and worship are fruitless, the goal being the Absolute and not Saguna, or qualified Brahman, God or Ishvara which is a lower stage to be transcended by the Jnani. In fact, the path of devotion; he says, is for persons of narrow or poor intellect. Since he cannot deny the scriptural character of the Vedas, he says that the path of ritualism or sacrifices is prescribed out of compassion for persons of low and average intellect and it can gain for them only heaven. As in Sankhya Yoga, withdrawal from the illusory adjuncts of Maya is suggested. Starting with Vairagya and dissociation with the world, the mystic achievement can be made only as a Sanyasin or renouncer of the world, giving up all works good or bad and as one who is unwilling to accept even the grace of God. The method prescribed, as in the Upanisads, is of Vedic study, reflection and meditation. The aim is to realize, "I am Brahman (Abam Brabm asm;)." It is an intellectual realization accompanied by Anubhava. But the *Jivan Mukta* has no role to play in life. Swami Sivananda writing about the two modern Jnanis, Kalkot Swami and Mowni Swami, says that they were unconscious of the movement of their bowels and the Sevdar (attendant) had to wash their bottoms."³⁹ "Such a Videha Mukta who is absolutely merged in Brahman cannot have the awareness of the world which is non-existent to him. If his body is to be maintained, it has to be fed and cared for by others. The Vidheha Mukta is thus not in a position to engage himself for the good of the world." ⁴⁰ For them, self-realization breaks the chain of causation and the world of experience appears false. Even the idea of God being a lower stage has to be transcended

finally, for "God" is only the most subtle, most magnificent, most flattering false impression of all in this general spectacle of erroneous self deception."⁴¹ No wonder Zimmer says that "Such holy megalomania goes past the bounds of sense. With Sankara, the grandeur of the Supreme human experience becomes intellectualized and reveals its inhuman sterility."⁴² Such is Shankra's monoism for which world is *Mithya*.

Nathism

Nathism was one of the prevalent religious cults in North India in the time of Guru Nanak. He criticized it quite severely. Nath Yogis are Saivites and Saivism has the longest religious history, being pre-Vedic. Pasupata is the oldest Saiva system. Nath Yogis are a part of the Lakula group that developed from the Pasupata. Gorakh Nath is the chief historical organizer of the Nath Yogis. He appears between 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The system involves asceticism, renunciation, Yogic methodology with emphasis on Hath and Mantra Yogas, and the worship of male and female deities. The goal is liberation from the misery of the world through Kundalini Yoga and final union with Lord Siva. Though Nathism is a theistic system, its entire approach and methodology are of Yoga where the aim is primarily to gain power. Both before and after the union the Nath has no interest in the world. Nathism is a monastic system. Each Nath is linked to a monastery headed by a Guru, or a Pir if he is a Muslim. Naths are also called Kanpathas. They are initiated into the group in a rigid ritualistic manner. Their ear lobes are split for the wearing of Mundras. The Nath takes three vows: to remain celibate, not to accept any employment or earn his living, and to sustain himself by begging, and to observe Ahimsa. The Nath goes barefooted on pilgrimage to sacred Hindu places and to Nath monasteries where images and pictures of Hindu gods and Siva in the form of Bhairon are worshipped.

The Naths do observe some caste distinctions. In theory, only twice born are initiated but in practice all except a few low castes are accepted. Hindu Naths do not eat with Muslim Naths nor do they go to the houses of Muslims or of lower castes for begging. The worshipping of the deities, the cooking at monasteries is done by Brahmins generally. At Dhinodhar monastery higher castes are given uncooked food. Other castes are fed at the monastery hall except low castes and Muslims who are given food outside in the open. Women, except widows, are

not admitted and Naths do not sit or eat with them, even if they were Naths.

The Nath Yogi is a typical ascetic who rubs ashes on his body as a symbol of death to the world from the misery of which he seeks liberation. Secondly, Naths have faith in ritualism. Certain months are auspicious, Mantras are used at the time of initiation and for daily and other use, because these are considered to have mystic potency for spiritual advancement. Fasting is also considered efficacious. May be because of the black colour of Bhairon, black buck, snakes' and black dogs are venerated. Animal sacrifices at the temple of Bhairon are practised. At the annual fair of Devi Pattan on one day 20 buffaloes, 250 goats and 250 pigs were sacrificed. Blood mark is applied to devotees. At places Linga and Yoni are worshipped. Naths have belief in Hindu gods and goddesses, good and bad spirits, auspicious and inauspicious days, etc. Nath Yogis mainly use Mantra Yoga and Hathyoga or Kundalini Yoga alongwith Pranayama. Their chief religious texts are Gorakh Sataka, Gorakhsa Paddhati and Hath Yoga pradipika. These prescribe yogic and meditational practices, asanas, repetition of mantras, stages of progress in raising Kundalini through the Nadis, chakras, etc. By the repetition of mantras 21,600 times a day a Yogi could gain liberation in year or so. The goal is to reach through Kundalini Yoga the top of the head as Sahashara achieving thereby blissful union with Siva and eternal release from the world. The Naths also believe in the combination of male and female energies (Nadi and Bindu) to achieve liberation. For this, sex practices called Vajroli, Sahjoli, or Amroli, conducted in the company of a woman are suggested. About Naths, Briggs concludes in his book, "The essence of Nath Yoga is physical exercise and manipulation, quite mechanical. If it is charged against the exposition found in the earlier pages that it is overburdened with interpretations on too Iowa plane, it must be said in reply that both the practices and the outlook of the Yogis confirm this point of view... The high religious value to man-woman relations was insisted upon. The first Chaitanya Sahajya movement confirms this point."⁴³ Even otherwise it is necessary to indicate that the use of the sexual method has been clearly indicated in the ancient Indian literature and materials. Datterya, who is a Hindu deity, is one of the chief deities worshipped by the Naths. He is considered an avatara of Visnu, a Jnani and Paramhansaj "Puranic accounts

depict him as always in ecstasy, surrounded by women, drinking wine and indulging in sex."⁴⁴ Hindu Tantras are supposed to be a fifth Veda for Kalyuga. Ghurye believes, "Fundamentally the Yogis represent the oldest school of Indian asceticism."⁴⁵ "The Yogis are the residual of the ancient Saivite sects."⁴⁶ The Nath cult, we conclude, is in direct lineage from the oldest pre-Vedic and Vedic traditions through the Saiva system of Pasupata and Kapilkas, with both of which all its essentials are common. It is noteworthy that everywhere asceticism or monasticism, whether Hindu, Saiva, Vaisnava or Buddhist, at some point leads to male and female symbolism and consequent erotic practices which are accepted as a means of salvation. Quite often these degenerate into licentious practices. Where a religious system does not harness creative energies to life-affirming and virtuous deeds and processes the danger of degeneration is obvious.

Nathism is, thus, a life negating and ascetic system which calculatedly avoids social responsibility and prescribes renunciation and withdrawal from the world which is considered a place of misery.

Comparison and conclusion

We have given an outline of Sikhism and of three Hindu systems prevalent in India in the times of Guru Nanak. We have selected the three Hindu systems because scholars ignorant of the Bani and the thesis of Gum Granth Sahib have confused Sikh doctrines with those of these systems. We shall now make a brief comparison of the essentials of Sikhism with the essentials of the three Hindu systems. For the purpose, we regret, some recapitulation will become unavoidable.

The religious experience of the Gurus is that God is Love. He is the Ocean of Virtues and is deeply interested in the world. The world, thus, becomes not only real but also the arena of spiritual expression and development. Fourth, the system is a monotheism. Fifth, virtuous deeds in the world are the sole measure of man's religious growth and assessment, for, higher than truth is truthful living. Sixth, the householder's life, in all its social aspects, thus, becomes the forum of religious activity involving full social responsibility. Seventh, the idea of the brotherhood of man is alone compatible with the idea of the fatherhood of God, logically involving equality between man and man, man and woman, and a fair distribution of God's wealth among His children. Consequently, the need

of work, social participation, and reaction and resistance against wrongs, both as an individual and as a society become part of one's religious duties. Therefore, the goal is neither *Moksha*, nor merger in, or blissful union with God as an end in itself, but to be the instrument of His Attributive Will directed toward the creation of the kingdom of God on earth (*Haleemi Raj*). Since there could be occasions when the use of force in pursuit of a righteous cause becomes inevitable, the doctrine of ahimsa as an invariable rule of religious conduct has been rejected. The conclusion is that there can be no socio-moral progress without the spiritual growth of man and there can be no spiritual growth in isolation without its simultaneous expression in life. As a model, the role and life of a *Jivan Mukta*, are epitomized in the lives, deeds, struggles and martyrdoms of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak, we find, was the first man of God in the East to proclaim and found a religion with an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. Hence his radical thesis and its logic involved a clear rejection of asceticism, monasticism, renunciation or withdrawal from life or any segment of it. In pursuit of his mission he also rejected the idea of avatarhood, ritualism, the caste and Ahimsa, both in theory and in practice. And, he positively created and guided a society that should as a religious duty attempt to combat the evils and to solve the social problems of life.

In contrast, Vaisnavism recommends asceticism, renunciation, withdrawal from life and celibacy. It accepts ritualism, Ahimsa, the caste ideology and the idea of a woman or married life being a hurdle in man's spiritual growth. Socio-moral participation and responsibility are recommended neither for the seeker nor for the *Jivan Mukta*, neither as a methodology nor as a goal. Formal and ritualistic image worship, meditation or emotional singing and dancing are the means of attaining *Moksha*, involving union with or merger in Brahman. The doctrine of avatarhood is fundamental and, may be on this account, the metaphysical or ideological concepts are quite variant and even conflicting. The Vasisht Advaita of Ramanuja is pantheistic. In sum, we find, that the fundamentals of Vaisnavism are opposed to those of Sikhism.

As in Vaisnavism, the ideological concepts in Vendantism are quite variant, this being the position in Upanisads too. The essentials of Shankara's Vedanta, which is the dominant view, are also in contrast with those of Sikhism. Sankara calls Brahman

"Sat-Chit-Anand", a quietist concept, against God being love, a dynamic concept, in Sikhism. Against monotheism, Shankara's monoism implies the world being an illusion (*Mithya*) and worldly activity of no spiritual value. The system being life-negating, it recommends celibacy and Sanyasa. Woman has been called the gateway to hell. The final realization of "*aham brahm asmi*" is the result of a contemplative effort and not of any grace of God. These ideas are considered heretical and egoistic in Sikhism. Therefore, Guru Arjan rejected the hymns of Bhagat Kanha who proclaimed, "I am the same, Oh, I am the same". Sankara accepts both the caste ideology and the value of Vedic ritualism because he concedes that the latter can gain heaven for the seeker. Sikhism calls ritualism useless and caste immoral. In Vedanta there is a clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life; in Sikhism such dichotomy is considered a negation of both. The Vedantic Jnani is wholly inactive, but in Sikhism he is the active instrument of God's Will. The contrast between the two systems is conspicuously evident.

The Gurus have criticized no system more severely than Nathism and its ways. This ascetic cult withdraws completely from the world which the Naths call a place of misery. Nath discipline is purely ritualistic, ascetic, Yogic and formal. They make caste distinctions both in the matter of admission to the cult and in the service of food, etc. Some of the Nath practices are quite abhorrent. Their goal, by the raising of Kundalini is a blissful union with Siva. The meanings of "Sahaj" and "Anhand sound" are very different in Nathism, from that in Sikhism. Both Nathism and Vaisnavism accept the validity of the sexual method for the achievement of liberation. In Sikhism there is not the faintest suggestion of the kind. Guru Nanak's observation that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path, clarifies categorically both the glaring contrast between the two systems and the completely radical nature of his thesis and mission.

Having given a brief outline of the four systems, let us now record the views of some Western and Indian scholars about Sikhism. They write: "the term founder is misleading for it suggests that the Guru (Nanak) originated not merely a group of followers but also a school of thought, or a set of teachings." "It was the influence of Nath doctrines and practice on Vaisnava Bhakti which was primarily responsible for the emergence of Sant synthesis". "This is precisely the doctrine which we find in

the works of Guru Nanak."⁴⁷ "The indigenous elements in Sikhism are largely those customs of the tribes of Jats, who made Sikhism their own and the marginal elements are there of the Nath Yogi tradition, which with Vaisnavism Bhakti was primarily responsible for the Sant synthesis."⁴⁸ "The teachings of Nanak do not have a direct causal connection with the later growth which should be understood, largely in terms of historical events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."⁴⁹ "The Sikh Gurus who compiled the *Guru Granth* were marked by the genuinely noble and emancipated trait of appreciating and assimilating all that is valuable in other religions. In this sense, *Guru Granth Sahib* is not a religious text like a holy Bible or Quran but a treatise on human life and righteous living. Guru Nanak did not seek to build a new religion, etc." "Even Sikh scholars see the *Miri* and *Pin* concept as an inseparable whole in the religious order. Non-Sikhs have come to see a basic religion-politics linkage in Sikhism and deduct the root cause of the current crisis in Punjab to this."⁵⁰ "To the extent Hinduism has been influenced by Vedanta, either traditionally or in the modern version of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, it has a tendency to subsume all religions as different aspect of one Large Religion...of which Hinduism is a subconscious if not an overt model. And, of course, in this Religion the closer a person or a doctrine is to the Advaita Vedanta closer to Truth is he or is assumed to be." "But where it comes to the Indians belonging to religions which originated within India, such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, many a Hindu regard these as downright unpatriotic or unspiritual, or both, if they wish to maintain their distinct identity from the Hindus. Distinctions are just not considered a mark of high enough vision and are mere appearances."⁵¹ "When dealing with the beliefs, rituals practices of the Sikhs-be they religious or political-it is always worth-while to constantly remind ourselves that we are fundamentally dealing with the peasantry and the world-view of this social class has historically always been very different from the other social classes."⁵²

Seen in the light of our discussion and analysis of Sikhism and the three other systems, we find that the above-noted observations of some scholars display a singular lack of understanding of the essentials of Sikhism and of the other three religious systems. This ignorance, we believe, is primarily due to their failure to understand the fundamental thesis of *Guru Granth Sahib*, namely, an inalienable combination between the

spiritual life and the empirical life of man. Guru Nanak was the first prophet who broke the dichotomy that existed between the two lives in all the Indian religious systems. It has been asserted and accepted that the institutions of asceticism and monasticism are the specific contribution of Indian religions and culture to the world culture. This dichotomy was not only broken ideologically and a contrary ideology embodied in the Sikh scripture, but it was consistently practised and clearly proclaimed. Further, this doctrine was externally symbolized and institutionalized in the close and common location of Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takhat, the installation of two flags at the common compound between Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat, and the two swords worn by the Sixth Guru. The chief fundamentals of Sikhism were not only opposed to those of the earlier Indian traditions but there was really no trace of them in those systems. It is, therefore, evident that this sudden and radical change in the essentials of the Indian religious doctrines as emphatically brought about by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus could only be spiritually revealed. For, there was nothing new in the environment to cause such a revolutionary response. Such being the thesis of the Gurus, it is sheer naivety to apply evolutionary, materialistic or sociological methodologies in trying to interpret the Sikh religion. Such studies could only suggest self-contradictory inferences. Hence our stress that the study of a religion requires a discipline of its own. Sikhism believes that there is a higher level of Reality which not only reveals itself to man but also operates in history. Without the acceptance of this concept, no revelatory religion or its history can be studied much less understood and correctly interpreted. The study of Sikhism and the three other contemporary systems clearly leads to the above conclusion.



CHAPTER V

THE SIKH WORLD-VIEW — ITS IDEOLOGICAL IDENTITY

Introduction

In order to understand the Sikh worldview, it is necessary to answer a number of questions, namely, (1) what is the spiritual experience of the Gurus about the fundamental Reality? (2) what are the logical implications of that religious experience? (3) how these implications or ideas differ from those in other religions? (4) did those ideas govern the course of Sikh religion? and (5) what is the future the Sikh world-view holds for man? In answering these questions we shall confine ourselves entirely to the Bani in Guru Granth Sahib and historically accepted facts about the lives of the Gurus. Many of the misrepresentations about Sikhism arise from the failure of writers to understand Sikhism on the basis of its thesis, or to define Sikhism in terms of doctrines in the Guru Granth Sahib. Obviously, in this short paper, we shall only give an outline of the Sikh world-view. We shall start with a definition of the fundamental Reality or God in Sikhism.

God in Sikhism

The Reality or God has been profusely defined in the Guru Granth. Guru Nanak calls Him "Karta Purkh" or "Creator Person", the world being His creation. Apart from being immanent in the world, He is the Ocean of virtues, i.e. He is a God of Attributes. In defining the fundamental nature of God, the Guru says, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord? He is all Love, rest He is Ineffable."¹ Thus, the key to understanding the Sikh worldview is that God is Love. And Love has four dear facets. It is dynamic, it is the mother of all virtues

and values, it is directive, or has a Will, and it is Benevolent towards life in which it is immanent, i.e. it generates neither a dialectical movement, nor a class war, nor suicidal competition or struggle.

Corollaries of God is Love

This spiritual experience leads to five corollaries, First, it ipso facto gives status, meaning and reality to the world and life, because Love and God's Attributes can be expressed only in a becoming universe. For, when God was all by Himself, the question of Love and devotion did not arise. In unambiguous words, the Guru says, "True is He and true is His creation."² Second, it clearly implies that the religious man has to lead a life of creativity and activity. Consequently, householder's life is accepted and monasticism is spurned. Third, this gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man, indicating thereby that it should be of the same character as the loving nature of God. For, "Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of Naam (God) to sprout."³ This dearly prescribes the methodology of deeds. Fourth, it unambiguously points out the direction in which human effort should move and the yardstick with which to measure human conduct. This sets the goal for the seeker, or God-man. Fifth, it shows the gracious interest of God in human affairs and activities. An important attribute of God is that He is 'Guru' or Enlightener who gives both knowledge and guidance, i.e. spiritual experience is noetic. Guru's God being a God of Will, one feels confident that one is working in line with His altruistic Will. For, God is perpetually creating and watching the world with His Benevolent Eye."⁴ And, He rewards every effort to become divine.⁵ For that matter, it gives man hope, strength and optimism.

Implication of God is Love

Here it is necessary to stress that the definition that God is Love is extremely important for determining the category of Sikh religion. For all systems in which God is Love, are life affirming and there is an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. And, as in the case of Abu Ben. Adam, Love of one's neighbour is the primary and essential counterpart of the love of God. But, in life-negating systems there is a dear dichotomy between the empirical life and the spiritual life of man. And Sanyasa, asceticism, monasticism,

withdrawal from life and celibacy are the normal modes of the spiritual path. Sikhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity belong to the first category. Jainism and most other Indian systems belong to the second category.

In fact, differences in approach to life are due to the basic difference in the spiritual experience. In the second category of systems like Vaisnavism and Vedanta, God has been defined as 'Sat-Chit-Ananda'. This is far from being a dynamic concept. Stace has made a detailed survey of the description various mystics give of the nature of their spiritual experience of the Ultimate Reality. They all give blessedness, tranquility, holiness, unitary consciousness and ineffability as the nature of their spiritual experience.⁶ No mystic mentions love as the characteristic of that experience. The distinction is not arbitrary but real. Huxley says, "The Indians say, the thought and the thinker and the thing thought about are one and then of the way in which this unowned experience becomes something belonging to me; then no 'I' any more and a kind of Sat-Chit-Ananda at one moment without Karma or Charity (how odd that the Vedantists say nothing about love)...! had an inkling of both kinds of Nirvana--the loveless being, consciousness, bliss and the one with love, and above all, sense that one can never love enough".⁷ He also says: "Staying in this ecstatic consciousness and cutting oneself off from participation and commitment in the rest of the world--this is perfectly expressed today in powerful slang, in the phrase "dropping out". It completely denies the facts; it is morally wrong, and finally of course, "Absolutely Catastrophic."⁸ Hence, the religious system laid down by the Gurus is radically different from the earlier Indian systems.

Consequent differences with other religious systems of India

As it is, Guru's concept of God is quite different from the concept of many of the quietist mystics who suggest a different concept, or from the Indian concept of Sat-Chit-Ananda. We shall find that Guru Nanak's system follows strictly his spiritual experience and his view of the Attributes of God. And as a godman, he seeks to follow the line of expression of God's attributes in the world of man. Consequently, in the empirical life, this concept has important implications which stand emphasized in the Rani and life of Guru Nanak. Hence, Guru

Nanak's system and its growth are entirely different from his contemporary religious systems and their growth.

First, it means, as already pointed out, the reality of the world and the life-affirming character of Sikhism. For, God is not only immanent in the world, but he also expresses His Love and Attributes in the empirical world and casts a Benevolent Eye on His Creation. But in Vedanta and other Indian systems, the world is either Mithya, illusion, a misery, or a suffering. Second, Sikhism being life-affirming, this, inevitably, involves an integral combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. This constitutes the foundation of the Miri-Piri doctrine laid down by Guru Nanak in his Bani. In other words, Guru Nanak's system is a whole life system like Islam and Judaism which also combine the spiritual and the empirical lives of men. Third, in consequence of it, monasticism, Sanyasa, asceticism and withdrawal from life are rejected, and householder's life is accepted as the forum of spiritual activities and growth. Logically monasticism and celibacy go together and Guru Nanak categorically rejected both of them. Obviously, God's qualities of being 'Shelter to the shelterless', 'milk to the child', 'riches to the poor', and 'eyes to the blind',⁹ can be expressed by the god-man only by being a householder and participating in all walks of life and not by withdrawing from them. The fourth difference follows as a corollary to this and to the rejection of celibacy, namely, equality between man and woman.

In contrast, we find that in life-negating systems, and more especially in the Indian systems, the position on all these four points is essentially different. For them, life is far from real or an arena of spiritual endeavours. The spiritual path and the worldly path are considered separate and distinct. Whether it is Vedanta, Jainism, Buddhism, Vaisnavism or Nathism, asceticism, monasticism, Sanyasa or withdrawal from life into Bhikshuhood is the normal course. In consequence, celibacy is the rule and woman is deemed to be a temptress. Digambara Jains believe that a woman cannot reach Kaivalya and has first to achieve male incarnation.¹⁰ In Buddhism, woman Bhikshus are deemed second grade compared to male Bhikshus who are considered senior to them.¹¹ A male Bhikshu is not supposed to touch and rescue a drowning woman, even if she were his mother.¹² Sankara calls a woman the gateway to hell.¹³ Both Ramanuja and Shankaradeva (a liberal Vaisnava saint) would not admit a woman to be a Vaisnava.¹⁴ The latter stated: "Of all the terrible aspirations of the

world, woman is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of women."¹⁵ Bhagat Kabir, we know, is considered a misogynist and calls woman "Black cobra" "I" "pit of hell" and "the refuse of the world".¹⁶ It is well known that even today in Catholic Christianity, a woman is not ordained as a priest. As against all this, Guru Nanak not only sanctioned a householder's life but stated as to "how woman could be called impure when without woman, there would be none."¹⁷

All this has been explained to stress that the basic perceptions about the nature of the spiritual experience and the ontological Reality being different, the spiritual paths, under the two categories of systems, become automatically quite divergent.

Further, the acceptance of householder's life has important empirical and socio-political implications. Except for Guru Harikrishan, who died at an early age, every Guru married and led a householder's life. By way of demonstration, this step was essential, otherwise, the entire Indian tradition being different, Guru Nanak's system would have been completely misunderstood and misinterpreted. We are well aware that it is the Naths who questioned Guru Nanak as to how incongruous it was that he was, on the one hand, wearing the clothes of a householder, and, on the other hand, was claiming to follow the religious path. Guru Nanak's reply was equally cryptic and categorical when he said that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path.¹⁸ For this very reason, the Guru did not make his son, Baba Sri Chand, a recluse, to be his successor.

Regarding the fifth important difference about the goal of life of the religious man, Guru Nanak has made the position very clear in his Japuji. After putting a specific question as to what is the way to be a 'sachiar' or a true man, the Guru, while dearly rejecting the method of observing silence, coupled with continuous concentration or meditation, replies that the right method and goal are to carry out the Will of God.¹⁹ And, God being Love and the Ocean of virtues, His will is altruistically creative and dynamic. The Sikh goal of life is, thus, to be active and live a creative life of love and virtues. The goal is not personal salvation, or merger in Brahman, but an ever

active life of love. It is in this context that Guru Nanak gives the call, "If you want to play the game of love, then come to my path with your head on your palm, once you set your foot on this way, then find not a way out and be prepared to lay down your head."²⁰ For him, life is a game of love. It is significant that the same advice was given by Guru Arjan to Bhai Manjh who was then a Sakhi Sarvarya and wanted to be a Sikh of the Guru : "You may go on with the easy path of Sakhi Sarvar worship because Sikhism is a very difficult path, and unless you are willing to be dispossessed of your wealth and to sacrifice your very life, it is no use coming to me."²¹ Exactly, the same call for total sacrifice was given by Guru Gobind Singh on Baisakhi Day, 1699 A.D., before he created the Khalsa and administered Amrit to the Panj Piaras.

The goal being different, the sixth implication is as to the method to achieve that goal. In Sikhism, the emphasis is on the methodology of deeds. Guru Nanak has made this point very clear when he says in Japuji that "man's assessment in His court is done on the basis of one's deeds"²² , and again that "it is by one's deeds that we become near or away from God."²³ In order to stress the fundamental spiritual importance of deeds, Guru Nanak says, "Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living. "²⁴ In fact, when the Guru defines the gurmukh or the superman, he calls him one who "always lives truthfully."

Essentials of Sikh life and its differences with other systems in matters of social responsibility

The basic difference between a whole-life system and a dichotomous system is that in the former every field of operation of God is also the field of operation and responsibility of both the god-man and the seeker. This is the broad approach. Having defined the nature of God and the goal of man, the important issue is what are the essentials of the religious life. In the context explained above, Guru Nanak has fixed five specific duties and responsibilities of the religious life. The first is of accepting equality between man and woman. Guru Nanak clearly stated, "Why downgrade women when without women there would be none,"²⁵ and "it is she who gives birth to great persons."²⁶ When the third Guru created Manjis or districts of religious administration, women were appointed incharge of some of them.²⁷ The second responsibility is of maintaining equality between man and man. This was

a direct blow to the social ideology of Vam Ashram Dharma which gave scriptural sanction for the hierarchical caste system. Guru Nanak found fault with that ideology saying, "The Vedas make a wrong distinction of caste,"²⁸ and "one cannot be a Yogi by mere wishing, real Yoga lies in treating all alike."²⁹ He demonstrated the primary importance of treating all as equal by taking, after his enlightenment, Mardana, a low caste Muslim, as his life companion. This meant a total departure from the then existing religious prejudices not only against caste, but also against Muslims who were regarded as Malechhas. He made it clear that anyone wanting to join his society had, at the very start, to shed all prejudices against inter-religious or inter-caste dining and social intercourse. The revolutionary character of this step could be gauged from the fact that a Ramanuja would throw the entire food as polluted, if anyone cast a glance on it while he had been preparing or eating his food.³⁰

The third point of social responsibility, Guru Nanak emphasized, was the importance of work. This too we find was something opposed to the then prevalent religious practice. Evidently, other-worldliness, Sanyas or monasticism excluded the religious necessity of work and sustaining the society. In fact, the Naths who were then the principal religious organisation in Punjab took a vow never to engage themselves in any work or business.³¹ But, Guru Nanak says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split (i.e. turns a Nath Yagi and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint. Do not look upto him nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others."³² The Guru deprecates the Yogi who gives up the world and then is not ashamed of begging at the door of the house-holders.³³ The fourth social responsibility Guru Nanak stressed was about the sharing of wealth. He stated, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves."³⁴ "Man gathers riches by making others miserable."³⁵ "Wealth cannot be gathered without sin but it does not keep one's company after death."³⁶ All this clearly condemns exploitative collection of wealth. The story of Guru Nanak rejecting the invitation of Malik Bhago, a rich person exploiting the poor, but accepting the hospitality of Lalo, a poor labourer, illustrates the same point as stressed in his Bani.

Thus, the twin ideas about the brotherhood of man and the sharing of wealth to eliminate poverty and maintain equality in

society were stressed by Guru Nanak. Even after his missionary tours, Guru Nanak took to the role of a peasant for the last 18 years of his life. It is significant that till the time of the sixth Guru, when social and military duties of the leadership and organisation of the Sikh society became quite heavy and absorbing, every Sikh Guru had been doing vocation or business to support his family.

The fifth point of social responsibility, where Guru Nanak radically departed from all the contemporary religious systems, including Sufism, Santism and Christianity, was his approach towards injustice and oppression of all kinds in society. He made a meticulous study of injustice and corruption, aggression and incongruity in every field of life. He pointed out the greed and hypocrisy of Brahman Priests and Mullahs, the "blood thirsty corruption" and injustice by lower and higher-rung officials in the administration, the misrule, oppression and irresponsibility of the local rulers, their inability to give security, fairplay and peace to the people, and brutal and barbaric butchery of the people. All this was not just idle rhetoric but a diagnostic assessment of the prevailing turmoil and conditions in the society which the Guru felt needed to be changed. The point for emphasis is that in Guru Nanak's ideology, there was nothing like private or personal salvation. Just as God of Love is benevolently looking after the entire world, in the same way, godman's sphere of activity and responsibility is equally wide, and is unheeded by any self-created barriers. This is, as we shall see, a fundamental difference between a salvation religion catering for individuals, and a universal religion catering for the spiritual well-being of society as a whole.

Here it is very relevant to give, as recorded by Bertrand Russell, the contrasted approach of St. Augustine, one of the greatest exponents of the Christian gospel and author of *City of God*, Russell concludes: "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned, not with saving civilization or expelling the barbarians or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merit of virginity and the damnation of unbaptized infants. Seeing that these were the pre-occupations that the Church handed on to the converted barbarian, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all other fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition."³⁷ Whereas, Guru Nanak, meticulously points out every dark spot in the religious and sodo-political life of his times.

St. Augustine is simply unconcerned with socio-political conditions of his period. For, "Augustine's City of God (426) attacked both Christians who expected the world to get better and pagans with a cyclic view of history. Augustine did not believe that the spread of Christianity would ensure political and economic improvement. The earthy city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires."³⁸

Another important fact is Guru Nanak's criticism in Babar Vani of the brutalities and massacres perpetrated and misery caused by the invaders. He condemns that in the strongest terms and complains to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong.³⁹ This hymn has an extremely important lesson, which many of us have missed. For, anything which is within the sphere of His creation and the responsibility of God, is certainly within the sphere of responsibility of the god-man. The hymn has four implications, first, that injustice and oppression are violative of the Order of God; second, that as Master and God of Love, harmony has to be maintained by His Will; third, that, as the instrument of God, it is the spiritual duty and responsibility of the god-man to confront all kinds of injustice; and, fourth, that, as such, resistance to oppression was a task and a target laid down by the Guru for the religious society he was organising. Because, it is Guru Nanak who defines God as "Destroyer of the evil-doers."⁴⁰ "Destroyer of demonical persons"⁴¹, "Slayer of the inimical"⁴² and "Protector of the weak". Such being the God of Guru Nanak, it is equally the responsibility of the godman, gurmukh, or the Sikh to carry out His will which is just and altruistic. In short, in Guru Nanak's system to ensure equality and fair play and to react against injustice and aggression become the religious duty and responsibility of the Sikh. Since the dawn of civilisation, the greatest oppression and injustice have undeniably been done by the rulers, the State, or the Establishment that has possessed all the instruments of power and coercion. It is impossible for individuals to confront that power. This leads to two important inferences. First, that in a whole-life system like Sikhism, which combines spiritual life with the empirical life of man and accepts the Miri-Piri doctrine, the religious man must as a religious duty resist and confront injustice wherever it should take place.

Second, that such a religious man should not only be Cognizant of such injustice but also organise a society that should be in a position to face the challenge of such injustice

and oppression. This follows logically both from Guru Nanak's Bani and his system. This also explains why from the very beginning of his mission, he started organising the Sikh societies at places which he visited and how the societies were logically linked and developed by his successors into a Panth. All this is very significant and important about his society and religion. It is obvious to every student of the Adi Granth that so far as the ideology is concerned; it had been completely laid down in the Bani of Guru Nanak. But what was lacking was the presence of a properly motivated and responsible society that should be in a position successfully to discharge the responsibility of reacting against injustice and oppression prevalent in his times.

In this connection there is another important and related issue. Having cast on his society the responsibility of confronting injustice, again it is Guru Nanak who eliminated the hurdle of Ahimsa that stood as a bar against the religious man or a religious society trying to confront socio-political aggression. Among Vaisnavas, Jains, Buddhist Bhikkhus, Naths, or Radical Sants like Kabir, Ahimsa is deemed to be a cardinal virtue and meat-eating is a prohibition. These religious persons are all from life-negating systems with personal salvation as the ideal. But a society that has to accept the social responsibility of confronting injustice cannot remain wedded to the hurdle of Ahimsa. For, reason and force are both neutral tools that can be used both for good and evil, for construction and destruction. That is why Guru Nanak says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or in what lies sin and what is not sin,"⁴³ and that "there is life in every grain of food we eat."⁴⁴

Role of later nine Gurus

In a country which for over 2,000 years had been trained in religious systems involving a clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man and which had accepted Ahimsa as a fundamental value and individual salvation as an ideal, it was no easy task to create a mature society with new motivations of willingly accepting the religious or social responsibility of always reacting against injustice and oppression in all spheres of life.

It is very significant that Guru Nanak laid the foundations of every institution that was later developed and matured by his successors. By starting the institution of Langar and taking

Mardana as his life companion, he gave a heavy blow to the divisive institution of 'Varn Ashram Dharma', pollution and caste. He created a separate Sikh society with their own Dharamsalas as centres of religious worship and training. He sanctified the role of the householder as the medium of religious expression and progress and made it plain that work was a necessity of life and idleness a vice. He emphatically made it clear that reaction against injustice and oppression is an essential duty of the religious man and the religious society. For that end, while he created a new society with a new ideology, he also removed the hurdle of Ahimsa so that his society could discharge its socio-religious responsibility without any unwanted inhibitions and impediments in its path. And since the new society had not yet been fully organised and developed, and had yet to be properly oriented to enable it to discharge its responsibilities, he also created the institution of succession. It is very significant of the social and societal aims of Guru Nanak that after passing the succession to Guru Angad when he found him to be living somewhat a solitary life, he reminded him that he had to be very active since he had to organize a society or Panth.⁴⁵

In the time of the second, third and fourth Gurus, four important steps were taken. Through the creation of 22 Manjis or districts of religious administration, the Sikh society was organised into a separate religious Panth. But, the most important and the most difficult part of the task was the creation of new motivations and the acceptance of new life-affirming religious ideals of Guru Nanak which were radically new in their approach, implications and goals. The stupendous nature of the task of the Gurus can be judged from the fact that even today great Hindus, like Jadunath Sarkar, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, and Christians like McLeod, Cole, Toynbee and the like, all coming from pacifist traditions and conditioned by them, find it difficult to understand the spiritual role of the sixth and the tenth Masters.

The third Guru created new institutions which had a dual purpose, on the one hand, of weaning away the Sikhs from the old Hindu society, and, on the other hand, of conditioning the Sikhs in new values, ideals and practices. For example, while Guru Nanak had bypassed his recluse son, Sri Chand, for the same reasons, the second and the third Gurus avoided persons

of ascetic tendencies from entering the Sikh fold. On the positive side, the institution of Langar with the dual purpose of feeding the poor and eliminating the caste and status prejudices and distinctions was strengthened. Finally, the important religious centre of Darbar Sahib and the town of Amritsar were founded and developed for the periodical meetings of the Sikh society and visits of the Sikhs to the Guru. The object of all this was to establish a separate historical identity of the Sikhs and to wean them away from the traditional society, its centres of pilgrimage, and its religious practices and rituals. Not only had they to be trained in the essentials of a new religious system, but they had also to be taken out of the strangle-hold of the Brahman priests claiming to be the sole medium of religious growth, practice and interpretation.

Then came the stage of the fifth Guru who created and installed the Sikh scripture as the revealed and final doctrinal authority. The system of Daswandh (giving 10 % of earnings for the cause of the community) was organised. Sikhs were initiated into trading in horses so that the transition to the next stage of militancy could become smooth. As the instrument of God on earth, the Sikhs called their Guru "True Emperor". In the time of fifth Guru, the Sikh society had become 'a State within a State',⁴⁶ and had developed a social identity which had caught the eye of the emperor who considered it an unwanted so do-political growth. By his martyrdom, the Guru not only strengthened the faith and determination of the community but also sought confrontation with the Empire, leaving instructions to his son to begin militarisation of the Sikh community. In the process, the sixth Guru even recruited mercenaries to train his people. This phase of martyrdom and confrontation with the empire was continued by the subsequent Gurus till Guru Gobind Singh did, as recorded by his contemporary Kavi Sainapat, the epitomic work of starting the institutions of Amrit and the Khalsa.⁴⁷ Having felt that the Panth had become mature and responsible enough, the Guru created the Khalsa in 1699 A.D., and requested the Panj Piaras to baptise him.⁴⁸ It is very significant that at that time the sons of the Guru were all alive, meaning thereby that Guru Nanak's mission had been completed and thereafter the succession was not to be continued. And, finally, the Guru made Gum Granth Sahib as the Guru.⁴⁹

Let us have a rapid look back to find out if the five tasks indicated by Guru Nanak had been accomplished. First, the Sikhs had been formed into a distinct new religious society with a scripture of its own, being the full repository and complete and final guide of the Sikh ideology and its way of life. This separateness was made total by Guru Gobind Singh's Nash doctrine of five freedoms, Dharam Nash, Bharam Nash, Kul Nash, Karam Nash and Kirt Nash.⁵⁰ This means freedom from the bonds of old religions and traditions, of earlier superstitions, prejudices, of earlier acts and of restrictions in choice of trade or in professional mobility. The Tenth Master made a complete break with the earlier traditions and societies. Second, it was a society of householders, rejecting all kinds of other-worldliness, idleness and monasticism. Three, it was a casteless society with complete fraternity among its members. Men from the lowest and Sudra castes rose to be its leaders. Four, it was a society which was fully earth aware; and habits of work, production and service became ingrained among its members. Begging was considered a disgrace; and in this poor country, it was difficult to find a Sikh beggar. The contrast is evident from the fact that while the Sikhs have never had a Brahman leader, in India after independence in 1947, from Prime Minister down to practically every Chief Minister was a Brahman. And now about the fifth social responsibility of freeing the country from the curse of a thousand-year wave of invaders from the North-West. Though the Sikhs were subjected over the years to the worst persecution in the Indian history, yet they suffered it and emerged triumphant. And, finally, they were able once for all to stem that tide. They have been trained to react against wrong, injustice and oppression. A society has been created with the ideal of Sant-Sipahi (Saint-Soldier).

Manmukh to Gurmukh-Guru's concept of Evolution of Man

Here, it is necessary to give the manmukh-gurmukh concept which is essential for understanding the Sikh worldview. The Gurus feel that over millions of years life has evolved into man from a tiny speck of life. The Guru says, "for several births (you) were a mere worm, for several births, an insect, for several births a fish and animal", "after ages you have the glory of being a man."⁵¹ "After passing through myriads of Species, one is blest with the human form."⁵² "God created you out of a drop of water and breathed life in you. He endowed

you with the light of reason, discrimination and wisdom."⁵³ "O man, you are supreme in God's creation; now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."⁵⁴ At its present stage of development, man is without doubt better equipped than the other animals so far as he has a higher sense of discrimination. But as an ego-conscious being, he is still an animal, being a manmukh. This implies that whatever be human pretensions, man is basically and organically a self-centred being. His psyche is governed by egoistic consciousness, that being his centre of awareness, control and propulsion. Because of his present inherent limitations of ego-consciousness, it is virtually impossible for man to avoid conflict, competition, and wars. But the Gurus clearly hold out hope for man. There are four stages of evolution or development. The Guru says, "God created first, Himself, then, Haumain, third, Maya (multifarious things and beings) and fourth, the next higher stage of the gurmukh who lives truthfully."⁵⁵ But, they clearly hold out hope for man in so far as they say that it is human destiny to reach the fourth stage and to meet God, or to be a gurmukh, or one who is in tune with the fundamental Reality or Universal Consciousness, God, Naam, or Love. His ideal is not merger in God or salvation, or union as an end in itself. Being the instrument of or in touch with God's altruistic consciousness, he is spontaneously benevolent, compassionate, creative and loving. It is very important to note that the gurmukh or superman is not a quietist, he "lives truthfully". He lives as did the ten Gurus. For Guru Nanak, was called just a gurmukh. This is the next higher stage of evolution towards which life is striving and not towards darkness and death as materialist scientists would have us believe. Nor does Sikhism accept any concept of the basic sinfulness or fall of man from grace. It only indicates the constitutional weakness, immaturity or imperfection of man at its present stage of the evolutionary process or development. Hence, it gives us an ideology of optimism and hope, invoking and exhorting us to make moral effort.

Survey of Higher Religions

Before we draw our conclusions, let us make a brief survey of some religious ideologies of the world and find the place of Sikhism among them. There are four clear religious ideologies that are current today.

Dichotomous religions

First is the category of religious systems like Buddhism, Jainism, Nathism, Vaisnavism and Vedanta in which there is clear dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life. Monasticism, Sanyas, other worldliness, celibacy, Yogic meditation and Ahimsa are the common but important features of this category. They hold out no hope for man except by withdrawal from life and Yogic or one-point meditation. In each case, it is a path of personal salvation without any involvement in the so do-political affairs of man. Practically, all the Indian religions, except Sikhism, belong to this category.

Judaism

Second is Judaism which has a long and chequered history. Basically, it is a system in which there is no dichotomy between the religious life and the empirical life of man. Prophet Moses who got the revelation was both a religious and political leader. His Torah or his Commandments and laws prescribe and govern the entire gamut of the spiritual and temporal life of the Jew. It is a system that prescribes rules governing the conduct of prayer, rituals, sacrifices and the socio-political life of the Jews. The renowned Hillel when asked to explain the 613 commandments of the Torah, replied, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary, go and learn it."⁵⁶ In short, it is basically a life-affirming system. It makes no distinction between the spiritual and the so do-political life of man. The Torah governs every aspect of it. As to the means of resistance, Judaism recommends the use of force by saying, 'Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' and indicates rules for a righteous fight.⁵⁷ But, over its long history including the period of prophets, this aspect of its principle has to an extent been altered, or changed atleast by some sects of the community. In the period of prophets at the time of Babylonian attack (Sixth Century B.C.) on Palestine, prophet Jeremiah strongly recommended non-resistance or pacifism. He asserted that the attack was God's punishment 'to the Jews for their non-observance of His Laws.'⁵⁸ His assertion was something like Mahatma Gandhi's statement that the Bihar earthquake was a punishment to the Hindus for their practice of untouchability. However, over the centuries thereafter, many religious sects of Jews like Essenes, Kabbalists,⁵⁹ Hasidists,

Therapeutics, and even some Pharisees accepted the principle of non-resistance, withdrawal and other-worldliness. Even monastic and celibate cults appeared among Jews discarding both the world and the use of force. This important change in a basic religious principle, we believe, appeared in the Jews religion in later parts of its history when Judaism was unable to cope with challenges from the environment and their religious fervour had been exhausted. Practically, all these other-worldly sects appeared after the destruction of the First Temple and the fall of Jerusalem when thousands of Jews were driven out as exiles and slaves to Babylonia. All we wish to stress is that these fundamental changes in Judaic ideology, including other-worldly or monastic sects, appeared only during the lean period of Jewish history. This happened about eight centuries after the revelation of Moses, and after the hey days of Jewish life in the times of David and Solomon. But, it is very significant that despite the presence of somewhat pacifist or other-wordly cults and sects in Judaism, and despite about 2500 years of suffering and travail, the cult of Zionism, a virtual revival of earlier non-pacifist ideals, strongly reappeared in Judaism in the last century. And it is an important fact that Einstein, who says that his life was spent 'between politics and equations' was a staunch Zionist. So much so that when Israil was formed he was offered its presidency.⁶⁰ However, apart from this apparent doctrinal ambivalence in its ideology, Judaism is a highly exclusive religion, not quite universal in its character, affinities and approach.

Christianity

The Judaic heritage of Christianity is undoubted. As in Judaism, in Christianity too, there is no dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. For, Christ emphasizes both loving God with all one's heart, and loving one's neighbour as oneself.⁶¹ But like Buddha, he also emphasizes the pacifist principles, 'resist not evil' and 'turn the left cheek if hit on the right.' Religious history demonstrates that pacifist religions almost invariably become other-worldly, even if they were life-affirming in the beginning. Because of their religious pacifism, the Christians declined to take up service in the Roman army. In fact, historians like Gibbon and Sir James Frazer have mentioned Christian other-worldliness as one of the major causes of the fall of the Roman Empire.⁶² It is obvious that

Christianity which like Judaism was a religion of householders, showed, by the beginning of the 4th century A.D., clear monastic trends.⁶³ Increasingly, monasteries and nunneries appeared as a significant development in the Christian religion. This life of monasticism, asceticism and nunneries led, on the one hand, to other-worldly quietist mysticism, and, on the other hand, to corruption and malpractices in the Catholic Church.

Consequent to this schism in the life of the Christian Church, ultimately arose the Reformation, causing a major blow to the supremacy of the Church and its role as the guiding moral force in the life of Christian society. Lutheran and Calvinist reforms not only shattered the universal character of the Church but also brought about its subordination to the national State. In addition, because of Luther's leanings towards the feudal princes, he took a very hostile, unjust and feudalistic stand against the rights of the peasantry. This landslide in the fortunes of the Church caused its gradual waning, as a major moral influence in the socio-political life of the Christian societies. After the rise of science, which was considered to be a new elixir, it came to be believed that it would in course of time cure most of human ills. The net result is that in the last 300 years, Renaissance, scientism, empiricism and secularism have virtually eliminated religion from the moral life of man in the West.

Toynbee says, "This transfer of allegiance from the Western Christian Church to parochial Western secular state was given a positive form borrowed from the Graeco-Roman civilization by the Renaissance." "This unavowed worship of parochial states was by far the most prevalent religion in the Christian society."⁶⁴ Since the loss of supremacy of religion in the Christian society, Western life has lost its moral moorings. Nationalism, communism and individualism have been the unstable off springs of this broken home. "Together with Darwinism, secularism and positivism, they have dehumanised the Western culture, reducing liberalism to a self-serving, highly competitive individualism."⁶⁵ By relegating religion to the background and having lost the moral springs of the Western culture, either utilitarian ethics has been accepted as an expedient substitute or a reductionist search has been made to find appropriate ethical elements in the life of the animals, or in the material base of man which is considered to be its fundamental constituent. And this search has finally come to the dismal conclusion that all ethical life is "a defence mechanism" or a "reaction formation" to

the impacts of the environment. After the Second World War, a third of the population of the world has been living under the Communist system. As the century is closing, these countries find that despite the myth of the dialectical movement and synthesis, the system has been unable to make any synthetic values or devise a system of ethics that should be able to maintain cohesion within these societies. And it is the existence of this moral vacuum that has made the Foreign Secretary of the Soviets proclaim that "universal values should have priority over class, group or other interest."⁶⁶ At the ethical plane, this decries, in a way, the validity of Darwinism, and its struggle for existence, and Marxism with its dialectical movement of class struggle. It involves equal condemnation of economic wars, cut-throat competition, consumerism and increasing disparities in Capitalist societies.

From the point of internal cohesion, the position in the Capitalist countries of the West is no better. Mounting number of divorces, broken homes, drug addiction, alcoholism, and individualism have created a situation in North America that the Christian Church raised a strong voice saying that Secularism was a common danger and needed to be eliminated as a social force, and that Christianity should seek the co-operation of other religions to combat its evil influence. Christianity had given to the empirical life in the West its cohesion, strength and elan; the divorce of religion from politics and the empirical life, has left Secularism a barren institution without any hope of a creative future. This is the tragedy both of Communism and Capitalism. It is this tragedy with its dark future that the North American Churches wanted to avoid. But in the temper of the times, this voice of sanity was drowned in an exhibition of suicidal egoism of European Churches who felt that "secularization, not secularism, is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put into a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force which is destroying all old ideas. Hence, secularization is an ally, because it will destroy Hinduism, Islam and other forms of what they considered to be superstition. So we should ally ourselves with secularization and see it as the work of God." Later, it was again repeated; "We do not feel that we have anything lacking. And so we are opposed to dialogue unless it is for the sake of testifying to Jesus Christ." That was it. Then they passed a resolution saying that under no circumstances should multi-religious

dialogues put Christianity on the same level as other religions, and this is unacceptable. So because the European C had that point of view, the World Council has not been engage in multi-religious dialogues for quite sometime."⁶⁷

This is the state of affairs of the moral life of man in the Western countries who lead the dominant culture of the times Recently, however, some priests in Latin America have raised a voice for an integrated and composite culture of Liberation Theology, invoking the Bible in support of revolutionary to help the poor. But it is still a minority voice in the Christian world. Further C. Torres states, "The Catholic who is not a revolutionary is living in mortal sin."⁶⁸

Islam

Islam started with a full-blooded combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is this combination that swept everything before it and created an epoch which is unrivalled in its achievements. It is a religious system and culture which is, in many respects, more comprehensive and unified than the parochial culture of the city states of Greece. It is hardly complimentary to the Christian world of the West that while today it seeks to fashion many of its cultural in on the basis of Greek classical models, yet these, but for the interlude of the Islamic epoch which preserved most of the Greek thought, would have been lost to posterity. Never was the concept of human brotherhood advanced, in thought and deed, on a scale as it happened during this epoch. It speaks volumes for the liberalism of Islamic culture that the hey days of the Judaic literature, philosophy and thought synchronise with the countries and periods of Islamic rule. Not only were some of the Jewish classics written, but Maimonides, the king of Judaic philosophy, also flourished and wrote during the period of Muslim rule. As against it, under Christian rulers the Jews suffered periodical massacres, persecution and the segregated life of the ghetto. Admittedly, the Muslim rulers, were by comparison quite liberal towards the followers of other religions. Islamic contribution to the scientific thought of the day was significant. But far more important is the contribution of men like Al Quraishi, Al Ghazali and Arbi to the religious thought of man.

There is, however, little doubt that mystic quietism and other-worldliness of Sufis is a growth that appeared during the

time of later Caliphs, when they indulged in luxurious and un-Islamic living. It has happened in the case of Judaism and of Islam, both whole-life religions, that in times when religiously sensitive souls found it difficult to face the social or socio-political challenges, they withdrew themselves into the shell of quietism, other-worldliness, monasticism and asceticism. Sufi sects appeared all over the Muslim world, but they never posed 'a challenge to the oppression and misrule of the Muslim emperors or kings. In this respect, the Jew prophets were quite bold in their criticism of Jewish rulers, including David and Solomon.

It is very significant, and shows the lofty spiritual status of the Sikh Gurus and the basic ideological affinity between the two religions, that a sufi saint like Peer Buddhu Shah fought and sacrificed two of his sons for the cause of Guru Gobind Singh.⁶⁹ But it was the Sikh Gurus and not the Sufis who challenged the growing Mughal tyranny. This instance demonstrates that although as an organisation, Sufis had become other-worldly and failed to confront the major challenge of societal oppression in the Muslim empires, yet when the Sikh Gurus had actually taken up the challenge and the ideological struggle was on, the Sufi saint made it clear that considering the tenets of Islam, on which side should be the sympathies of a pious person.

There are, however, some scholars who believe that like the otherworldliness of Christians in the case of Roman Empire, Sufis also became a significant cause of the decline of the Muslim. cultural supremacy in the world. For, there is considerable truth in Dr. Mohammad Iqbal's couplet that 'whether it be the facade of a great republic, or the domain of a glorious empire, if its polity is divorced of the religious component, the system is reduced to sheer Changezian barbarity and tyranny'. Thoughtful and saner elements in the Muslim world seem to be disillusioned with the bankrupt Western Secularism and are trying to revert to a reformed but composite culture of Islam.

Religious history and Creation of KhaIsa

In our brief survey, we have indicated four categories of religious systems. The Indian systems are all dichotomous. To the second category belongs pacifist Christianity which, though it originally suggested the love of one's neighbour as oneself,

has gradually but ultimately reduced itself to sheer Secularism, Individualism and Consumerism bereft of any religious component. To the third category belong Judaism and Islam which started with a full-blooded combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life but ultimately, under pressure of circumstances, bifurcated, on the one hand, into other-worldliness or mystic quietism and, on the other hand, into the pursuit of worldly gains and sheer animal survival.

Sikhism belongs to a different or a fourth category of a religious system. For the purpose of understanding, clarity and comparison, it will help us if we recapitulate the salient features of Sikhism. The Gurus say that the Basic Reality is creative and free. It has a direction and a will. It is the ocean of values, Destroyer of evil-doers, Benevolent and Beneficent. That Reality is Love and we can be at peace with ourselves and the world only if we live a life of love and fall in line with the Direction of that Reality. Though ego is God-created and man is at present at the ego-conscious (manmukh) stage of development, it is his destiny to evolve and reach the stage of Universal or God-consciousness and work in line with His altruistic Will, i.e. achieve the gurmukh stage of development when alone he can be 'spontaneously moral' and 'live truthfully'. At the present or the egoistic stage of his development, man cannot avoid conflicts and suicidal wars. It is a futile search to find the moral base of man either in the animal life or in the material constituents of man. Nor can reason, which is just a tool of the egoistic psyche, like any other limb of the individual, devise and give man a helpful ethics. God or Basic Reality which is Love can alone be the source of the moral life of man. Ultimately, it is only God or Naam-consciousness, involving link with the Basic Fount of Love, that alone can lead to truthful living. That is why the Guru says that "Naam-consciousness and ego-consciousness cannot go together."⁷⁰ The two are contradictory to each other. It is a hymn of fundamental significance. For, ego-consciousness, means man's alienation from the basic Force of love. And greater the alienation or isolation of man from its spiritual and moral Source, greater would be his drive towards destruction. Secularism as an institution represents that egoistic isolation. This trend, the Guru says, is inconsistent with the path towards gaining universal consciousness, the spring of moral life. The Gurus have given a lead to man in this field. Ten Gurus or ten Gurmukhs have lived the life of God-consciousness. In one

sense, it is the life of one gurmukh completing a demonstration and furthering the progress of life and its spiritual evolution and ascent. Guru Nanak's thesis involved the integration of the spiritual life with the empirical life of man. This integration has to enrich life and society. Because of the earlier cultural and religious tradition, it took ten lives for Guru Nanak, the gurmukh or Sant Sipahi, to demonstrate his thesis and role and discharge his social responsibilities. These socio-spiritual responsibilities involved not only creation of a society motivated with new ideals, but also the discharge of five social responsibilities, Guru Nanak had indicated as targets before himself and his society. With every succeeding Guru, the ideal of gurmukh or Sant-Sipahi, as laid down and lived by Guru Nanak, unfolded itself progressively. It is a path of love, humility, service, sacrifice, martyrdom and total responsibility as the instrument of God, the basic Universal Consciousness moving the world.

A question may be asked as to why there have been ten incarnations of Gurus in the case of Sikhs, while, in other cases, there has generally been one prophet. To us, four reasons appear quite obvious. First, in a society in which dichotomous religions stand deeply embedded and established for over three thousand years and which claims to have contributed asceticism and monasticism to the cultures of the rest of the world, it was not easy for a whole-life religion with the Miri-Piri concept to be acceptable and take firm roots in one generation. Second, the Sikh ideology did not involve individual salvation or a gurmukh just living truthfully; but it also involved compulsively the creation of a society motivated with new aspirations and ideals. And this new orientation and conditioning could be done only by the process of creating a new ideology, embodying it in a new scripture, organising new institutions, socio-religious practices and centres of the new faith, and inspiring the people, by the method of martyrdoms, into accepting a new standard of morality and values. For, as Ambedkar⁷¹ and Max Weber have stated, the Hindu society cannot be reformed from inside and rid itself from the degrading system of caste and untouchability because the Varn Ashram Dharma has the sanction of Shastras and Scriptures; and a Hindu while making caste distinctions and exhibiting caste prejudices never feels any moral guilt or abhorrence. Instead, he feels a real sense of religious and moral satisfaction that he is observing his Dharma and Shastric

injunctions. Hence, the inevitable necessity of creating a new ideology and scripture with a new religious and socio-moral code of conduct. Third, even if the ideology and institutions had been there, the Sikh society would, like some reformed societies, soon have reverted to the parent society if it had, not successfully achieved the social targets discussed above, including those of creating a fraternal society of householders, of dislodging the political misrule, and of sealing the north-western gate of India against the invaders.

The fourth reason appears to be very important. Our survey of the major religions of the world shows that revealed systems which start with a combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life and even with clear social objectives, over period of time, either shed their social ideals and become pacifist, otherworldly, or a salvation religion, or become dichotomous, bifurcating, on the one hand, into monasticism, and, on the other hand, into either political misrule and tyranny or sheer secularism. But Sikhism does not stand any such danger of ideological decline or bifurcation, because of its gradual and firm ascent and unfolding. It shows the prophetic vision of Guru Nanak that he not only profusely and clearly defined all aspects of his life-affirming and integrated ideology, but also detailed the targets his society had to achieve. He laid the firm foundations of the institutions and the socio-religious structure his successors had to develop and complete. Guru Nanak defined his God not only as the Ocean of virtues but also as a Sant-Sipahi or the Destroyer of evil-doers; and the ideal he laid down for the seeker was to be the instrument of the Will of such a God. Guru Arjan gave instructions to his son to militarise the movement and thereafter, as was explained by Guru Hargobind to Sant Ram Das,⁷² his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant. While Guru Arjan, the first martyr of the faith, had confrontation with the empire and gave orders for militarisation, the subsequent five Gurus manifestly proclaimed and practised the spiritual ideal of Sant-Sipahi. So, whatever some votaries of pacifist or dichotomous ideologies or other outsiders may say, to students of Sikhism or a seeker of the Sikh ideal, there can never be any doubt as to the integrated Miri-Piri or Sant-Sipahi ideal in Sikhism. Because in the eyes of a Sikh, any reversion to ideas of pacifism, personal salvation or monasticism would be a manifest fall from the spiritual Ideology laid down by Guru Nanak, enshrined in Guru Granth,

and openly, single-mindedly and demonstrably lived by the ten Gurus, culminating in the creation of the Khalsa, with Kirpan as the essential symbol for resisting injustice and oppression. The Kirpan essentially signifies two fundamental tenets of Sikhism, namely, that it is the basic responsibility of a Sikh to confront and to resist injustice, and that asceticism, monasticism, or escapism, of any kind is wrong. Thus the Kirpan, on the one hand, is a constant reminder to the Sikh of his duty, and, on the other hand, is a standing guard against reversion to pacifism and other-worldliness. The extreme sagacity and vision of the Sikh Gurus is evident from the thoughtfully planned and measured manner in which they built the structure of their ideology and the Sikh society, epitomised in the order of the Khalsa. That is also the reason that so far as the ideology and the ideals of the Sikh society are concerned, there cannot be any ambiguity in that regard. Hence, the manner in which the lives of the ten Gurus have demonstrated the Sikh way of life, the question of its bifurcation or accepting pacifism or other-worldliness does not arise. And this forms, we believe, the fourth important reason for there being ten Gurus and the closure of succession after the Khalsa was created.

Conclusion

The summary of the Sikh ideology, in the background of the religious history of some higher religions, makes the viewpoint of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh position very clear. The Gurus emphasize that at the manmukh stage of man's development, man is constitutionally incapable of avoiding injustice, wars and conflicts. Because man is basically egocentric and stands alienated from the fundamental Force (God) which is Love. So long he does not link himself with the Flow of Love and fails to work in unison with it, his problems of clash, disharmony and tensions will continue. The diagnosis of the authors of *Limits of Growth* is also the same, namely, that unless man is able to shed his egocentrism, there appears little hope for peace and happiness in the world.⁷³

The state is an instrument devised by man to curb the basic egocentrism or wickedness of individuals and power groups. But, politics divorced from the fundamental spiritual force, or moral brakes creates the situation that the State or Establishment is siezed by individuals and groups, who openly use and employ all the enormous means of the modern state

for the satisfaction of their egocentrism, working to the detriment of the masses and the poor. And the more backward or poorer a country, greater the oppression uninhibited secularism can do with the power machine of the state. The result, logically and unavoidably, is that the gap between the downtrodden masses and the oppressive elites goes on widening. This happens both within a state, and among the various national states. It would be a bold man who being acquainted with recent history can contradict this observation.

Rationally speaking, secularism is incapable of reversing the present trend, or finding a solution of the existing malady. The causes for this failure have been stressed by the Gurus. Reason being a tool or limb of the egocentric man (*manmukh*) and being unconnected with the Universal Consciousness or the spirituo-moral Base of man, it can never make the individual spontaneously 'altruistic. Hence, any search for a humanitarian ethics through empiricism, communism or secularism is doomed to failure. The hopes which science and the first decades of the century had raised, stand tragically dashed.

To us, materialism and morality seem a contradiction in terms. Similarly, dichotomous or life-negating religions are equally amoral in their social impact. It is because of the Indian religions being dichotomous that the unjust institution of *Varn Asbram Dbarma* and caste could continue in the Indian society and have also the approval of scriptures and *Shastras*. The study of the three Western religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam also furnishes the same lesson. The moment any of these societies became other-worldly or showed dichotomous tendencies, the moral strength of the society to face the challenges of life became minimal. Or vice versa, the society became dichotomous when it failed to face effectively the challenges of life. And, ultimately it is the moral stamina of a people or culture that by and large determines its survival. This is evident from the known history, both of Judaism and Islam. The triumph of secularism and scientism to erode the Christian ethical base from the Western life would never have been possible, but for the subordination of religious institutions to the national state, following the Reformation. The ethical 'field is today in complete disarray.⁷⁴ Since religion is the only source which could furnish the moral sap to maintain social cohesion, and Christian clan being at its lowest ebb, the twentieth century has witnessed the worst slaughter and butchery both at the

international and the national levels. The nations of the world are spending on arms a thousand billion dollars each year. It is this dismal spectacle that has, on the one hand, forced the Soviets to talk of the 'priority of universal values over the class or group values', and, on the other hand, led the North American Churches to suggest co-operation with other religions in order to fight the common danger of Secularism. For the present, either out of their ignorance, or for other reasons, the European Churches have overruled the American view. But, the problem remains and stands highlighted by thinking persons. Decades back, Collingwood wrote: "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me; and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which he establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of the theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of religious consciousness and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it."⁷⁵ This statement presents the view that unless reason and religion are combined or the spiritual life is combined with the empirical life of man, man's problems will remain insolvable. Reason is incapable of devising or creating a moral force. Hence, the inherent incapacity of Secularism to create any worthwhile values, much less universal values.

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak emphasized that unless the spiritual component enriches the empirical life, man's problems of conflict, war and disharmony will remain. The solution lies in working in consonance with God's Will or the basic force of Love and Altruism. The brotherhood of man cannot be a reality without accepting the Fatherhood of God. For the Gurus, the Fatherhood of God or Force of Love or Universal Consciousness is not an assumption but a reality. For them it is a true and most indubitable experience, spontaneously leading to activity. It is an experience far more real than the sensory perception of external phenomena or the construction of a pragmatic or utilitarian ethics or the assumption of a

dialectical movement raised by human reason. The Gurus exhort man to follow the path of altruistic deeds to reach the next evolutionary stage of gurmukh or godman....It is a worldview of combining the spiritual life with the empirical life of man, thereby breaking the alienation from which man suffers. It is a worldview of total responsibility towards every sphere of life, the godman's sphere of responsibility being co-terminus with the sphere of God. At a time when most of the higher religions have either become dichotomous, or are withdrawing from the main fields of social responsibility, and human reason feels frustrated, the Sikh Gurus express a comprehensive worldview of hope and eternal relevance. At the same time, it is important to state that, far from being exclusive, Sikhism is universal in its approach, always anxious and willing to serve and co-operate with those who aim at harmony among beings and welfare of man. For, the Guru's prayer to God is that the world may be saved by anyway, He may be Gracious enough to do.⁷⁶ And, Guru Nanak proclaimed that his mission was, with the help of other god-men, to steer man across the turbulent sea of life.⁷⁷ This fundamental ideal stands enshrined in the final words of the daily Sikh prayer, "May God bless all mankind."

**SIKH THEORY OF EVOLUTION: HAUMAIN
AND PROBLEM OF HERMENEUTICS**

**Part I
THEORY OF EVOLUTION**

The Sikh theory of evolution is a distinct and unique contribution of Guru Nanak to the religious thought of man. Here we shall attempt to outline the Guru's theory of evolution from a *manmukh* (ego-conscious) to a *gurmukh* (God-conscious), and how it is necessary to interpret the revelation or spiritual experience of the Gurus, in relation to their lives or historical role which is a product of their revelation; and why persons drawn from pacifist or dichotomous religions, have difficulty in understanding the system of the Gurus.

Spiritual Experience of the Gurus

Every prophet builds the structure of his religious system on the foundation of his spiritual experience of the Basic Reality or God. It is these perceptions of the prophet, that govern his understanding of the world and approach to it. Guru Nanak's spiritual experience highlights four facts about the Basic Reality. First, He is the Creator, and is both transcendent and immanent, but He does not incarnate. Second, He is the Fount of all values. Third, He, being Love, is interested in the evolution and progress of the world, and is its Guide and Enlightener. Fourth, in view of the first three qualities of God, the goal of the spiritual man is to be the instrument of such a God or Reality.

Individuation, Ego and Man

This being the perception, the Gurus envisage a clear evolutionary growth in the organic constitution or consciousness of man. The Gurus say that ' "The world came into being by individuation."¹

Evidently, for the growth of life, creation of an individual self or *haumain* (I-am-ness) or ego in every being was essential. For, there could be no animal life without there being in each unit a centre of consciousness or autonomy, which could be both the guardian and guide of the individual being. It is this centre of individuation, that has enabled the evolution of life from the smallest being to the extremely complicated biological structure of man. The Gurus describe the evolution thus: "For several births, (you) were a worm; for several births an insect; for several births a fish and an antelope."² "After passing through myriads of species one is blessed with the human form."³ "After ages you have the glory of becoming a man."⁴ These statements of the Gurus make it clear how from the smallest speck of life, man has evolved after millions of years and myriads of births. Second, although man is mainly an animal, he is distinctly superior to other animals. His superiority lies in his two attributes which the other animals do not possess. First is his sense of discrimination, i.e., his awareness of his own thinking process and his capacity to deliberate over his thinking. The Guru makes a clear statement that man has, apart from his other potentialities, a superior sense of discrimination. "God created you out of a drop of water, and breathed life into you. He endowed you with the light of reason, sense of discrimination and wisdom."⁵ This clearly emphasises that man has the sense of making judgement and choice, i.e., a moral sense to distinguish right from wrong. For, this light of discrimination is an additional weapon with man to cope with the problems of life. The Gurus' perception is basically different from the view of modern psychology, which believes that man is virtually a determined being, and that his development and evolution are governed by the environment, following a struggle for existence and survival of the fittest. The Gurus differ completely. For, they emphasise that man should use his sense of discrimination or his freedom to choose, in making a correct decision. This freedom forms the base of his moral life, which is beyond the ken of an animal. They, thus, completely repudiate the view that "Moral life is just a 'defence mechanism', or a 'reaction formation' for survival to battle against the impacts of environment." The Gurus convey unambiguously that a social or a civilised life is not possible, unless man develops his internal discipline or moral life, which alone can make for progress of man in social life, or in a multi-national society.

The second superior attribute of man is that, although he is at present at the egoistic state of development, he has also the capacity to develop a link with the Universal Consciousness, the Basic Reality or God. True, presently man is at the *manmukh* (egoistic) state of consciousness, but he has the capacity to be linked with the Universal Consciousness, or to be a *gurmukh* who works in line with the Fundamental Reality, by being its instrument. The Gurus say, "You have obtained the privilege of human birth; now is your opportunity to meet God."⁶ "O man, you are superior in God's creation; now is your opportunity; you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."⁷ The Gurus stress that not only is there hope for man and an opportunity open to him, but it is also his destiny to rise above his egoistic condition, so as to become a superman or *agurmukh*. And it is this spiritual progress of man, which Benevolent God is helping with His Grace.

The Malady of Haumain

The Gurus repeatedly state that at the *manmukh* stage, man's greatest malady that blocks his progress, is his egoism or *haumain* consciousness. The struggle against the elements and environment having largely been won, man finds himself incapable of dealing with his own species. All his rational capacities and talents are still the equipment of the egoistic man, and for that matter, are governed by his ego-consciousness. His intellectual capacities being subservient to his ego-consciousness, cannot be used for the benefit of another person. Just as a man's lungs cannot breathe for the benefit of another human being, in the same way, his rational capacities cannot help being selfish, since they are directed by his ego-consciousness. It is this organic condition of the present-day man, that holds out little hope for his ever being able rationally to rectify his disability to solve the problems of conflict, clash and war, at the individual, social or international level. It is true that during the period of man's civilised life, certain cultural conditioning for moral ends, has taken place, but the change is very superficial. The moment there is anything threatening man's personal entity or interests, his basic self-centredness is unmasked and works with unabashed vehemence and violence. This is the spectacle we witness everyday in dealings between man and man, one society and another, and one nation and another. And this, despite all pretensions to the contrary. The

twentieth century has witnessed the worst massacres, butchery, holocausts and wars in the civilised history of man. Not only have there been large-scale killings, but we have had the worst rulers who have not refrained from killing millions of their own innocent citizens. It is a fact that our Einsteins, Oppenbauers, and Sakharovs have been just the instruments of the tyrants who have staged those crimes, and destroyed Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The fact remains that the greater the instrument of violence science has supplied to our rulers, the greater has been the threat to the security of the people and the environment of the planet. For, the ape in man, or his egoist consciousness, continues to drive the vehicles of violence, that science has placed at his disposal. And he knows of no other use of it, except to cater to his egoism and pride. Hence, the warning the learned authors of the Limits of Growth gave to the present day man: "The outcome can only be disastrous, whether due to selfishness of individual countries that continue to act purely in their own interest, or to a power struggle between the developing and the developed nations. The world system is simply not ample enough, nor generous enough, to accommodate much longer such ego-centric and conflicting behaviour of its inhabitants."⁸ Unfortunately, despite about a quarter of a century having elapsed, since this warning was given, neither human behaviour, nor the behaviour of nations, has changed materially, to curb the drive towards destruction. In fact, the gap between the rich and the poor nations has been widening.

Schweitzer who made a survey of the entire field of Greek and Western thought and philosophy, came to the dismal conclusion that there is no trace of the ethical in the working of the world, or any sound basis for ethics in the present-day thought of man. He could discover nothing of purposive evolution in the material world or our thinking, by which our activities could acquire a meaning. Nor is the ethical to be found in any form in the world process. We can only describe more and more minutely the phenomena of the world. But neither science nor thought has been able to find any meaning, purpose or direction in the world process, except a drive towards death and meaninglessness,⁹ Schumacker also sounds the same plaintive note saying that nothing is more in disarray than the ethical thought of man.¹⁰ Consequently, both the working of

man in the present century and his present day thought do not hold out any hope for mankind.

The Gurus' Solution and the Theory of Spiritual Evolution

It is in the above context, that the Gurus not only hold out hope of progress for man, but also lay down the path of human evolution. That path is through a moral life. This is so for two reasons. First, God alone is the Source of all morality. This is, for the Gurus, not a mere assumption, but a truth which they have intuitively or mystically perceived. We find that in the processes of the world and its thought and science there is no trace of the ethical. As against it, the Gurus emphasise that the Basic Reality is not only ethical and the Ocean of Values, but is working the world towards a life of morality, harmony and love. They repeatedly stress their spiritual experience about the Fatherhood of God, the consequent brotherhood of man and the direction of the Universal Consciousness to create and evolve the superman or the *gurmukh*, who, being linked to the Universal Consciousness, will work according to its direction. The Gurus, thus, explain that there is no midway between ego-consciousness and *Naam* or God-consciousness. They state, "There is conflict between *Naam* and *haumain*; the two cannot be at one place."¹¹ This progress from *manmukh* to *gurmukh*, or ego-consciousness to God-consciousness or Universal Consciousness, is the spiritual thesis of the Gurus, laid down in the *Guru Granth*, and lived and demonstrated by them, for a period of about 240 years. This thesis of evolution, the role prescribed for the superman, and the methodology of progress, have been clearly stated by the Gurus. They say, "God created first Himself, then *haumain* (sense of individuation), third *maya* (multifarious beings and entities), and at the fourth place, *gurmukh* who always lives truthfully."¹² This hymn clearly conveys the Sikh theory of evolution, and meaning and hope for man. The second part of the thesis is the role of the superman. Guru Nanak, while indicating the uselessness of some ascetic disciplines, clearly concludes that to be a *sachiara* or a superman, one has to work according to the Will of God, which he calls Altruistic. In their *bani* the Gurus profusely indicate the innumerable attributes of God, including help and shelter to the weak, and destruction of the evil. The Guru says, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is all Love, rest He is ineffable."¹³ It is in this light that Guru Nanak says, "If you want to play

the game of love, come with your head on your palm, and waver not."¹⁴ It means that life is a game of love, God being All Love, working the world with His Altruistic Will. That is also why Guru Nanak emphasises, "Truth is higher than everything; higher still is truthful living."¹⁵ Further, the Guru says, "Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of *Naam* to sprout."¹⁶ "With self-control and discipline, we forsake vice, and see the miracle of man becoming God."¹⁷ "Good, righteousness, virtues and the giving up of vice, are the way to realise the essence of God."¹⁸ "God created the world of life and planted *Naam* therein, making it the place for righteous activity."¹⁹

The quotations above and the thesis of the Gurus, lay stress on four points. First, that moral conditioning apart, at the present stage of man, he is imperfect, being only ego-conscious, which is his greatest limitation, and is also the cause of his conflicts, wars, poverty and other problems. Second, that although, like the animals, his working is largely determined by the processes of cause and effect, he has, unlike other animals, the capacity to gain freedom of functioning through a moral life. Third, and this is their fundamental spiritual experience, that the Basic Reality is not only loving and altruistic, but is also the only Source of altruism. Fourth, accordingly, man can be free, creative and altruistic, only through a moral life, which alone, through His Grace, can link him to the Universal Consciousness, and, for that matter, bring him peace, blissfulness, and harmony with his environment, physical, social and political.

Here we should like to explain one point. It is not suggested that the Gurus do not stress the value of meditation, remembrance or *simran* of God. But these, they do not indicate as an end in themselves. These are important means to enable man to pursue the goal of working according to the Altruistic Will of God. This point stands stressed both in their *bani* and their lives over a period of about two and a half centuries. The Guru says, "It is by our deeds that we are judged in His Court."²⁰ "It is by your deeds that we become near or away from God."²¹ "Truth and continence are true deeds, not fasting and rituals."²² "True living is living God in life."²³ "Through virtue is one enlightened."²⁴ "Imbued with His Will, he (*gurmukh*) carries it out."²⁵ "Wonderful is His Will. If one walks in His Will, then one knows how to lead the life of Truth."²⁶ "They who know His Will, carry it out."²⁷ The above quotations, the hymn of

evolution of *gurmukh*, and the lives of the Ten Gurus unambiguously emphasise that since God is immanent in the world, and is working it, the only spiritual path is to be the instrument of His Will. And, that is why the Gurus say, that they are His soldiers or wrestlers. Thus, both the *gurmukh* and the seeker have to "live truthfully." This is the Gurus' system of spiritual evolution, as embodied in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and as lived by the Ten Masters.

Religion Implications of the Gurus' System

The most fundamental implication of the Gurus' spiritual system is an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. They have stressed that there can be no spiritual progress of man, unless spirituality is expressed in life and deeds. This is essential, because God himself is informing and working the world, and the spiritual man can neither remain indifferent to, nor step aside from, the mainstream of life. Its necessary implication is that there can be no progress in empirical life, unless it is linked to the Spiritual Base, which is the Source of all values and morality. This is the fundamental or the singular base of the Gurus' religious system. This also explains all the departures in principles and doctrines, from those of thousands-of-years old systems and traditions that had been in vogue in their times. Dichotomy between the empirical and the religious life, with emphasis on personal salvation, has been the basis of all the Indian systems like Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Vedanta, etc. The logical implications of these religions were the institutions of asceticism, monasticism, *Sanyasa*, celibacy, downgrading of women, and *Ahimsa*. In the Hindu system caste divisions in the social life, had the religious sanction, but it was a discriminatory system, far from being just, fair or moral. Spiritual and empirical progress having been declared inter-linked and inter-dependent, the other corollaries of the Gurus' system follow so logically. First is the rejection of asceticism, monasticism, *Sanyasa* and celibacy, and instead, the acceptance of a house-holder's life, and the necessary creation of a society, concerned with the socio-political problems of man. The Gurus say, "One gets not to God by despising the world."²⁸ "One becomes liberated even while laughing and playing."²⁹ "The God-centred lives truthfully, while a householder."³⁰ The second corollary is the brotherhood of man, and equality between man and woman as well. This was a

logical step following from the Gurus' fundamental, but it was unknown, so far as the Indian contexts were concerned. For, equality between man and woman in the religious or social field, was nowhere prescribed in the religions of the world. But this was emphasised by Guru Nanak. The Guru says, "Spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk, but by actually treating all humans alike, and as one's equals. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation, roaming all over places, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but in remaining balanced and God-centred, while conducting the affairs of the world."³¹ "Why call women impure, when without women there would be none?"³² The third Guru, when he created Centres of religious organisation, appointed women, too, to head some of them.³³ The third implication of the system is doing work in order to sustain life. Guru Nanak says, "The person incapable of earning his living, gets his ears split (turns a yogi), and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a guru or a saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He alone knows the way, who earns his living, and shares his earnings with others."³⁴ In this and some other hymns, the Gurus not only emphasise the necessity of work and sustaining life, but they also stress the necessity of fair distribution, saying, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves."³⁵ "Man gathers riches by making others miserable."³⁶ "Riches cannot be accumulated without sin, but these do not keep company after death."³⁷ Fair distribution of wealth, and censure of its exploitative accumulation, are clearly implied. Guru Nanak's acceptance of the invitation of Lalo, a poor carpenter, and rejection of the hospitality of Malik Bhago, the local rich Landlord, also stress the same point. Fourth, as total participation in life and social responsibility in all fields, are desired, Guru Nanak condemned injustice and oppression in the political field by the rulers and invaders. He even complained to God for allowing the weak to be oppressed by the strong.³⁸ This clearly implies that in the Order of God, justice, fairness and equality are the rule, and for that matter, it is essential for the seeker, the Godman and his society, to confront and remove injustice and oppression. It is for this reason that Guru Nanak stressed two points. First, that God was the Destroyer of the evil,³⁹ the Punisher of the demonical,⁴⁰ and the Slayer of the Inimical.⁴¹ Second, as a corollary of the above, he rejected Ahimsa or pacificism,⁴² as prescribed in the other Indian systems.

It is both important and significant that this fundamental principle of combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man, was enunciated by Guru Nanak, as also the four corollaries thereof. Not only that, Guru Nanak himself laid down the foundations of the institutional structures that were necessary to implement his thesis. He led a householder's life, worked as a peasant, and organised a society, eating together from a common kitchen, and at a common platform. Second, since he felt that the organisational structure had still to be completed and matured, he started the institution of succession, and in selecting Guru Angad, a householder, as the second Guru, he left out his son, Baba Sri Chand, who was of an ascetic bent of mind. He gave Guru Angad instructions to organise and lead a *Panth*.⁴³ Third, Guru Nanak rejected Ahimsa and described his God as the Destroyer of the evil. Consequently, Guru Hargobind's statement to *Sant Ramdas* of Maharashtra, that his sword was for the destruction of the tyrant and for the protection of the weak,⁴⁴ only reiterated what Guru Nanak had defined, as the attributes of God, who was both the Protector of the weak and the Punisher of the evil, and who showered His Grace, where the weak were helped.⁴⁵ Since the entire system of the Gurus was against the tide of times and traditions, thousands-of-years-old, ten Gurus had to work and demonstrate for about 240 years their thesis, according to the targets laid down by Guru Nanak. This explains the necessity of the uncommon steps the Ten Gurus took, the new institutions they created, and the long period they spent in training, motivating and conditioning their followers to tread the path laid down by Guru Nanak. In the Indian context the Gurus' system was so revolutionary, that many a people including scholars, conditioned by their own thought and background, have failed to understand the essentiality of the measures the Sikh Gurus took, and the spiritual fundamentals of the Sikh thought.

An important implication of the Sikh theory of evolution is, that the Gurus attribute faults and evil in the society, to the imperfections of man. They repudiate the concept of a Fall, Satan or Devil. Nor do they accept the doctrines of Atonement or Sacrifices for the sins, or salvation of man. All such myths or concepts are rejected. . In fact, they declare that God is benevolently helping with His Will and Grace, the process of human evolution, and the *gurmukh* has to be the instrument of that Will. The concept of Grace is fundamental to the Gurus' thought,

because it repudiates all systems of determinism, mechanical or environmental evolution, and the empirical logic of cause and effect. For, Grace implies freedom, choice and creativity. As such, it is the source of morality. Thus the ideal of individual salvation as an end in itself, is not there.

The concept of incarnation is also denied. Of course, immanence of God in the world and man is accepted. Another major implication of the Sikh thesis is its universalism. The Gurus do not assert exclusivism. For, they pray to God to save the anguished world by any means He may be gracious enough to do.⁴⁶ In fact, they clearly contemplate co-operation with other systems or God-conscious men. For, Guru Nanak declared that his mission was, with the help of other God-conscious men, to ferry people across the turbulent sea of life.⁴⁷ It is in this light, that we have to understand the hymns of some other saints in the *Guru Granth*. Considering the exclusiveness of some other religions, Guru Nanak's system is unique in its universalism.

The Gurus also make another logical but major change. As God's Will is pervasive in the entire world, the spiritual man's participation and responsibility, extend to the entire field of life and human functioning. Since injustice, oppression and evil are a fact of life, and since these are the greatest in the socio-political field, the man of God has neither to withdraw from any field, nor to remain neutral. In fact, in order to discharge his socio-moral responsibilities, he has to confront, resist and undo injustice. Hence, Guru Nanak's organisation of a *Panth*, rejection of Ahimsa, and the inevitable use of minimum force to undo injustice.

In short, whereas Ahimsa, monasticism, withdrawal, celibacy, ritualism and sacrifices are logical and essential in a dichotomous system, Guru Nanak at one stroke, rejected all of them. Because with his perception of an Immanent God, who is a Destroyer of the evil, he created a whole-life system with the acceptance of total responsibility to sustain life, and move towards a spiritual goal.

Conclusion

In sum, the Gurus' theory of evolution from the present stage of *manmukh* (ego-conscious man) to the higher stage of *gurmukh* (God-conscious man) is a unique contribution to the Spiritual thought of man. For, it repudiates all concepts of the

Fall of man, or his moral degradation from an era of satyug to kalyug. Simultaneously, it gives the seeker optimism and hope for, God is interested in his destiny, future and progress. There is no obsession with sin, nor any system of sacrifices to atone for one's moral lapses. On the other hand, it has been stated that man at present, is at the stage of imperfection; and hence, like the infant, he has to be helped to move and run, and not to be obsessively punished for not being able immediately to gain speed. The fledgling cannot be expected to fly. All the same, it has been repeatedly emphasised that God alone is the Source of all spirituality and morality, and man's empirical life cannot rid itself of its present conflicts and wars, until it learns to draw spirituo-moral sap and support from Him.

Further, since Sikhism is universal in its approach, it claims no exclusiveness for its system, and is eager and willing to co-operate with every other religious system that seeks or wants to give succour to man and ferry him across the troubled sea of life, so as to reach the level of man's chartered destiny, proclaimed by the Gurus.

PART II

THE PROBLEM OF HERMENEUTICS

Multifarious have been the reasons for the inability of some scholars or others, to understand the spiritual thesis of the Gurus, and their theory of the spiritual evolution of man.

Revelation

One hurdle has been, especially with the so-called 'modern scholars', the issue of revelation. All the world over, religious systems and mystics accept the reality of revelation, in one form or the other. In their ontologies practically all of them believe in the existence of a Fundamental Reality, transcendent to the physical world. Many of them also conceive of its operation in the material world, and its perception by supermen. It is this intuitive perception of the Reality by prophets of the world, that has been called revelation. The hymns of the Gurus repeatedly emphasise this truth, which forms the basis of their entire spiritual system. Guru Nanak says, "O Lalo, I express what the Lord conveys me to speak."⁴⁸ The other Gurus also emphasise the same truth. "Nanak says the words of Truth. He expresses only the Truth; it is time to convey the Truth."⁴⁹ "I have

expressed only what you made me convey."⁵⁰ "I have no voice of my own; all that I have said, is His Command."⁵¹ "Guru's words are divine nectar; these quench all spiritual thirst."⁵² "Consider the *Bani* of the Satguru the words of Truth. O Sikhs, it is the Lord who makes me convey them."⁵³ "The word is the Guru; my consciousness is the follower of the immanent mystic Force."⁵⁴ "The *Bani* is the Guru, and the Guru is the *Bani*; all spiritual truths are enshrined in it."⁵⁵ Following their spiritual experiences, the Gurus declare, first, that there is a Higher Reality than the becoming material world, which is His creation; and, second, that the Reality informs the world, and graciously reveals itself to one who thereby attains the final level of evolution; i.e., becomes a *gurmukh*. Equally emphatic is the Guru's statement that the superman, once in contact with this Basic Reality, compulsively follows the Direction and Will (*Hukam*) of that Reality. Consequently, there can be no peace or harmony in the physical world, unless man evolves to the final stage of development; and, in tune with the Reality, moves in line with its Direction and Order.

Revelation of, contact with, or Order from, the Basic Reality, has been claimed by Prophets Moses, Mohammad and Christ, as also by mystics like Eckhart and Hallaj. The lives of the prophets are the best evidence of revelation. Their activities are the outcome of their spiritual experience. Toynbee observes, "They are not the product of their social milieu; the events that produce them, are encounters between the human beings and the Absolute Reality that is in, and at the same time, beyond the phenomenon of Existence, Life and History; and any soul may meet God at any time or place in any historical circumstances. Nevertheless, an examination of the social milieu, will help us to understand the nature, as well as the rise of religions in which this experience of meeting God, is communicated and commended to mankind, as the inspiration for a new way of life."⁵⁶

Significantly, in Sikhism, the claim of revelation has repeatedly been made by the Gurus themselves, and it stands authenticated in the Scripture, compiled by the Fifth Guru. In every other case, the scripture was prepared by the devotees, decades or even centuries, after the demise of the prophet. It is a unique feature of the Gurus' system and shows the great care they took to define their system, so that its purity is maintained, and it is not misunderstood or misconstrued. Hence, the

yardstick which we apply to assess the claims of the followers of other religions, cannot be used in the case of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Very sagaciously, the Guru has excluded the relevance of any textual criticism, form criticism or redaction criticism and the like. Even if the authenticity and validity of revelation is not accepted, it can certainly be understood and logically deduced from its evident spiritual, moral and empirical consequences. Unfortunately, in modern times, the burden of social science methodology is so heavy, that even persons believing in the Transcendent Reality and the intervention of revelation, are not able to shake it off. Some of them tend to relate prophetic or revelatory systems to empirical or environmental causes. To do so, is a contradiction in terms. Anything which is revelatory, is from the realm that is Free, and is ungoverned by empirical or the mechanical laws of the world of cause and effect. The Transcendent, by its very definition, is beyond the empirical logic, it being a world of Freedom and Grace. For, His Will and Grace have no causal relation, with a world that is determined. It is, therefore, pathetic to find persons having faith in God or the Transcendent, explaining basic religious developments by social or environmental causes. Major social and historical developments have been the product of a revelation or a spiritual event. For, by its definition, a revelation or a spiritual event cannot be the result of a social development, although it could be the cause of it. In view of the *Bani* in the *Guru Granth*, it is essential to interpret it and the history of the Guru period, in the light of the spiritual phenomena and culture, of which these are the product. For, God described by the Guru has an Altruistic and Gracious Will, which operates in the world. He is the Ocean of Values, and for that matter, the Fount of all morality and ethics. Because, morality has a significance, only if man has the freedom of choice, and his moral activity is undetermined.

Materialistic explanations examined

Following the empirical method of cause and effect, some scholars suggest that Sikhism is a syncretism, or a growth occurring under the impact of Bhakti, Shakti, Christian, Islamic or environmental influences.

First, let us take the Hindu systems, especially its Bhakti sects. Guru Nanak rejected almost every principle of these sects, i.e., their faith in the Vedas and Upanishads as the sole

scriptures, in Sanyasa, in Ahimsa, in the efficacy of rituals, Mantras, fasts, pilgrimages and sacrifices, in meditation and logic methodology as an end in itself, in celibacy and downgrading of women, in the theory of incarnation and personal salvation, in the religiously sanctioned hierarchical division of the caste ideology, etc. In fact, no Hindu, except a Sanyasi or Bairagi, could be without a caste tag. Even in the system of Chaitanya, the priests were Brahmans.

Second, we come to the system of Radical Bhagats, like Kabir and Namdev. They were all believers in personal salvation, in Ahimsa, and even in withdrawal and otherworldliness. Serious prejudice against women and marriage was there. Bhagat Kabir has been considered a mesogynist,⁵⁷ and Bhagat Shankradeva, a contemporary of Guru Nanak, said, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side-glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this the wise keep away from the company of women."⁵⁸ Murthi writes about him that "to trouble about the improvement of social conditions, deemed to him as little profitable."⁵⁹ Whereas, none of the Bhagats ever sought to organise a society, or to appoint a successor for the purpose, it was Guru Nanak, who at the very outset, not only created a society with a common kitchen, but also started the chain of successors, so that his socio-spiritual mission could mature and fructify. In fact, both Hindu sects and the Radical Bhagats, belong to the dichotomous category of religions, in which Ahimsa (pacifism), withdrawal, Sanyasa, and celibacy or downgrading of women, are religious values. In a whole-life system all these are rejected, and socio-moral responsibilities are accepted, and minimum use of force to discharge them is approved. For, the very goal of life, ethics, and methodology in Sikhism, on the one hand, and those in the above two cases, on the other, are different, and, to an extent, contrasted. The Position of Christianity with its pacifism, monasteries and nunneries, and goal of personal salvation, is no different. The syncretic argument, thus, is very thin. Since Jeremiah, for six hundred years there were pacifist and other-worldly sects in Judaism like Essenes, Kabbalists and others, and yet Christ's originality has not been in doubt. But in a country with

a dichotomous and pacifist tradition of over 2,000 years, Guru Nanak's whole-life system cannot rationally be called a syncretism, or a part of the Bhakti systems.

If we consider Sikhism a Bhakti system, we can never explain how it was that in 1975, when Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency Laws and abrogated all civil liberties, it was only the Sikhs who organised from the precincts of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, a peaceful protest, involving the imprisonment of 40,000 volunteers, while in the rest of India of 750 millions, no social group, much less a religious group, organised, or sent even two scores of volunteers for protest. In fact, Vinobha Bhave, the spiritual successor of Mahatma Gandhi, called the Emergency a good disciplinary measure. Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of late Jawaharlal Nehru, paid a handsome tribute to the Akalis for their brave resistance to the Emergency. She said, "Punjab which had always been in the forefront of resistance to oppression, kept its colours flying, during the Emergency also. It was in Punjab and Punjab alone, that a large scale resistance was organised against it. The worst thing that happened during the Emergency was that a brave nation was frightened into submission, and nobody spoke, except in hushed tones. In Dehra Dun, where I was, I hung my head in shame, and wondered, if this was the Bharat for which we, the freedom fighters, had suffered. Even those, not actually in prison, were no less than in jail. Only in Punjab the Akalis organised a Morcha (protest) against this. Punjab's lead in such matters should continue."⁶⁰ The contrast between the socio-religious ethos of Hindu religious sects, and that of Sikhism, is evident. Similarly, James Lewis, who made a detailed analysis of the syncretic theory, writes: "From this perspective, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the syncretism appellation probably originated with English missionaries or some other group of colonial officials who regarded the Sikh religion as spurious.

"If someone were to argue that "syncretism" has lost its negative, judgemental connotations, we can ask, why, then, are the major religions of the West never described as "syncretisms"? In other words, there is basically nothing wrong with the observation that both Muslim and Hindu influences are evident in the Sikh religion, as long as one does not fail to note that the same state of affairs exists in other religious traditions. Christianity, for example, was shaped by Judaism, Mithraism, Neoplatonism, and other Hellenistic religions. And, not just

during the period of their birth, but also over the course of later contact with other peoples, all of the major world traditions have been influenced, to some extent, by other religions. Why, then, is it appropriate to refer to Sikhism as a "syncretism", but not appropriate to thus refer to other religions? In other words, if a faith like Christianity cannot appropriately be called a "syncretism", then what term would apply to Christianity's particular blend of influences that could not apply to Sikhism ?

"With a little reflection, it should be apparent that there is no clear criterion for distinguishing Sikhism from other religious traditions on this point. The covert judgement, and here we are finally in a position to state the evaluation implicit in this seemingly neutral term, is that Sikhism can be understood entirely in terms of its constituent religions, whereas other traditions are somehow "more", or that they somehow "transcend," the religions from which their constituents are derived. To restate this value-judgement as bluntly as possible, the founders of other traditions were somehow able to provide a special (creative? revealed?) element to their new spiritual synthesis that was somehow missing in the case of Guru Nanak.

"I am, of course, exaggerating the point, but it needs to be made perfectly dear that the characterization of the Sikh tradition as a "syncretism" is a holdover from the days when all of the other world religions were compared with Christianity for the purpose of demonstrating Christianity's superiority. Although I recognize that present-day scholars do not consciously intend to pronounce such a judgement against Sikhism, the fact that "syncretism" continues to be used differently--to describe some religions but not others--indicates that this judgement has not ceased to shape interpretations of the Sikh tradition."⁶¹

"Given the popularity of this state of affairs, it would not be inappropriate to postulate some kind of unconscious repression-projection mechanism at work that might explain the scholar's lack of even-handedness. One does not have to be a psychoanalyst to perceive that the guilt about the gap between one's ideals and one's behaviour can be pushed out of the light of full awareness only to re-emerge as a projection. In lieu of a better explanation of the one-sided treatment of the Sikh religion by Westerners, it appears to the present writer that the relevant scholars are uncomfortable with the contradictions between the theory and practice of their own traditions, but have repressed

the problem and have projected the contradiction on to Sikhism a tradition that *apparently* (but not actually) contains the same contradiction. Thus their condemnation of Sikh militancy is really a projection of their own (unexpressed, repressed) condemnation of the Christian tradition. The point here is not to criticise Christianity, but rather to once again point out the different treatment that the Sikh religion has received at the hands of Western scholars. These kinds of evaluative statements would have been less objectionable, had similar criticism been levelled against other religious traditions as well."⁶²

The argument about the influence of Islam is equally without substance. For, not only are its ideas of Fall of man, Satan, sin, exclusivism, Prophet Mohammad being the Seal of Prophets, and acceptance of slavery., variant from the Sikh concepts, but Sufism, the face of Islam in India, was itself a system of withdrawal- and personal salvation. It never accepted any social responsibility, much less did it think of confronting Moghal oppression in the state. In fact, like Christianity in the British colonial period, Sufism took advantage of the prestige and protection Muslim rule gave to it. It is on record that the Head of Nakshabandi Sect of Islam congratulated Emperor Jehangir on the execution of Guru Arjun Dev. But the greatest contrast is that while Sikhism raised the level, both social and moral, and the sense of self esteem of the lowest sectors of the society, Indian converts to Islam continued, by and large, at the low level at which they had lived earlier. Niebuhr, a distinguished Christian theologian of the century, has argued, "that because of the evil in man and in society, Christian political action called not only for love but for an attempt to give each group within society enough power to defend itself against exploitation by other groups. Although relations between individuals might be a matter of ethics, relations between groups were a matter of politics."⁶³ In the religious and political history of man, it is a remarkable achievement of the Sikh Gurus, that the socio-moral and political status of the lowest classes, has nowhere else been raised to a higher level than that in the Sikh society.

Apart from the contrasted ideological position of Sikhism with the contemporary systems, one major fact alone demolishes the environmental arguments, namely, Guru Nanak's religious stand about equality of man and woman. In the religious or social systems of the

world there was not an iota of evidence to give rise to the radical approach of the Sikh Gurus on this issue of so do-spiritual equality of man and woman; or of social justice, as a whole, in the caste-ridden society of India. Not only Shudras like Kalals, Ranghretas and Ramgarhias, became leaders of the Sikh Community, but the Third Guru appointed women to head some of the religious districts, when he constituted 22 of them in the country.⁶⁴ Shankara calls woman, "the gateway to hell."⁶⁵ For Ramanuja, woman is sin-born. The position of women in other religious systems of the world, including radical Bhagats, as mentioned earlier, is certainly not of equality with men. It ranges between her being considered a temptress and being regarded as second rate. No environmental theory can explain this radical change Guru Nanak made. The only explanation for it, as stated by him, is his revelation, or what he calls the Will of God, and His immanence (*Naam*).

Singularity of Spiritual Experience which is Noetic

William James, who made a detailed study of the religious experiences of mystics, clearly records that those are also noetic in character, i.e. they give knowledge.⁶⁶ This knowledge, as stated by Plato, is true and not opinions. Its authenticity accounts for the certitude of mystics who are willing to lay down their lives pursuant to its call or logic. Both Christianity and Islam give God the symbol of Light. Guru Nanak, in the very opening line in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, calls Him Enlightener and Gracious. While the Gurus dearly recommend the use of reason and one's sense of discrimination for moral purposes, they repeatedly emphasise that the real Knowledge and Guidance come from His Will (*raza*). In fact, they call it the final and the ultimate Source of all knowledge and direction. Collingwood, in his *Idea of History*, states that "it would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life all take their special form by segregation out of the body of religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connection with it and with each other in it."⁶⁷ Toynbee also concedes that "the historians' point of view is not incompatible with the belief that God has revealed Himself to man for the purposes of helping man to gain spiritual salvation."⁶⁸ Of course, there is a difference in the concept of salvation as between Christianity

and Sikhism. A Christian like Saint Augustine, believes that salvation is an other-worldly event, and he did not expect "the world to get better"; or "that the spread of Christianity would ensure political and economic improvement. The earthy city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires."⁶⁹ We have already stated that Guru Nanak's thesis was whole-life, and envisaged the expression of spirituality in the empirical life of man as well.

It is evident, as has been recorded by many students of religion, that there is variation in the spiritual experiences of different mystics or prophets. The Gurus stress that the historical expression of their lives, is in pursuance of the spiritual direction and knowledge the Will of God supplies. The Gurus say, "They who know His Will, carry it out."⁷⁰ "Wonderful is His Will; if one walks in His Will, then one knows how to lead the life of Truth."⁷¹ Bergson, too, expresses a similar opinion, "The Ultimate end of mysticism is establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God Himself. The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being capable of transcending limitations imposed by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action. Such is our definition."⁷²

Importance of History in Sikh Hermeneutics, and Unity of Perception, Ideology and Deed

For the proper understanding of a religious system, and in appreciating its different doctrines in their proper perspective, it is essential to bear the unity of perception, ideology and activities in mind. Let us explain what we mean by the unity of perception, ideology and activity. Almost every religion owes its origin to the mystic or religious experience of some prophet. Actually, it is this experience which forms the real fount of the entire ideology, mission and activities of the mystic. In this sequence, the first stage is the perception of the religious experience. At the second stage, the saint, naturally, tries to understand and absorb it, and reacts to it. This is the stage where reflective thought appears. This reaction constitutes both the ideology and proposed plan of the saint for giving practical shape to the ideology. This ideology and plan are generally understood and interpreted by others from the words expressed, or other means of communication resorted to be the saint. This

forms his real response to his religious experience, and reflects his ideology and decisions made thereunder. For example, if the religious experience of a mystic is that God is Love, is the Shelter of the shelterless, and Help of the helpless, the mystic's ideology is that God is the Ocean of virtues and a God of attributes. In line with it, and as a reaction to this experience, he compulsively frames a plan of action of love and help to the poor and the needy. Accordingly, the activities undertaken and the programmes initiated and executed by the saint, are the true reflection and projection of his religious experience and the consequent ideology. The activities of the saint are only the form and shape which the basic experience directs and takes. Mystics can rarely express in words fully the nature of their experience, it being generally ineffable. And even if they do, the description is so often interpreted variously. For the same reason, even the statements of these persons, cannot always be very clear, being sometimes too brief or merely symbolic. It is in the interpretation of these statements that students of religion and others make major errors of understanding and deduction. But it is the deeds and activities of the person, that portray truly and directly his or her religious experience and ideology. All we seek to stress is, first, the inalienable unity of experience, ideology and activity; and, second, the activities of the saint alone being the right key to the understanding and appreciation of his or her perceptions and message. So often, mere statements, taken in their isolation, have been wrongly interpreted, especially by those distant in time and space. Because, howsoever sophisticated these be, rational tools cannot rise above the prejudices and predilections of the person employing them.

We have, therefore, to re-emphasize the very special position of Sikh hermeneutics. We have no access to the actual spiritual experience of the Gurus, nor can we be aware of the deliberations consequent to the experience in the consciousness of the prophet. We are aware only of the activities and the expression of their decisions. This expression is either in the form of words or deeds. Here comes a major difference. In the case of almost every other system, the Scripture is a post-facto man-made construction, recorded decades or even centuries later. The debate has continued as to how far the record could be true, considering the known human weakness to remain subservient to personal or social influences. This handicap does

not exist in the case of *Guru Granth Sahib*, which stands authenticated by the Guru himself. The second point is that expression in the form of deed has always been considered clearer than the word. This is for two important reasons. The expression in words can at best be general or theoretical in nature. For, this expression must seek to cover all possible eventualities that may arise in the future, and which possibilities can never be anticipated or guessed completely. In short, word is the penultimate step in the expression of spiritual perceptions, of which deed is the concrete, unambiguous and final step in a comparatively specific flux of events. For this reason it is easier to understand and less liable to misinterpretation than the word.

The second point about the word is that it is a secondary mode of expression, and, for that matter, it can never be as clear and concrete as the deed. Language, at any rate, is always a pre-existing vehicle of communication. It has its own changing nuances, and many a time, its roots extend to a distant cultural past. Obviously, language, being a second hand vehicle of expression, its truth is more liable to misinterpretation than the deed which is not only particular to the author, but is also clearly related as a response to known or identifiable set of events. For this reason, apart from being accurate and direct, it is simpler and easier to comprehend. Hence our emphasis that by losing sight of the historical perspective and hastening to go by a literal interpretation, we may so often miss the very meaning of the *Bani*. For this reason the lives of the Gurus are of fundamental importance, so as to enable us to understand the real import of the words of the Gurus. For example, in *Asa di Var*, the Guru sings:

"*Sache tere khand sache brahmand,*

Sache tere loe sache akar."⁷³

and again:

"*Kur raja kur parja kur sabh sansar.*"⁷⁴

To a casual reader these hymns would appear discrepant, which they are not, if one keeps in view, how the Gurus led their lives. The first hymn stresses the reality of the world, so that we do not withdraw from it, and instead, ensure responsible participation. The second hymn, while referring to life's evanescence, deprecates lust for power and wealth, and describes it as vain. For, in the *Japuji*, Guru Nanak clearly prescribes that the goal is to work in life, in line with the

Altruistic will of God. The truth of the hymns becomes explicit, when we keep in mind, how in their lives the Gurus worked, struggled and suffered their martyrdoms. The Tenth Nanak, almost from his childhood, had to face a most intense strife, which, for any ordinary human being, would have been impossible to bear, because of its pressures, anguish and tragedies. This being the context, it is impossible to conclude that the Gurus considered life to be false and illusory. In the absence of a close study of the lives of the Gurus, it is not possible to be clear about the subtleties and depths of the *Bani*. Hence the fundamental importance of the exemplary lives of the Gurus in Sikh hermeneutics. The *Bani* says that those who know His Will, carry it out. It was the Altruistic Will of God, the Gurus were following in their lives.

In the above context, let us see what the Guru did for us to reduce all possibilities of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. In the case of the word, the Guru himself authenticated it. As to the clearly understandable expression of the deed, Guru Nanak lived for us in ten lives for 240 years. He lived, worked, struggled, organised a *Panth*, sacrificed and martyred, while facing all sets of events, eventualities and milieus, social and political. The above are the two unique steps Guru Nanak has taken to make his system clear to us, and to solve our problems of interpretation. Hence the fundamental importance of the history of Guru period in Sikh hermeneutics.

Sikhism and its Historical Role

Revelation does not mean that the students of religion should not seek to synchronize the historical events with the spiritual thesis of the mystic. In fact, our emphasis is, that Sikh history is a product of the Sikh thesis, which is a revelation. In this short essay it is not possible for us to portray all the historical events, that have followed from the Gurus' spiritual view of life. But we shall refer to only two points.

Social Responsibility

Guru Nanak prescribed four empirical responsibilities for the spiritual man, namely, to secure the brotherhood of man, second, the importance of work and sustenance of life, third, fair distribution of wealth and the bounties of nature, and fourth, justice in society and confrontation with the unjust and the oppressor of the weak. Hardly a prophet or Bhagat, in

the statement of his thesis, has so clearly enumerated the faults of the contemporary socio-political life, as did Guru Nanak. These four components of empirical life, provided the structural foundations of related new institutions, so that his successors could develop them to fructify. Although the evolutionary processes in socio-political life and conditioning have always been extremely slow, yet progress in the four fields has been visibly significant. Equality in the Sikh society has been distinctly at a comparatively higher level. It was a fraternization unknown on the Indian soil. Apart from bringing about improvement in the social equality and human relations, the very time Banda gained political power, he undertook distribution of land among the peasantry, so as to raise the economic level of the lowest people in the state. And, it is well known that the Sikh masses constitute the real strength of the Sikh community. The second achievement is the work habit among the Sikhs, for which they are well known the world over. That the Green Revolution was first brought about in Punjab, whereas the wherewithal and pre-requisites for it, were as well available elsewhere in India and Asia, also demonstrates their zest for work and life. Further, it is significant that a very tiny section of the community in the country, Punjab, not only suffered and survived extreme persecution and destruction, but also was able to supplant a mighty Empire and repulse, once and for all times, the thousand-year wave of invasions from north-west of India. And, compared to his contemporary rulers in Maharashtra and elsewhere, Ranjit Singh's rule was far more fair and humane. He made available all opportunities arising in his administration, civil, political or military, to every section of the community, without any communal, religious or other discrimination. The ethos of his functioning was such, that neither was there any attempt at conversion, nor was there the least feeling of revenge or discrimination against the Muslims for the persecution, the Sikhs and their Gurus had suffered during the Mughal rule. This is evident from the fact that, in the Anglo-Sikh wars, the Muslim soldiers fought with the same loyalty, zeal and valour as did the Sikhs. And the bard who sang the swan song of the tragic fall of this benevolent Administration, was a Muslim.

Sikhism and Militancy

The second point relates to militancy and political objectives. Without a close study of the spiritual thesis of the

Gurus, there have been lazy suggestions, mostly by scholars drawn from dichotomous or pacifist religions, or from believers in the environmental evolution of man, that militancy in the Sikh religion was the result of social or environmental factors.

Let us examine this view, piece by piece. First is the Ideological factor about the use of force for a righteous cause. Dichotomous religions apart, there is no religion, except Christianity, which, while recommending a householder's life, does not accept use of force, as the last resort, to discharge one's social responsibility. For, in them withdrawal or Sanyasa is never a value. It is so in Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. For outsiders, it has sometimes not been easy to understand the position of Exodus or Torah in the Old Testament, the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, and the Just-War theory of Later Christianity. In the revelation to Moses, God clearly goaded Jews to attack and drive out the Canaanites, saying, "My angel goes before you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and Jubusites, and I annihilate them; you shall not bow down to their gods in worship and follow their practices, but shall tear them down and smash their pillars to bits."⁷⁵ Out of the commandments prescribed for war, one is, "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth", etc.⁷⁶ Six hundred years later, prophet Jeremiah suggested pacifism against the Babylonian attack. Later, followed the pacifist cults of Essenes and others. It is true, that Christ's emphasis on pacifism in the Sermon on the Mount, is unambiguous, and forms the fundamental basis of Christian theology. However, since Christianity has become a state religion, the concept of a just-war has appeared. Dr. Walsh says that, at present, it is virtually the accepted doctrine by most sections of Christianity, except the Anna-Baptists and a few others.⁷⁷

Evidently, pacifism and a whole-life system cannot go together. As suggested by theologian Niebuhr, Liberation theologians, and other noted Christians, the use of political action for a righteous cause, becomes inevitable, if social responsibility has to be discharged. Let us examine the position of two noted pacifists of the century. Pacifist philosopher Bertrand Russell, who had courted arrest during the First World War, suggested, after the Second World War, that in order to avoid the appalling disaster of a Russian victory, threat of force, or, if necessary, actual use of force should be made against the

USSR, so as to impose on it, the rule of a democratic world government.⁷⁸ Pacifist Mahatma Gandhi cut out an equally sorry figure. At the beginning of the Second World War, pacifists of the world wrote to Mahatma Gandhi for guidance and advice. He felt distressed and baffled, but had hardly an answer. Maulana Azad writes that more than once he thought of committing suicide, saying that if he was helpless to avoid it, he would at least not be a witness to the holocaust.⁷⁹ But, as is well-known, later he became prepared to join the War effort, provided India were given autonomy; and again he approved of the sending of Indian forces in Kashmir to maintain Kashmir, Maharaja's accession to India and to repel the Pakistani-backed tribal intrusion.⁸⁰ The greatest constitutional lawyer of India, H.M. Seervai, has examined Mahatma's principle of non-violence and come to the conclusion that "there is little doubt that Gandhi used non-violence as a political weapon, and was prepared to support, or connive at violence to secure political goals."⁸¹ All this exposes the bankruptcy of pacifism in human affairs, especially when a religion seeks to solve socio-political problems. The logic is clear in a system that accepts social responsibility, and seeks to provide succour for the poor, the downtrodden or the oppressed. Injustice and oppression being the greatest in the socio-political field, in no way can these be resisted or undone, except by the minimum use of force by an organised society. Hence the sanction for it in Judaism, Islam and Sikhism.

There is a common misunderstanding that a doctrine of Love, *ipso facto* implies non-violence. The logic of love, points just the other way. How can one remain neutral and unconcerned, or shirk using minimum force, if the very person or the cause one loves is in jeopardy, or under attack? Social responsibility, or succour to the oppressed, is an essential counterpart of love of your neighbour. Inevitably, love or social responsibility and pacifism cannot always go together. Pacifism is consistent only where the ideal is individual salvation and, or withdrawal from life, which is considered a suffering, *mithya* 'or an avoidable entanglement. In fact, whole-life religions have regarded the approach of withdrawal as escapist or self-centred.

In this context, we have to see what is the stand of the Gurus on the issue. Guru Nanak has defined God as the Director of the World, the Helper of the weak and the oppressed, and

Destroyer of the evil. For him, oppression of the weak and injustice are not consonant with the Order of God. This implies that the God-conscious man, who has to be His instrument, must resist and undo injustice. Since political injustice can be undone only by a society, by the use of force, if necessary, it was he who rejected Ahimsa, initiated the organisation of his *Panth*, and started the institution of succession, so as to develop and direct its growth, and to enable it to achieve the targets fixed by him.

Sikhism and its Socio-Political role

Some outsiders feel that the first five Gurus were pacifist. But, facts do not support this contention. Guru Nanak himself directed Guru Angad that he had to lead a *Panth*. The Third Guru, in order to expand the organisation of the Sikh society created 22 districts of socio-religious administration, with a head at each Centre, covering almost the entire expanse of India from Dacca to Kabul. He created new institutions to develop an independent sense of Sikh consciousness and identity. The Fourth Guru founded Amritsar as a religious as well as a business centre. The role of the Fifth Guru showed unambiguously what part the future Sikh society would play. Contemporary evidence of Mohsin Fani, the Emperor himself, and others is clear. He prescribed the system of *Daswandh* or 10% contribution of one's earnings by every Sikh,⁸² and strengthened the institution of *Masands* for its collection. This made it plain to everyone that a parallel religio-secular society, with deep motivations, was being created. These collections were used for religious as well as secular purposes. The *Masands* also dealt with secular problems of the Sikhs. In fact, since Guru Nanak, as stated by Bhai Gurdas, the Gurus were called *Sacha Padshah*, and their followers looked up to them for solution of their problems, mundane or spiritual. Mohsin Fani records that the Fifth Guru erected lofty buildings, kept horses, and even elephants, and maintained retainers.⁸³ He also organised trade of horses and commerce. On his own behalf and otherwise he sent Sikhs to Central Asia to procure and trade in horses. Gupta, the distinguished historian, writes that the Guru had in every respect created a 'state within a state'.⁸⁴ According to *Khulasatu-twarikh* (Persian), the Guru successfully interceded with Emperor Akbar for reduction in the land revenue imposed on the hard-pressed peasantry.⁸⁵ The Guru's Compiling the *Granth* was an obvious declaration of the

ideological independence of the Sikh society. It is because of his religio-secular status that Chandu Shah, senior official of the Mughal Administration, offered the hand of his daughter to Guru Hargobind. But the crucial event was help to Khusro. Mohsin Fani records that the Guru blessed Khusro, the rebel Prince after Jehangir's accession to the throne. Indian historians like Jadunath Sarkar, Latifand Beni Prasad, record that monetary assistance was also given to the Prince. Beni Prasad in his *History of Jehangir*, puts the amount at Rs. 5000.⁸⁶ Both, because of the secular status and political potential of the Sikh society, and the Guru's help to the rebel Prince, claiming the throne, the incident came significantly to the notice of the Emperor. Jehangir, in his autobiography, records that for three or four generations the Sikh Gurus had been successfully creating a society, and thereby misleading the folk, Hindus and Muslims. He, therefore, felt that it was time that he put a stop to it, and accordingly, ordered the execution of the Guru as also the imposition of a fine and confiscation of his property.⁸⁷ The *Dabistan* records that the unpaid fine was demanded even from the Sixth Master. It is inconceivable that an Emperor in Delhi would take notice of a peaceful religious group, or order such a drastic action as he did, or consider the event of such importance as to record it in his autobiography, unless the development and aims of the Guru and his *Panth* had been considered by him of serious socio-political potential and proportions. Had the Guru's activities been felt to be purely of a salvation or a quietist saint, there could never be any question of an Administration and the Emperor having taken note of the organisation, assessed its likely effects on the polity, and ordered its being nipped in the bud. That the development was both significant and well-known, and had invited jealousy, is also evident by the reaction of the politically important Head of the Naqshabandi Sect of Islam at Sirhind, who conveyed his delight and congratulations at the Emperor having eliminated the Fifth Guru.⁸⁸

The other part of the story is equally clear. Obviously, the Guru envisaged confrontation with the Empire. He could never be unaware of what would be the result of his help to the rebel Prince, who was moving with his army, and had claimed the throne. Simultaneously, it is also on record that Guru Hargobind, even in the time of the Fifth Master, had been having militant training, and joining hunting parties.⁸⁹ All evidence

makes it plain that Guru Hargobind knew clearly from his father, as to what course had been followed by the Sikh society, and what were its future plans or aims. Otherwise, it is impossible to conceive that Guru Hargobind on the very first day of his Guruship should equip himself with two swords, and don a military dress. All this makes it clear that the socio-political objectives of the Sikh society had become clearly visible, even from the time of the Fifth Guru. The Guru's martyrdom was, from his own angle, a voluntary step, taken to prepare his people for the struggle initiated by Guru Nanak. On the part of the Emperor, his order was a necessary step to stop the growth of the Sikh Movement. In a whole-life ideology, martyrdom is not an act of suicide, sacrifice or atonement, but it is a calculated step to stop aggression, if that could be possible, and simultaneously an essential lead to prepare, and strengthen the will of the people for the struggle and sacrifices.

Guru Hargobind's military activities are well known. He created a fort at Amritsar, and the institution of Akal Takhat, the symbol of the *Miri-Piri* system of Guru Nanak. It is clear that the Guru took to the militant path as a positive step, and not under any social or political pressure, or for personal defence. The Guru had openly declared his policy to punish the tyrant and protect the weak.⁹⁰ He kept 700 horses and fought six battles with the Mughal Forces, several thousand strong. In one of his successful battles at Gurusar, he lost 1200 men.⁹¹ He even recruited mercenaries to train his people and to create a regular army. Since the time of the Sixth Guru every Guru maintained an army. The Seventh Master, who on all accounts was personally of a very compassionate temperament, maintained an army of 2000, which was quite a sizeable force. Another political move of the Guru was extremely significant. When Dara, a rival claimant to the throne, was moving with his army, he met him and offered military assistance.⁹² Just as Jehangir never forgot Guru Arjun's aid to rebel Khusro, Aurangzeb did not fail to note Guru Har Rai's offer of assistance to his elder brother claiming the throne. Significantly, the Seventh Master took this step knowing full well that his grandfather's assistance to Khusro had led to his martyrdom. Evidently, had the policy of the Sikh Gurus been to avoid confrontation with the Empire, or to give up militancy and socio-political objectives, the Seventh Master would never have offered military help to Dara. In the socio-political growth of the Sikh society, the part played by the

Ninth Master, is very meaningful and ideologically important. Governor Timur Shah, son of Ahmad Shah Abdali, writes in his *Hakikat-i-Banawa-Uruj-i-Firqa-i-Sikhan*, that it was reported to Aurangzeb that the Guru was creating a new nation, and was making militant preparations. On this the Emperor conveyed to the Guru that if he gave up his political and military role, and confined his activities to preaching and prayers, he would be given state grants for that purpose. The Guru declined the offer, and his consequent martyrdom⁹³ at the hands of the Empire is the second major event in the Sikh confrontation with the Mughal Administration, so as to inspire and steel his men for the final confrontation.

The Tenth Master's militant role and his armed struggles with the Empire, were protracted, long and decisive. From his very boyhood he strengthened his military preparations, fortified Anandpur, and proclaimed an independent political status. His clash with the local Hill Princes, thus, became inevitable. He, too, recruited mercenaries for his army and his battles. After the great event of his creating the Khalsa, he invited the Hill Princes to join him in his liberation struggle against the Empire. Owing to fundamental ideological differences they did not accept the Guru's suggestion.⁹⁴ Instead, they joined the Imperial Forces against the Guru. In this struggle, he lost all his four sons and his mother, but he continued the confrontation uninterrupted and undismayed. It was he who deputed Bandato mount an attack on Sirhind,⁹⁵ and sent Hukamnamas to his Sikhs to join and support him. The message which his spouse Mata Sundri, later conveyed to the Sikhs, made two things clear. First, that Banda's mandate was to supplant the Moghal Administration, and second, that political sovereignty was to be with the Sikh *Panth*.⁹⁶

Sikhism-a Miri-Piri System

The above facts should enable us to understand Sikh history as the product of Sikh ideology. For, unless we grasp the intimate relation between the two, often problems of interpretation arise. Sikhism is a whole-life, *Miri-Piri* or *Sant-Sipahi* religion. The three terms are synonymous, and convey a single concept, and not a combination of two concepts. For, Guru's concept of God (True Emperor) or spirituality is incomplete or partial without an essential and inalienable

combination of the spiritual life with the empirical life. Spirituality and its attributes have to be expressed in, and enrich the latter, which, without drawing the spiritual and moral sap from the former, remains egoistic and barren. In Guru Nanak's system God Himself is engaged in the socio-spiritual development of man. He does not want the spiritual man to withdraw to Him, but wants him to be the agent of His Altruistic Will. Man has not been left alone by God to fight lone battles with Satan. He is a Benevolent Helper, enabling man to remove and shed his imperfections, resulting from his egoism at the present level. The spiritual man, as stated by Guru Nanak, has to ferry others across the turbulent sea of life. The concept of personal salvation, as in some other religions, by withdrawing from the empirical life, is distinctly denied. A dichotomous system or the modern concept of Secularism, governing empirical life, leaves the society to devise its own ethics. Thus, Secularism has led to the appearance in the twentieth century, of the biggest ruling monsters, civilised history has known. For, the Frankenstein of military power, modern science has placed with the state or its ruler, virtually makes it impossible for the downtrodden or the weak, to defy him or dislodge him from his self-chosen path, howsoever evil or disastrous it may be.

It is a whole-life or a Miri-Piri thesis that Guru Nanak and *Guru Granth* have laid down; and the Ten Masters or the Ten *Gurmukhs* have demonstrated for 240 years how to live it under all combinations of circumstances. It is because of the completely radical nature of their religion, that they took so long to show in life how to live every aspect of their system, and thereby, to motivate and condition the Sikhs in their faith. The lives of the Gurus over 240 years are a lesson in interpretation or hermeneutics.

The *Guru Granth* itself stresses that all the Gurus express a single unified thesis, representing the same spirit.⁹⁷ Guru Gobind Singh has stated that they are all a unity, and express the same spiritual gospel. In fact, he emphasises that unless this is realised and recognised, there can be no success in understanding the Sikh thesis, and that it would be foolish to believe otherwise.⁹⁸ That is also the reason that in the entire *Guru Granth Sahib*, only the word 'Nanak' appears to convey the authorship of all the hymns and messages of the Gurus therein. This emphasis is not without meaning.

A superficial reading of the hymns of the Ninth Guru would suggest to an outsider that he was a pacifist. But historical evidence of Governor Timur Shah, quoted earlier, that the Guru declined to stop his military and political activities, as desired by the Emperor, is exactly contrary to it. By his confrontation and the consequent martyrdom, the Guru prepared his people for the final role the Tenth Master had to play. Evidently, he could not be unaware of the consequences of the rejection of the Emperor's offer. And yet, as in the case of the Fifth Master, he, in order to help Kashmiri pandits⁹⁹, sought martyrdom as a part of his socio-political struggle, and to inspire and strengthen the people's faith in the mission.

Creation of Khalsa - an Epitomic Event

The creation of the Khalsa was the epitomic achievement of Guru Nanak's mission. Guru Gobind Singh prescribed five Kakkas for the Sikhs, including a *Kirpan*. Quite often the significance of the *Kirpan* (sword) as an essential wear of the Sikhs, has been missed. But it emphasises two important principles, which the Guru wants the Sikh to remember, namely, his duty to confront injustice and oppression, and second, to stop the Sikhs from escape into withdrawal and monasticism. It is in this context, that one has to understand the outstanding role and contribution of the Sikhs, fighting the Mughals and the invaders in the 18th century, for Indian Independence in the 20th century, and during the encroachment on all humans rights and liberties, following the imposition of Emergency Laws in 1975. Can any historian, or sociologist explain why no other political, social or religious section of India rose to struggle or protest?

Our conclusion is plain. Neither Sikh ideology in the *Guru Granth*, nor Sikh history can be understood in isolation. It is impossible to grasp one without the other. For, each historical event, social development or institution, is part of a multi-dimensional process, which, in turn, is an essential and positive empirical projection of the ideology of Guru Nanak and the *Guru Granth*. As such, Sikh history is the best explanation and index of the Sikh ideology.

Sikhism-a System of Evolution

Sikhism is an evolutionary theory about the spirituo-empirical development of man. We can never understand the

human process, its psychology and its spirituality, by experimenting with and dissecting the lower animals or examining material processes. Our scientific tools cannot yield any information about what is not discernible in the life of the animals or the state of matter. The sufferings, trials, tortures and martyrdoms through which the moral man or the spiritual person can go without flinching, cannot be understood by any principle of cause and effect, or egoism, which is the present level of man. But the *gurmukh* is as spontaneous in his altruistic activities and sacrifices, as the normal man is egoist in his thought and deed. For, the latter cannot rise above his organic or constitutional level, which is governed by his ego-consciousness. In the same way the *gurmukh* with his universal consciousness cannot help or refrain from being altruistic, which is his compulsive mission. Freedom, creativity, spirituality or morality are virtually synonymous terms expressing a higher level of consciousness. Somewhat similar thought is suggested by a modern thinker, "The inner world seen as fields of knowledge (...) is the world of freedom, the 'outer world' (.....) is the world of necessity." "It is dying to oneself, to one's likes and dislikes, to all one's egocentric occupations. To the extent one succeeds in this, one ceases to be directed from outside, and also ceases to be self-directed. One has gained freedom, or one might say, one is then God-directed."¹⁰⁰ The only difference with the above thought is, that although the two levels have been clearly brought out, one cannot be partially God-directed and partially self-directed. For, that would be a contradiction in terms. The Guru says, "Ego-consciousness and God-consciousness are contrary; the two cannot be at one place."¹⁰¹ For, the moment universal consciousness is achieved, ego-consciousness disappears. In the case of *gurmukh*, while earth-awareness is necessary, the driving force is the *gurmukh*'s universal consciousness.

The radical and revolutionary changes the Gurus made, can be understood only on the assumption of their revelation and universal consciousness. No rational, mechanical, empirical or environmental logic can explain the originality of their thought, their mission and activities. An important fact to bear in mind is the die-hard, burden of the prevalent and religiously sanctioned and divisive caste ideology. There was nothing in the contemporary life of Hinduism, Islam or Christianity to give rise to an ideology which instead of assuming a Fall from Satyug to Kalyug, or from the

Garden of Eden to Earth, suggested an ideology of Evolution.

It is in this context that we feel that any theory of Syncretism or sociological, environmental, religious or empirical influences would appear to be superficial and naive. Sikh ideology or Sikh history has to be understood and interpreted on its own terms. It has been explained in the *Guru Granth*, and has been lived and demonstrated by the Gurus.

An argument is sometimes advanced that whereas the Torah, the Old Testament, and the Quran, alongwith enunciating spiritual principles and revelations, also prescribe civil duties, and rules concerning war, and rituals, the *Guru Granth Sahib* lays down no such specifications, and hence, it cannot be taken to be a scripture recommending any role in the socio-political life of man. The argument is invalid and even casual. Any detailed study of the *Guru Granth* would show the Gurus' wisdom and vision. For, while they clearly and repeatedly lay down every spiritual and moral principle, and man's responsibility concerning the religious, social and political life, they scrupulously avoid any injunction about civil, cultural or social matters, which, by their very nature, are always dated. We are all aware that many of the civil rules or Shariat, provided in other scriptures or holy books, sometimes become a problem for the devotees. Because socio-political practices and matters, being always evolving and changing, rigid adherence to them in a future context could become an embarrassing and avoidable limitation. Hence, just as the Fifth Master, by authenticating the Scripture, excluded all possibility of confusion or controversy about the purity of the text and the principles prescribed, the Gurus have not included in the Scripture, anything that could be dated. But it should not be understood that they have on that ground kept their followers without guidance. The *Guru Granth* not only lays down every spiritual principle, that is universal and eternal, but also all the major responsibilities, moral and social, which the seeker has to shoulder and discharge, i.e., regarding brotherhood of man and equality, fair distribution of wealth, sustenance of life, assistance to the down-trodden, and struggle against injustice and aggression. In addition, the more important lessons are the demonstrations and the lead which the Ten Masters have given over a period of about two and a half centuries in respect of almost every eventuality that could arise in the socio-political life

of the individual and society. It is for setting examples of conduct for the religious man, regarding every aspect of life, that the Ten Gurus guided the Sikh society from its infancy to its maturity.

Conclusion

Thought, as stated by Iqbal, is the internal and integral component of the deed, which is its external part. In the case of mystics and prophets, unity between thought and deed is a logical certainty, because the two are not the product of ego-consciousness, but these are the expression of the fundamental or universal consciousness. There is no intervention of the ego-consciousness to distort the fundamental unity and harmony of life. Hence the deeds of the Gurus are the truest interpretation of their thesis and the Bani. The Tenth Master has stressed that no success in understanding the Gurus' system, can be achieved, unless the unity of their spirit is accepted. He says, "Those who recognised them (all the Gurus) as one, were successful on the spiritual plain." This reveals the basis on which the Gurus themselves worked, and how firmly and strongly they believed in the unity of spirit, thesis and goal of all the Gurus. Therefore, what is of fundamental importance, is the spirit, faith, understanding and interpretation of Guru Nanak's thesis, emphasised by his successors, who were considered spiritually the most competent contemporaries who laid down their all for it.

In the matter of interpretation or hermeneutics, Sikhism has a unique advantage, which is not available to other religions. Here we have nine successors who have uniformly lived and interpreted the system of Guru Nanak. Three points indisputably emerge from the above. First, is the belief and understanding of the nine successors about his thesis. Second, they being the most competent contemporaries and executors of Guru Nanak's thesis, their understanding and interpretation of it, is of far greater value and importance than the *post facto* views of those who have a subjective commitment to a dichotomous religion or a social science discipline or any other system, which at best is only limited in its vision and scope. Third, the Gurus have lived, acted and proclaimed the unity of that thesis. Consequently, the logical method of interpretation, is to accept the unity of their Spiritual experience, deliberation and deed, and to approach

the understanding of their spiritual thesis from the end of the deed. We have no ground to think otherwise.

There is a major difference between the Sikh Scripture and other scriptures, which were constructed by human beings, decades even centuries, after the concerned prophet had left the scene. Of the Christian Gospel, John Hick states, "Our modern historical awareness is that Christian doctrines should not be regarded divinely formulated and guaranteed propositions, but rather as human attempts to grasp the religious meaning, primarily of the Christ event, and in the light of this of our human situation as a whole. The history of Christian theology is thus a part of the history of human thought." In the case of Sikhism, it is entirely different. The *Guru Granth* is not only the authentic Bani of, or revelation to Guru Nanak, but it is also the authentic record of the understanding and interpretation of his five spiritual successors. They are not human records of understanding, but true statements of unsurpassed spiritual value and authenticity.

By their living and deeds the Gurus themselves have explained how to understand and interpret their Bani or system. Guru Nanak laid down that the goal of man is to carry out His Will. The hymns quoted above say that those who know His Will, carry it out, this being a spiritual compulsion, and that only when one walks in His Will, the Truth comes to be known about what is true living. These wonderful statements give us a true glimpse of Sikhism and Sikh hermeneutics. This emphasises the primary importance of lives and deeds of the Gurus. Consequently, in Sikhism, the unity of the spiritual experience of the Gurus, their deliberations or thinking, and their deeds, has to be accepted in order to grasp or interpret their Bani or thesis. This is what they have stressed in their hymns, quoted earlier.

The best, and the only way truly to interpret the thought of the Gurus, is to understand and trace it from their deeds to the other end of their spiritual experiences. For, the Gurus emphasise that His Will has compulsively to be followed, and only after following it, one comes to know of the Truth. Accordingly, so as to interpret their system, their deeds have to be understood and given priority. Otherwise, any attempt to understand their thought by ignoring their deeds, will only keep us entangled in debates about what is correct linguistic paraphrase of their Bani. This is like putting the cart before the

horse. It is this egoistic failing of the scholars that often results in numerous interpretations of the same writings. For example, the Vedas and Upanishads have been interpreted differently by scholars like Kumarila Bhatt, Sankara, Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava, Vallabha, Swami Dayanand, and others. Many a time a scholar's interpretation is just a piece of self-justification, as has happened in the interpretations of the variant *Parnalis* of Udasis, Nirmalas, Gyanis and others. For the Gurus, there was not only complete unity of spiritual experience and thought, but they were all pursuing uniformly the same thesis, aims, objectives and goals during the 240 years of their lives. Hence all talk of multiple or different levels or methods of approach and interpretations, is faulty ab initio. The Gurus themselves emphasise that the sure method of understanding and interpretation of their thesis, is to start with deeds as the basis, which would give one a clue or glimpse of their spiritual experience. Otherwise, we shall have the same crop of confusion as that of this *Parnali* or that *Parnali*, Western *Parnali* or Eastern *Parnali*; and most of these would be products of egoistic self-justification, or personal prejudices.

For the true interpretation of the Sikh Gospel, there are five unique events which cannot be ignored. The first is that Guru Nanak's system is a revelation. Second, that the revelation has been recorded by the Guru or the prophet himself. Third, that both the *Guru Granth* and the Gurus emphasise the impeccable unity of their thesis, and that failure to understand its unity and integrity means failure to comprehend and interpret its depths and truths. Fourth, that the thesis has been lived and demonstrated with love and humility by the Ten Masters for 240 years, thereby leaving no scope for ambiguity. Those demonstrations have been made by them as the unquestioned heads of a society dealing with all kinds of problems, and under variant social and political circumstances. Fifth, as is the clear lesson from the Gurus' lives, the *Kakka* of *Kirpan* prescribed by the Tenth Master, stresses not only that Sikhism is a whole-life or Miri-Piri system, and that Sikhs should live truthfully, discharging all their social responsibilities in all fields of life, but also that they should never withdraw into the isolation of asceticism or monasticism.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONCEPT OF MAYA IN SIKHISM

The term *maya* which has continuously appeared in old religious literature has also been used frequently in the Gum Granth but with a meaning and import that are entirely different. Therefore, commentators well-versed in old literature and languages, while interpreting isolated verses in the Guru Granth, are quite likely to draw conclusions which are sometime completely opposed to Sikh doctrines. Fortunately, an over-all study of the Guru Granth, leaves one in no doubt about its message. Hence, for a correct understanding of the Sikh view it would be conducive first to trace the meaning of *maya* in traditional literature.

Maya in Traditional literature

The term *maya* comes from the root *ma* meaning 'to form', and indicates the power of a god or demon to deceive, to change form, to do trickery and magic and create illusions.¹ Even the nature of Varuna, the lord of *maya* and *rita* is depicted as somewhat temperamental since at times he punishes even the innocent.² The favourite Vedic god, Indra, also used this Mayic method to dupe his adversaries and create illusions³ as mentioned in the Rig *Veda*. The same idea of the divine nature concealing itself by illusion is contained in the Atharva *Veda*.⁴ Though the word appears also in the *Brahmanas*,⁵ the doctrine of *maya* was developed only in *Upanishads* and their commentaries. In the thought of Yajnavalkya we have the beginning of *maya* or illusion theory⁶ about the empirical world. This idea was referred to as *maya* later in *Svetasvatra Upanishad* and accepted and amplified as the basis of Vedantic theory by Gaudapada and Shamkara.⁷ In the latter's philosophy, the universe is an illusion and an unreality, like a rope appearing a snake in the classical example. In order to maintain his monism,

Brahman is regarded as the sole reality, knowledge of which alone is worth having. Brahm, by its power of *maya*, which neither 'is' nor 'is not', conceals itself, thereby down-grading the universe to an illusory and secondary level, knowledge of which is not real but is of a lower category.⁸ It is not our object to go into the details of this theory, but it is very relevant to our subject to indicate briefly its consequences concerning five important and allied problems of (i) life-affirmation, (ii) reality of the empirical world and optimistic interest in life and its development, (iii) ethics and its growth, (iv) free will and human responsibility, and (v) the idea of superman. We take them up seriatim.

With the obvious unreality of the universe of man, this philosophy, like many idealistic systems, established an Absolute or *Brahman*⁹ that is almost as life-chilling and soulless as any materialism. Yajnavalkya and *Svetasvatra Upanishad*, the chief authors of the *Upanishad* doctrine of *maya*¹⁰, reduce *Brahman* to a mere conjurer,¹¹ unconcerned with the fate of his creatures. They are not given even the status of his handicrafts but are instead deemed as unreal and illusory and thus of no use and interest whatsoever to the Absolute; *Brahman* alone is real. The logic of this Mayic theory culminated ultimately in the negative anonymity of *sat-chit-anand* that can be described neither by existence nor by non-existence.¹² Later, it was believed that even the description *sat-chit-anand*, is not quite appropriate and that it should be understood in the negative sense. Conceptually, it should not mean that He is nor that he is void, nor that He is not. Hence, instead of conceiving *sat-chit-anand* negatively, the only way out was to say that He is transcendent.¹³ In Keith's view Shamkara's philosophic attempt is merely a clever tour de force without final validity, its ingenuity being as great but no greater than its improbability.¹⁴ We are hardly concerned with the philosophic merit of the *Brahman-cum-maya* doctrine but it is evident that it leads to life-negation.

Secondly, the unreality and the negation of life having been proclaimed, it froze completely all interest in the physical world and release from it through knowledge of the Absolute, became the only worthwhile aim of human endeavour. The world being just a phantom play of puppets, it was natural for all thinking persons to turn their back on life and cease to have any zest and inspiration to improve human lot and to alleviate human misery. We find that Yajnavalkya, the initiator of the Mayic doctrine,

himself left his wife and family, in search of unity with the Absolute.¹⁵ Evidently, as human activity was an entanglement in the snare laid by *maya*, all effort was directed to get out of the trap.¹⁶ This secret doctrine, which was mainly developed by the forest hermits, ultimately prescribed a revealed social order and ideal of four *ashramas*.¹⁷ The first of studentship, the second of the house-holder, the third of *vanprastha* and departure to the forest, and the fourth of *bhikshu* or beggar, in search of identity with *Brahman*. This objective was to be achieved in the last two stages when thoughts for the present and all links with the delusive secular life were to be abjured as bondage.¹⁸ This Yogic struggle for total release and freedom from the empirical world, which in itself was neither free nor real was a torturous experience, militating against latent urges, instincts and psychic mechanisms of life, built during millions of years of its evolution. No wonder this doctrine of the consequent futility of all human endeavour destroyed the creativity of man's thought and spirit, thereby forcing him not only to still capacity for healthy reaction but also to accept and own the cancerous slavery of caste in the social field and the dehumanizing cult of elusive release from the bondage of *maya* in the spiritual field. We are not saying that the prescription was practised by the laity or significantly even by the upper classes. But we seek to emphasize the damage done by the doctrine as an ideal to be pursued by all subtle and searching souls. Historical evidence of the ruin caused to the spirit of man is overwhelming. Whatever one may say of the ritualistic practices of the Aryans, one thing is unanimously accepted that they were a people full of optimism, confidence and vigour, and who during their influx into this country established their superiority over the local population. Whatever be their failings in their religious beliefs and practices, their love of the joys of life and this-worldliness are not in doubt,¹⁹ so much so that a very large majority of the *Rig Vedic* hymns were composed in order to praise and propitiate the gods and obtain from them material gifts of food, cattle, long life, progeny and victory over their enemies. Even the shackles of caste had not been formed till then and the institution was referred to only in the last mandala and a later hymn of the *Rig Veda*.²⁰ And what a contrast that by the period of *upanishads* and Vedantism, the doctrine of *maya* had its full toll in sapping their vitality and turning their thoughts into arid and dismal pessimism.²¹ The supreme objective of unity with

Brahman being attainable through cognition, all secular activity, good or bad, had to be given up, being illusory and an impediment in the achievement of the only useful goal. All this caused in the Indian mind an utter contempt of this world and life.²² This reckless disregard of social well-being led to an increasing rigidity in the caste system, causing a serious deterioration of the position of *vaishyas* and *sudras*²³ and also of women who in course of time came to be classed with them.²⁴ Truly, the authors of Vedic Age complain of the spiritual barrenness of people in the *Upanishadic* age.²⁵

The full effect of the doctrine of *maya* and unreality of the cosmos is demonstrated by the glaring contrast between the following hymns of the *Rig Veda* asking for happiness, gifts and success in battle, and the morning *mantram* prescribed by Shamkara for mature students on way to union with *Brahma* :

1. From the *Rig Veda*

O Usha ! shine with shimmering radiance; O daughter of heaven bringing us ample happiness, as you show your light upon the daily sacrifice ! Yet accept our hymns to bestow on us gifts in token of your satisfaction. O Usha, with brilliant luster !

By the bow we'll win the cattle, by the bow the battle; by the bow shall we win the mighty struggles; the bow destroys the enemy. By the bow shall we conquer the regions²⁶

2. Extracts from *Mantram*

I am not a combination of the five elements. I am neither body, nor sense, nor what is in the body. I am not the ego-function. I am not born, how can there be birth or death for me? I am not the vital air; how can there be either hunger or thirst for me ? Etc. I am not the doer. How can there be bondage or release for me?

etc.

Owing to ignorance, the rope appears to be a snake; owing to ignorance of the self, the transient state arises of the individualized, limited phenomenal aspect of the Self. The rope becomes a snake when the false impression disappears, etc.

Thirdly is the question about the influence of this doctrine on the development of ethics. In the *Rig Vedic* period, *Varuna* was supposed to be the only god of morality. Even *Varuna*, the god of *maya*, as we have already seen, is more the god of *rita* the law of the regularity of the physical world, than of morality, since he is capricious

enough to punish even the innocent, and good conduct is no security against his wrath.²⁷ Indra, the chief and most respected god of the *Rig Veda*, to whom the largest number" (one fourth out of about a thousand) of its hymns, are addressed,²⁸ is more known for *Indrajala*, a synonym for Mayic tricks, than for ethical conduct.²⁹ It is argued, probably for these reasons, that neither in the thought of *Vedas* nor of *Brahmanas* is there any basis of or serious concern for sound ethics and morality.³⁰ This appears especially true of the thought of *Brahmanas* which even the authors of *Vedic India* find comparatively undignified. Keith who has made a careful and exhaustive study of the *Upanishads* concludes that their ethical content is negligible and valueless.³¹ It is correct that the aim of the authors of *Brahmanas* was anything but ethical but unfortunately the doctrine of *Brahman* in the *Upanishads* hardly improves the ethical situation.³²

In fact, it was not accepted by the authors of *Upanishads* to prescribe a positive ethics for man, as it would amount to a recognition of the reality of the empirical world and denial of the unity of the Absolute, thereby controverting the very basis of their doctrine. Hence, by the sheer force of their own logic, the *Upanishads* made morality devoid of any value and meaning.³³ Obviously, as morality was not even the concern of Vedantic philosophers, none of them cared to attack the monstrous evil of caste and other rituals,³⁴ which in a way were rather recognised. Thus the social system remained static and stagnant as evidenced by the position of caste and women.³⁵ It rather gave sanction to the status quo and success, howsoever achieved, was approved because of the fatalism generated by the doctrine.³⁶ The same doctrine was made a ground for complete disregard of the fate of individuals who were a deluding product of the cosmic play of *Maya*.³⁷ Even Yudhishtira's wife, while discussing with her husband his unaccountably bad fate in this world, came to the conclusion that God in His *Maya* and whims just plays with the fate of individuals in this life.³⁸

Let us now consider the result of this doctrine on the idea of individual development and responsibility in life. Logically, a view which considers all empirical world as second rate, would not seek to bother about developments in life except as on way to merger with the *Brahman*. And this is exactly what happened. We have already seen that Yudhishtira's wife came to the belief that God treated the individual capriciously and without consideration. In this

view³⁹⁻⁴⁰ the cosmic play virtually de-humanizes and downgrades the individual personality. It has really no contribution to make by way of self-expression and self-discovery, a path opposed to the pursuit of union with the *Brahman*, which, in turn, needs annihilation of the human personality. In short, man was at every step a pitiable target of mockery by *maya*.⁴¹ In theory and practice, this doctrine fully absolved man of any moral or other responsibility because he was without any significance and reality, a mere bubble in the Mayic play.⁴² In whatever faint form it was, the Karmic law had tended to introduce an element of personal initiative for the good. But, unfortunately, the logical fatalism of this doctrine negated the practical incentive coming from the Karmic philosophy.⁴³ Under the *Brahman-maya* theory the self as individual was never recognised as real and consequently the self could have no say or responsibility in doing good or evil, the real actor being the Mayic *Brahman*.⁴⁴

The above gives a picture of the negation of the idea of human personality and responsibility and of its' capacity for any meaningful growth and expression into fruitful institutions of all kinds. Such a thing could only lead to the general devastation of the human spirit.⁴⁵

From the ideal of the pursuit of unity with *Brahman*, an argument could be adduced that this path enjoined the bracing up of human personality and its ethical growth and for that end moral living was not only recommended but also practised. It would, therefore, be extremely relevant to consider the idea of *Jivan mukta*, which was the ideal for subtle souls to attain in the last two recommended stages (Vanprastha and Sanyas) of man's life. The means and methods prescribed for it are revealing and significant, as the basis of all of them is this doctrine and the delusive character of the empirical world, the spell of which one has to transcend.⁴⁶

In search of this ideal, the first step to be taken as indicated already, is to leave the world and its entanglements including one's kith and kin as was done by Yajnavalkya.⁴⁷

And in reaching the final stage of *Jivan mukta*, these Mayic and deceptive ideas about God have to be completely discarded.⁴⁸ In fact the bliss attained on way to the final stage of *Jivan Mukta* is the last and the subtlest trap laid by *maya* which has to be escaped. For, in the above feeling about God or in the act of beholding

God, there is a duality and *Brahman* is without a second. In his final stage the *Jivan mukta* is beyond all veils of phenomenality which are created by sheer ignorance. True, the *Jivan mukta* has a body, but he is utterly unconcerned with all phenomenality of karma.⁴⁹ He knows that his ego-senses and all the scene of misery, pain of the world around, including that of birth and death, have no substantiality or meaning in them and have thus to be disregarded.⁵⁰ Finally a person who has obtained this knowledge and pierced the veil of *maya* can indulge in any kind of actions without affecting his salvation.⁵¹ He can do any evil or sin with impunity since knowledge protects him from its consequences. A moral conduct is not characteristic of *Jivan mukta*. He is a despot with unlimited power and sanction to do and eat anything he wants and assume any shape he likes.⁵² It is this kind of description of *Jivan mukta* that has led Zimmer to consider it an image of schizoid inflation of the ego.⁵³

Before we conclude the subject of the traditional view of *Maya* one point needs a little explanation. It might be contended that Ramanuja's view about Vedantism does not follow the school of Shamkara and rather controverts him on certain points. For a number of reasons this argument is hardly germane to our present discussion and conclusion about *Jivan mukta*. First, Shamkara's *Vedantism*, apart from being most widely accepted and typical, leans heavily on the Mayic view of things in order to maintain its monism, whereas for Ramanuja it is 'unbelief', and not 'ignorance', which is the cause of wrong understanding of the underlying unity.⁵⁴ Secondly, it is really doubtful whether Ramanuja's view is at all Vedantic in the sense of being monistic, since his critics, for his failure to reconcile his entities and assumptions, place him very near pluralistic dualists.⁵⁵ Thirdly, and this is important, Maitra who discussed the problem of ideal life in all schools of orthodox philosophy, including that of *Vaisheshika*, *Samkhya*, *Purva Mimamsa*, Shamkara, Ramanuja, Vallabhacharya, Madhava, comes to the conclusion that a common feature of all these doctrines about ideal life or moksha is the conception of the ideal as a negation

or, at least as a transcendence of the empirical life proper, and that this state is thus a super-moral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral ideal. And after meeting this state of merger there is hardly

anything to be done except, as in the case of Ramanuja's system, doing unconditional scriptural works like daily rituals, bathing in the Ganges on the day of lunar or solar eclipse, etc. Further, in the case of Ramanuja, and most of other systems, this ideal is not open to *shudras* and the caste system is strictly upheld.⁵⁶

Before coming to the Sikh view, we have briefly traced above the old idea of *Brahman-maya* in which God is the magician who produces souls, bound by illusion.⁵⁷ *Brahman* is allied to the power of *Maya* or deception, thereby limiting it. It is from this definition of *Brahman* and *Maya* that the various implications as described in the orthodox traditional literature follow, in regard to the five basic issues stated earlier.

Maya in Sikh View

The Sikh view of *maya* in the *Adi Granth* follows mainly from the ideas about God and the individual human ego. It is, therefore, pertinent first to consider the concept of God in Sikhism as it will give us the basic clue and answers to the problems before us. In confirmation, we shall find that those views have also been given very specifically in the scripture. The *Guru Granth* states as follows about God and his creation:

From the Absolute Formless Being, He became manifest.⁵⁸ God created the world and permeated it.⁵⁹ God is present in all ways and forms and works through winds, waters and all worlds.⁶⁰ He is the life of all life.⁶¹ The world and God are one and He is in all hearts.⁶² God is just, beneficent to all life and compassionate treasure and ocean of all virtues and merciful.⁶³ God's children err and stumble and yet they are pleasing to the Father.⁶⁴ We are all His beings, none are high or low.⁶⁵

Three qualities of God have been particularly emphasized in the *Adi Granth* : His grace,⁶⁶ His innermost nature to help the erring and the sinner,⁶⁷ and His presence in all hearts and life. From these follow the chief features of Sikh theism, namely, God's personal character and things happening with His grace, His being the final moving Will (*Hukam*) in the world; His basic desire and nature to redeem the erring beings and promote human evolution, which is a sign of His creativity; and the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. Further, there are three important facets of God's creativity in (a) establishing the world and leaving it free to develop,⁶⁸ (b) assessing each being according to his

deeds,⁶⁹ and in the light of His Purpose; and yet (c) His innermost nature of helping the erring in their growth and treating them justly and as equals.⁷⁰ In this background, some aspects of which will be dealt with presently, we now come to the basic question of *maya* in the Guru Granth.

It is very clear that in this definition of God there is no scope for *maya* being the limiting quality of God and giving an illusory character to the empirical world. In the Sikh doctrines, the world is as true as God Himself.⁷¹ Similarly, oneness and brotherly affinities of humanity follow directly from the same definition. And yet the normal consciousness of man, being egoistic, he does not grasp this unity, and assumes separateness of individuals as the basis of man's life, motives and actions. Thus individualism is directly opposed to the idea of unity of life in the *Adi Granth*. This wrong way of looking at things from only an individual's point of view, in violation of the basic unity and harmony of life, inherent in this idea of God is termed *maya*. This very egoistic view or assumption, conflicting with the basic oneness of humanity is *maya*, misleading and fallacious.

In the Guru Granth the word *maya* has been used in two senses: one in the literal sense of wealth or money and the other in the sense of a wrong or egoistic way of looking at things. Let us see what is written in the *Adi Granth* about *maya*, ego and individualism. It says:

In ego we sin and in ego is *maya*.⁷² Between Him and me is the partition of I-am-ness (ego). The ego-centric are in illusion and waste their lives as without deeds no one is emancipated.⁷³ Whoever is afflicted by a sense of duality is the slave of *maya*.⁷⁴ Intoxicated with *maya* one is vain and creates an illusion, thereby getting away from God.⁷⁵ Egoistic passions and duality all follow from *maya*.⁷⁶ Carvings of self for indulgence, possessiveness and wealth are the poisons of *maya*.⁷⁷ The world came into being through individuation, but, by forgetting *Naam*, we come to grief.⁷⁸ Love, contentment, truth, humility and other virtues enable the seed of *Naam* (vision of basic unity and reality) to sprout.⁷⁹ In the grip of *maya* we grab what belongs to others.⁸⁰ With fear of God in mind one loses

I-am-ness.⁸¹ Service of God makes one free.⁸² It is man's nature to err and God's nature to redeem.⁸³ *Naam* dispels delusion and enlightens the mind.⁸⁴ O man, overcome your passions and do good

deeds; this is the way to get rid of *maya*, for you reap what you sow.⁸⁵ Man gathers riches by making others miserable.⁸⁶ Human passions, ego and duality lead us away from God.⁸⁷ With dispassion we destroy *maya*.⁸⁸ With self-control and discipline we forsake vice and see the miracle of man becoming God.⁸⁹

It is clear from the foregoing as to what is meant by *maya*. The *Adi Granth* does not convey anything like the un-reality of the physical world, the truth of which is emphasized and proclaimed. *Maya* is not a cognitive error caused by the universe. There is nothing deceptive in the objective world that misleads us. *Maya* is a subjective error of accepting a wrong point of view, the failure of man not to look at things in the proper perspective of the unity of life. This error of man is not conceptual or perceptual but it is ethical inadequacy and moral infinity that is to blame. Misled by passions and ego, the individual ignores the basic reality of the brotherhood of man and instead assumes separateness of individuals, involving himself in destructive conflict. Hence the stress that the way to rectify this human weakness is not so much to have a new mental picture of things and men, as to accept a new ethical angle and make a moral effort by disciplining one's passions and controlling one's selfish propensities. And the final test of the correctness of ethical vision is right action. The world is not unreal; the wonder of man becoming God can be performed only by correct ethical standards and virtuous conduct in the domain of the truthful reality of the world. It is vicious action based on self-regarding passions that have to be corrected and replaced with the practice of universal humanism. Therefore, conduct and deeds alone will help to break the wall between man and God. Thus, repeated stress on right action and virtue, as the only means leading to God, follows from the Sikh view of *maya*, which means a wrong and perverted ethical assumption or viewpoint, producing immoral, separatist, possessive and conflicting activities. It is in this sense that *maya* is virtually synonymous with ego or I-am-ness.

Let us now consider the consequences of this view in relation to the five issues mentioned earlier.

On the problem of life-affirmation, the Sikh view is categorical and in consonance with the idea of *maya* discussed above. The Guru Granth says:

The guru contemplates God by word, thought and deed.⁹⁰ Human body is the temple of God.⁹¹ By despising the world one gets not to God.⁹² Beauteous, O Farid, are the garden of the earth and the human body.⁹³ All austerities, rituals and *Yoga* are of no avail, real *yoga* is to look alike upon all beings.⁹⁴ God does not come near a person, hard of heart and with a sense of duality.⁹⁵ Human birth is a precious privilege.⁹⁶ God creates the world and yokes everybody to His task.⁹⁷ Earth is the true abode of righteousness.⁹⁸ The body is the house of Lord but we allow it to be robbed by our vicious passions.⁹⁹ God works through his creation.¹⁰⁰ Serve God with a clean heart.¹⁰¹ Do not think God is afar, nor be an egoist and lose the opportunity of human birth.¹⁰² By evil deeds we lose link with God. We do good deeds and pad ones; but do not forget' God, as our virtues might wither away and bad deeds form a firm habit.¹⁰³ Practise virtue and not vice, nor gamble away human life.¹⁰⁴ Some people shun meat but devour men.¹⁰⁵ Our deeds alone bear witness unto our life.¹⁰⁶ Human infirmities consist in a sense of duality, falsehood, slander and covetousness.¹⁰⁷ Body is the horse by which one rides to God.¹⁰⁸ Deride not the world as it is the creation of God.¹⁰⁹

The above affirms unambiguously the reality and significance of human life. Not only that; the reality of life is deemed as great as that of God. In fact, practices involving direct or indirect rejection or despising of life are denounced, and the human body is regarded as a privilege and an opportunity to make life fruitful by doing good deeds and avoiding vice and duality that lead to strife. Practice of good and virtuous deeds alone is said to be essential and acceptable to God.

The answer to the next question about the optimistic and constructive interest in life automatically follows from the idea of life-affirmation indicated above. Following is what the Guru Granth says on the point:

Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is truthful living or conduct.¹¹⁰ My God is riches to the poor,

staff to the blind, milk to the child and a boat in the sea of life always helpful and beneficent.¹¹¹ Why blame others, it is our own doings that lead us astray. The seeker discriminates between good and bad.¹¹³ I do good deeds, reflect on the Word and am blessed with *Naam*.¹¹⁴

The seeker speaks the truth, acts truthfully and treats all alike.¹¹⁵ Truth and continence are true deeds, not fasting and rituals.¹¹⁶ Drive out lust and anger, be the servant of all, and see the Lord in all hearts.¹¹⁷ Through virtue alone is wisdom attained.¹¹⁸ God's soldiers try to be like Him and fight evil.¹¹⁹ Worship God with virtue and crave not what belongs to others.¹²⁰ With God, only the deeds that one does in the world are of any avail.¹²¹ Control your evil propensities and you become a perfect man.¹²² Good, righteousness, virtue and giving up of vice are the way to realize the essence of God.¹²³ Vice is our enemy and virtue the only friend.¹²⁴

Apart from sanction in scriptures of virtuous and social living, the lives of the Gurus are the best evidence and interpretation of the views approved in Sikhism. It is a significant fact of their interest in the physical world that all the ten Gurus, excepting Guru Harkrishan, who passed away before his majority, married and had children. Here it would be relevant to indicate the social milieu in which Sikhism was born. Caste, the practice of untouchability, and pollution, poverty, the degrading position of women, invading hordes, and tyrannical political rule were the order of the day. Not only is there the strongest denunciation of each one of these anti-social evils in the Guru Granth, but also, in order to eradicate them, parallel, social and political institutions were established. The institution of common and free kitchen to feed the poor and all who came to the Guru or lived with him was an important instrument not only to help the needy but also to break the most malignant evil of caste-distinction and establish the equality of man. In a country where caste had received an unquestioned religious sanction of the Rig Veda and other orthodox systems for over 2500 years, the insistence on community kitchen and eating at common platform of all castes, including untouchables and *shudras*, was an unprecedented social reform of great magnitude with implication for the future economic and social development of the people. Similarly, whereas women had earlier been classed with *shudras*, they were brought to level with men. It is

no accident of history that two of the Sikh Gurus, the fifth and the ninth, had to suffer torture and martyrdom at the hands of Mughal emperors for socio-political activities and organisation, which the latter did not countenance with equanimity. From the time of the sixth Guru,

regular military training of the Sikhs was started with the result that the sixth and the tenth Guru had many military skirmishes with the Mughal armies. The objective, from 'the very start, was to pose a military' challenge to the oppressive political system. In furtherance of this plan, the tenth Guru created and built, without distinction of caste or birth, the institution of the *Khalsa*, in order to forge ahead is, the socio-political life and to confront, resist and demolish political tyranny. In this military struggle, the Guru lost all the four sons of his, two in battle and two in execution. These socio-political developments constitute an important chapter in the history of north-western India. But suffice it to say for our purpose that the lives and teachings of the Sikh Gurus laid a firm religious basis and sanction for remoulding and re-organising the affairs of men, in all their social and political aspects, with a view to creating a righteous, social order, capable of reacting fruitfully against challenges of the physical world. In any case, the position regarding the second issue is clear.

In view of the above the answer to the third problem of ethics is equally emphatic and naturally follows the Sikh Guru's deep interest in life and man. Let us first consider what, if any, is the standard in Sikh ethics. Fortunately, for our discussion, this standard is not only linked with the doctrine of *maya* but, in a way, follows from it, and from Guru's idea of God and brotherhood of man. The root of all evil is the sense of separateness and one's looking upon others as outsiders and adversaries. But the truth is that they are all equal members of the human family. Therefore, all our actions have to be judged from one standard, namely, that of the unity of life and brotherhood of man. The test is laid and all human activity has to be screened and directed in that light. Not that all men will measure up to it but the invariable standard and the ideal are there and have the sanction of the Guru Granth. Human failure, in not coming up to the mark, is due to the egoistic consciousness of man for whom it is not easily possible to break the wall of duality. This obstruction or ethical myopia is what is *maya*, a misconception about the reality of the world. With the idea of unity of life as the standard, all moral injunctions and prescriptions follow, as aids and correctives to restore the right ethical vision. Before we proceed further we may see what more the Guru Granth states on this issue:

The Lord is a stern Judge.¹²⁵ One, in fear of God and discriminating

between good and bad, appears sweet to God.¹²⁶ Practice truth.¹²⁷ God rewards even an iota of virtue.¹²⁸ God evaluates all.¹²⁹ The five evils (passion, greed, wrath, pride and infatuation) destroy the rich and righteous heritage of man.¹³⁰ Enshrine God in heart' and share with others.¹³¹ Guru is the slave of one who knows no duality.¹³² Truth and continence are true virtues, not fasting, rituals and daily worship.¹³³ Control cravings and the light of wisdom will come; then fashion this wisdom into deeds.¹³⁴ With God in mind human faculties are aroused and inspired.¹³⁵ O Yogi, don't you feel ashamed of begging from door to door for your food.¹³⁶ Religious practices are of no use; give in charity through your body.¹³⁷ Our deeds are the book on which the mind writes good or bad; vice takes us away from God.¹³⁸ No progress without good deeds.¹³⁹ Do not covet riches and women of others.¹⁴⁰ God's riches belong to all and it is the world that makes distinctions.¹⁴¹ God makes all, why call one good and the other bad.¹⁴² It is wrong to make distinctions of caste, colour, high and low.¹⁴³ It is man's nature to swim out, so why drown yourself ?¹⁴⁴ Good deeds always flower and flourish.¹⁴⁵ Humility, forgiveness and sweetness of tongue win God.¹⁴⁶ Destroy evil and you become a perfect man.¹⁴⁷ Give up evil, do good and right and you realize the essence of God.¹⁴⁸ If one sees God in all men, one becomes godly.¹⁴⁹ Salvation is attained while laughing, playing and living a full life.¹⁵⁰ Defiled are they who call others polluted as their mind is impure.¹⁵¹ Why call women impure when without women there would be none? Women are the links of the world.¹⁵² We are all children of God, none are high or low.¹⁵³

It is not necessary to deal with all aspects of Sikh ethics, but a few points need to be clarified.

It might be argued that the Guru Granth emphasizes just a sense of piety and virtuous living which is common to all salvation religions and there is nothing to suggest a comprehensive growth of social ethics. We feel this objection is

already met by the indication of the socio-political role of the Sikh Gurus, while considering the earlier issue of interest in life. To see God in all hearts and to treat all men as equals, is the ideal and also the basis of Sikh ethics. As this ideal could only be achieved in

life, right living and practice, there was a distinct orientation and education in creating new attitudes towards social life and the physical world. The Sikh Gurus felt that fear, hypocrisy and religiosity were evils that were corroding the social life. In regard to all of them an attempt was made to remould individual attitudes so as to enable men, in pursuit of their ideal to face and shape life boldly and develop the capacity to react against wrongs. It would be relevant to mention a fact of history. Ram Rai, the eldest son of Guru Har Rai, when called upon to assure the Mughal emperor at Delhi that there was nothing derogatory to Muslims in the *Gum Granth*, is understood (on deference to his royal host) slightly to have misquoted a verse in the *Guru Granth*. When the Guru was told of this, he ordered that Ram Rai, who was supposed to have displayed a sense of fear, should not return to the father and that he no longer represented him.¹⁵⁴

Secondly, it has been said that Sikhism, like most other idealistic systems, suffers from a deterministic fatalism and consequent lack of growth of a healthy ethics. We have already said that the Sikh idea is of a creative God, with a Will and Purpose, who is deeply interested in the improvement and evolution of his creation and the erring beings. Nor is the deterministic Karmic doctrine accepted in the *Guru Granth*, which clearly controverts it by saying that if Karma is invariable, how did the first being inherit Karma or who created Karmas initially? And then there is the basic idea of grace over-riding and controverting the doctrine of Karma. The ideas of creativity and growth are an integral part of the Sikh view of God and ethics.

The standard is fixed, but there is no inhibitory limit in the means or the value-system and no moral taboos excepting those that do not conform to the ideal. We shall revert to these points while considering the two remaining problems. But before we close this part, we might quote Guru Gobind Singh: "O God give me power, so that I never fear or shirk from doing righteous deeds in this world." And the righteous deeds he did were the creation of *Khalsa*, the organisation and development

of the people from the lowest strata of society. He educated and trained them in the arts of war and peace, and, what is fundamental to revolutionary or ethical change, sought radically to form new attitudes and a new optimistic and ethical spirit of

confidence and zeal in facing human and physical challenges from the environment. And this correcting of wrong emotions and attitudes was brought about by the only right method, namely, of personal example and deeds, not by precept but by practice. This follows directly from the Sikh view of *Maya*. Hence the emphasis that religion is not a ritualistic performance to be completed in the temple and then forgotten, or an other-worldly activity to be pursued with one's back to life. But because of the need for conditioning of the emotional pattern and moral attitudes, religious practices start when the day's job begins, since deeds in life are the sole test of the change of outlook and behaviour towards others. Let us see what the Guru Granth says in this regard:

Build the boat of self-control and contemplation to go across life unobstructed.¹⁵⁵ God has yoked us to his purpose.¹⁵⁶ When there was no creation what deeds were done by man which led to his first birth.¹⁵⁷ When there was no father or mother how did Karma originate?¹⁵⁸ After numerous lives, one becomes a human being and this is one's lone opportunity.¹⁵⁹ Service of God is the boat by which to cross the sea of existence.¹⁶⁰ O man, do not be led astray.¹⁶¹ Walk on the straight path or you would receive a push.¹⁶² Man is blessed with the light of reason and discrimination.¹⁶³ O man, you are supreme in God's creation, now is the time to fulfil your destiny.¹⁶⁴ Lord created the world and left it free to do as it wills.¹⁶⁵ Human birth is a privilege but we waste it for a trifle.¹⁶⁶ One has to account for every movement and suffer for evils.¹⁶⁷ Do not be misled, try to discriminate; God assesses everyone according to his deeds.¹⁶⁸ Man should shun evil and practice good, as life is short.¹⁶⁹ Life is priceless, why waste it?¹⁷⁰ We know right from wrong and yet fall into the well with torch in hand.¹⁷¹

Maya being an ethical infirmity and a warped view of things, the idea of personal responsibility and effort automatically follows from it. The same is the lesson of the various sayings of the Guru Granth indicated earlier. No doubt

God is the creator but he leaves the world to act according to its own will, indicating thereby its capacity and consequent responsibility to grow and evolve. Secondly, God permeates the world and He has a will and purpose in undertaking this creative activity. In fact, will by

itself presupposes a direction and a purpose. True, in the normal individual psyche, God's will is unawakened, but still man is endowed with reflective ability. Reference to this discriminatory sense in man is made again and again in the Guru Granth; this sense being higher than anything like it in the lower animals. And further, he has the undoubted ability to link himself with the latent will in him so as to draw on its creative power and resources and to gain spiritual vision. Both these factors indicate a free will in the individual and a continuing process of evolution and creativity ensured by God permeating his creation. Two ideas have been repeatedly stressed in the Guru Granth : the first, of God being interested (it being His innermost nature) in helping the erring persons to improve and evolve; second, of each person being judged according to the actions and even an iota of good action being duly rewarded. It is stated that after innumerable transformations man has appeared and this lone opportunity of further transformation should not be missed. Just as man is evolved from lower forms of life, man's evolution into the superman is unambiguously indicated. And this superman, as we shall consider subsequently, is not a dead end, but an enlightened instrument of God's creativity so as to continue that process. Hence the triple idea of (a) creative and free beings, with capacity and responsibility for further growth; (b) assessment and growth according to actions; and (c) God, in view of his creativity, always trying to aid and help this evolution and improvement. That is why, in most of the sayings of the Guru Granth cited above, there is a sense of urgency and an exhortation to all human beings to hasten the process of improvement and evolution by linking oneself with the underlying reality of God and discovering in it further source of power and purposeful creativity.

It is true that the idea of "as you sow, so shall you reap" is there; but this only fortifies the principle of free will and moral responsibility of man rather than endorsing deterministic Karmic doctrine of traditional Brahmanism. The latter idea, as we have seen already, has been specifically refuted in the Guru Granth.

Hence the idea of "as you sow, so shall you reap," in the absence of a fixed Karmic law and, coupled with the doctrines of grace and creativity, has only a limited application, being just an appeal and exhortation to the rationality and limited sovereignty of man, so as to

invoke his sense of initiative, responsibility and growth. The Sikh view does not at all envisage an ideal block universe, with morality to be imported as a categorical imperative. No doubt the thing-in-itself cannot be known through reason alone, but with moral effort and God's grace, a link with *Naam*, the Creative Reality, can be established. The certitude, universal love and unflinching moral and creative power of the superman or mystic are an incontrovertible evidence of this link. Thus with *Naam* as the basic reality underlying the empirical world, its inherent creativity is asserted, and all ideas of rigid determinism, fatalism, etc. repudiated. Hence, the conclusion, regarding the significance of man's personality, his moral responsibility and creative expression. This again is in consonance with the Sikh doctrine of *Maya*.

Finally, we come to the ideal of superman (Bhagat or Brahmagyani) in the Guru Granth. This ideal is distinctly laid before all men to strive for and achieve, if so desired. In this regard one thing is clear and significant. No one can reach this ideal by the process of mere mechanical growth. Invariably, the final stage is reached by an act of God's grace, the Fountain of all creativity. Had it been a merely deterministic or mechanistic world, the idea of grace would be completely incongruous; but this personality aspect of grace is an essential counterpart of the idea of God's creativity in Sikhism. It is also clear that becoming a superman is not the end in itself. Here the objective is entirely different from the ideal of salvation in orthodox systems, where it implies extinction, release from bondage or final merger with the Absolute. Here a link with the basic creative force is to be established in order to assist and partake more fully in God's creative activity. The superman or Brahmagyani becomes an instrument, not a mere onlooker of God's creative work, which he is obliged to further in all humility. Guru Nanak, in response to the question of the Sidhas, remarked: It is through God-conscious beings that I will ferry my fellow-beings across.¹⁷² The superman is God's agent in the mission of carrying out God's creative will and purpose.¹⁷³ He cannot be unconcerned, but is anxious to help and promote the cause of creativity and evolution of supermen from the erring human beings. This superman does not look down upon the world; he is a soldier and a combatant in the legion of God. This is the emphatic message of the Guru Granth and the lives of the Sikh Gurus. That is why the terms

Guru and God have been used almost synonymously.

All the attributes of the superman or Brahmagyani are godly. He is interested in the empirical world as much as God, but only as an awakened instrument of the divine will and purpose. The ideal laid before man is to know God's will and carry it out after demolishing the wall obstructing our vision. The superman has been described in glowing terms in the Guru Granth. His company enables man to improve his ethical and spiritual growth, which, in fact, is the superman's mission. A few indications about the ideal man in the Guru Granth are given below:

The man of merit gathers virtue and instructs others to do likewise. In the society of saints one goes not astray, one has no enemy, one goes the Lord's way.¹⁷⁴ There is nothing to tell God from a saint.¹⁷⁵ He is imbued with love.¹⁷⁶ He looks alike upon all men, gives warmth to all, has pleasure in doing good and is merciful.¹⁷⁷ He is a perfect man and gives support to all, full of unlimited and spontaneous beneficence. He helps the shelterless.¹⁷⁸

In sum, the superman in Sikhism is not a person merged in the anonymity of *Brahman*, unconcerned with the empirical world, looking down on it as something illusory and evil, but he is a live and active missionary of God partaking in the operation of creativity according to the Divine Will: He has virtually the attributes of God, namely, mercy, beneficence, creativity, unlimited help to the weak and erring humanity without distinctions. And one thing is important: this help is not offered through miracles, but it comes through process of growth, change in attitudes, education, training, lead, example and organisation in all human fields.

From our consideration of the foregoing problems, we find that one idea is fundamental in the theology of the Guru Granth and has been repeatedly stressed therein, namely, the creativity of God. This explains God's presence in the universe, His immanence (which may be called universe-in-God, in order to distinguish it from bare pantheism), His innermost nature in

improving and evolving individual beings, His assessment of them, His will and purpose and His yoking all men, including the supermen, to the fulfilment of His ever-emerging design. This message of the Guru Granth and the Gurus is clearly evidenced by the latter's

lives which glaringly bear out their inspiring optimism in purposeful growth and an active interest in life with a view to creating and shaping moral and social institutions based on humanitarianism. And all this they did as the understanding and humble instruments of God's will and creativity. In short, they aimed not at a self-annihilating merger, but at being enlightened vehicles of God's creative expression.

On the basis of the foregoing, we come to understand what *Maya* means in Sikhism and how in its logical and natural implications in regard to the five problems of (1) life-affirmation, (2) an optimistic interest in all aspects of life and its development, (3) growth of ethical standards and moral education, (4) human initiative, responsibility and significance, and (5) the ideal of the superman, it has led us to inferences and deductions directly opposed to those, flowing from the meaning and implications of *Maya* in the traditional Vedantic doctrine:

(1) We are led to the clear conclusion that Sikhism accepts the creative reality of the world as one of its fundamental doctrines. Not only is the authenticity of the individual and that of all social and political life and organisation asserted but also a defined goal of creative activity in accordance with the will of God is set before man and society, who have a definite role and responsibility in furthering the process of purposeful growth. Life is neither illusory nor an accident, nor is man an insignificant victim of rigid fate or chaotic and capricious circumstances. To be man is a very great privilege, since he has the glorious opportunity of not merely knowing the truth, but also the more glorious responsibility of living it; not only of understanding the creative will but also of carrying it out, because God works, not through miracles but through man whose resources and capacity are enormous. Accordingly, in Sikhism, the highest ideal is not to know the truth but to live that truth. The realization of truth is not an end in itself but only a means to the highest end of creative living. In fact, there is no realisation of truth, unless it inevitably culminates in true living, the latter alone being the correct test and index of the former. Hence the validity and authenticity of all aspects and fields of human endeavour.

(2) Right activity is multi-faceted and no facet of it is inferior to the others, so long its direction and development, are in harmony with

the prescribed ethical and spiritual standards and the overall creative plan. In fact, such an effort is not optional but obligatory, it being the sole measure of spirituality. Not that man will not stumble and falter, frail as he is, but he can be confident that his errors will be overlooked as a part of the process of growth and his efforts, howsoever small; are an essential step towards the ideal.



CHAPTER VIII

ESSENTIALS OF SIKH BHAKTI AND HINDU BHAKTI*

It is not an easy task to summaries the essentials of two higher religious systems in the short space available to us, especially when Hindu Bhakti has a history extending over 2,500 years. Therefore, it will be possible for us to give only the barest outline of each system.

Sikh Bhakti

Sikhism and Sikh Bhakti are synonymous terms. The system is monotheistic, God is the Creator and the world is His creation. Guru Nanak defines God thus: "The Sole One Self-Existent and Immanent, the Creator Person, Un-conditioned, Un-contradicted, Un-incarnated, Timeless Person, Self-created and Gracious Enlightener."¹ Sikhism started with God's revelation to Guru Nanak; Sikh Bhakti is, thus, the path in pursuit of His Gracious revelation. This idea of revelation means, first, that there is a level of Reality higher than the empirical Reality we experience with our senses, and, second, that this Higher Reality reveals itself to man and enlightens him. Guru Nanak says, "O, Lalo, I say what the Lord Commands me to convey."² This means God is both Transcendent and Immanent and He operates in history. In order to understand Sikh Bhakti this fundamental has to be kept in view.

But the important point is what is the nature of God, or the revelation. For the Guru God is Love. "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is all Love, rest He is ineffable."³ This

fundamental religious experience of the Guru is the foundation of the entire structure of Sikhism. Bhakti, thus, means living a life of love. Guru Nanak says, "If you want to play the game of love, come to me with your head on your palm."⁴ Guru Gobind Singh declares, "Let all heed the truth I proclaim. Only those who love attain to God."⁵ It is the same thing as Jesus says, "Thous shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." "Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself."⁶ The entire system of Sikhism is based on the logic of love, the first corollary being that Sikhism is life-affirming. Love has four essential dimensions. It is dynamic, cohesive, directive and the mother of all values. Guru Nanak calls God the ocean of virtues. It is in this context that we shall draw the logic and the structure of Sikh Bhakti and its doctrines.

The first inference of the fundamental of God is Love, is that the world is real. For, "When God was by Himself there was no love or devotion."⁷ Because for the expression of God's love a real and meaningful world is essential. It is not a place of misery, entanglement or suffering, nor is it *Mithya* or illusory. The Guru says, "True is He, true is His creation." "True are Thy worlds and Thy universes, True are the forms Thou created."⁸ "God created the world and permeated it with His Light."⁹ God being the Creator of a meaningful world, He is deeply interested in it. "God is eyes to the blind, milk to the child, and riches to the poor."¹⁰ "It is the innermost nature of God to help the erring."¹¹ For the Guru, God is the Teacher, the Guide. The third inference is that the practice of virtues and the living of an altruistic life is the path prescribed by Sikh Bhakti. "God created the world of life and planted Naam therein, making it the place for righteous activity."¹² "Good, righteousness, virtues and the giving up of vice are the ways to realize the essence of God."¹³ "Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of Naam (God) to sprout."¹⁴ Fourth, as altruism is the sole path to God, man's deeds alone are the index of his spiritual level. The Gurus say, "With God only the deeds one does in this world count."¹⁵ "True living is living God in life."¹⁶ "God showers His grace where the lowly are cared for."¹⁷ "It is by our deeds that we become near or away from God."¹⁸ "Everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living." It is "by service in this world that one gets honour in His Court."¹⁹ Thus, Sikh Bhakti does not recommend monasticism, or asceticism, since virtuous deeds can be performed only in social life and not by

withdrawal from it, nor by a life given to monasticism or meditation alone. Having rejected monasticism and asceticism, the acceptance of social and a householder's life becomes the fifth corollary of God is Love. It is significant that Guru Nanak and the other Gurus have sanctified man-woman relationship by profusely using it as the metaphor for the expression of their devotion to God. The Gurus made a major and a conscious departure from the earlier religious systems because we find that all the Gurus, except Guru Harkrishan, who died at an early age, were married householders, accepting the responsibilities of such a life. "One gets not to God by despising the world."²⁰ "The God-centred lives truthfully while a householder."²¹ "The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words and talk but by actually treating all men alike and as one's equal. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation, or roaming all over places, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but in remaining balanced and God-centred while conducting the affairs of the world."²² Not only that, in Sikhism while anyone could become a Sikh an ascetic or a recluse was unwelcome. The Sikh prays for "millions of hands to serve God."²³ From the above follows the sixth principle of equality of man and woman. Guru Nanak says, "Why call woman impure when without woman there would be none."²⁴ Not only he gave equality to women, but the later Guru appointed women to head some districts of religious administration. In fact, monasticism, asceticism and celibacy go together. In most of the old Indian religions, woman is considered an impediment in the religious path.

The brotherhood of man is the seventh corollary of Guru's experience of God is Love. Thus, the hierarchical caste ideology was scripturally and practically rejected. After his revelation Guru Nanak's first words were, "There is no Hindu nor any Mussalman." It means he saw only man, without distinction of caste, or class. And his lifelong companion during his tours was a low-caste Muslim. This meant that anyone wanting to have dealings or discourse with him could not make distinctions of caste or class. For the Guru the spiritual path could be lived not by mere words but by treating without discrimination all men alike. Once the householder's responsibilities are accepted, work becomes a part of man's religious duty. The Guru says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or a saint. Do not

look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others."²⁵ The Guru deprecates the Yogi who gives up the world and then is not ashamed of begging at the doors of householders. From the idea of the brotherhood of man follows essentially the eighth principle of sharing of man's income with one's fellow beings. "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves."²⁶ "Riches cannot be gathered without sin but these do not keep company after death."²⁷ And, it was Guru Nanak who introduced the practice of '*Langar*' and '*Pangat*' i.e eating the same food while sitting together. The inevitable inferences from the basic experience of God is Love are the ideas of the brotherhood of man, the acceptance of householder's and social responsibilities, the consequent necessity of work and production and of the fair distribution of wealth. These ideas are so logically connected that they cannot be dislinked or accepted partly. Once the love of man becomes the fundamental principle of religious life, the involvement of the spiritual person in all walks of life becomes inescapable. In fact, total responsibility towards all beings is only the other side of the coin of Love. In whatever field there is encroachment on human interests, reaction and response from the spiritual person becomes a religious duty. Otherwise the idea of the brotherhood of man becomes meaningless. That is why in the hymns of Guru Nanak, there is a bold and loud criticism of the evil practices and institutions of his day. He criticised the tyranny of the invaders and the oppression of the rulers, the corruption and cruelty of the administration and the officials, the degrading inhumanity of the caste ideology and the underlying idea of pollution, the greed and hypocrisy of Brahmans and the Muslim Mullahs, the rapacity of the rich in amassing wealth, the idleness of Yogis and mendicants, etc. All this meant only one thing, namely, that there was a right or religious way of doing things that were being misconducted, and that no walk of life was taboo for the religious man. In whatever field of life there is aggression or injustice, the religious man cannot remain neutral; he must react and do so in a righteous way. For, once the householder's life was considered to be the medium of the religious growth of man, it became natural for him to accept total moral participation and total responsibility in all fields of life. The traditional barriers created between the so-called socio-political life and religious life were deemed artificial, and were once for all broken for the religious

man. For, wherever man suffers, the religious man must go to his succour. Such was the result of the religious experience or perception of Guru Nanak. And it was he who laid the firm foundation of such a religious system and structure. Here it is necessary to understand one important point. Social or political evils can be fought and remedied only by a cohesive society, accepting social responsibilities and right goals. These cannot be removed just by individuals or by mere preaching. Guru Nanak's aim was not individual salvation, but the socio-spiritual salvation of man and his society. In his system of Bhakti, meditation on God's Name, service of man and sharing of production or wealth were all integrated and made essential, because love of God meant love and service of man in all areas of life. It is necessary to emphasize that in Sikh Bhakti the acceptance of total responsibility in all fields of life for the service of man is the inseparable counterpart of the love of God. This fundamental is the key to the understanding of Sikh Bhakti and its history during the period of Sikh Gurus. The socio-spiritual task before Guru Nanak and his successors was gigantic. A whole society had to be organised that had internally to remove the disintegrating influence of the caste ideology, and externally to fight the political oppression. Evidently, such a task could not be completed in one generation. But it was Guru Nanak who while he laid the foundations both of the system and the society, also initiated the method of appointing a successor so that in due time the society could become fully organised and mature enough to complete the socio-spiritual tasks set before it. The Gurus had first to organise a new society motivated with new values, with a keen sense of brotherhood, inspired to struggle and sacrifice, and committed to achieving new goals. It is in this light that the role of different Gurus has to be viewed. The Gurus were clearly of the "idea that specifically designated organised bands of men" should "play a creative part in the political world, destroying the established order and reconstructing society according to the Word of God."²⁸

Another logical corollary of the fundamental of love and of participation in all walks of life, including the socio-political field, is a clear rejection of the doctrine of Ahimsa by Guru Nanak. Bhagat Kabir says that the goat eats grass and is skinned, what will happen to those who eat its meat? Meat-eating and use of force are barred in all Indian systems that recommend Ahimsa. But, it was Guru Nanak who emphatically discarded

Ahimsa, thereby sanctioning the use of force in aid of righteous causes. Only that food is to be avoided as disturbs the mental and bodily tranquility. He says, "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating, they do not know what is flesh or non-flesh or what is sin or what is not sin."²⁹ In a whole hymn he exposes the cant of non-meat-eating, and the allied doctrine of Ahimsa. Evidently, a religious system that accepts socio-political responsibility must spurn the doctrine of Ahimsa, otherwise it cannot rectify or resist any wrong or injustice. In *Babar Vani*, Guru Nanak deplores the brutality of the invaders and the unpreparedness of the local rulers. He even goes to the extent of complaining to God, as the guardian of man, in allowing the weak to be oppressed by the strong. The Guru was, in fact, clearly laying one of the basic principles of his religion whereunder he not only sanctioned the use of force for righteous causes, but also prescribed that it was the duty and the responsibility of the religious man and the society he was creating to resist aggression. It was this society which was later developed by the other Gurus. And it was the Sikh society of the time of Guru Arjan that Dr. Gupta calls a state within a state. And, it was the sixth Guru who despite the contrary advice of even the most respected Sikhs like Bhai Buddha, created an armed force and the institution of Akal Takhat, the socio-political centre of the Sikhs with a distinct flag for the purpose. And again, it was Guru Hargobind who in reply to a question by Sant Ram Dass of Maharashtra explained that Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the world, and that his sword was for the protection of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant.³⁰ The point to stress is that a religious system that proceeds with the basic experience of God as Love, must as a consequence, also accept the total responsibilities of relieving all kinds of sufferings of man, and for that end, even enter the political field, and have resort to the use of force to the extent necessary. It is important to understand that Guru Nanak who complained to God for allowing the weak to be oppressed, could obviously not, as a man of God with his deep love both for man and God, shirk the logical responsibility of creating and organising a system and a society that aimed at relieving or undoing the oppression. It is in this context that we have to understand the logic of the succession of ten masters, the institutions of saint-soldier, *Miri and Piri*, combination of the empirical life and the spiritual life of man, and Harmandar Sahib

and Akal Takhat with separate flags. These were epitomised in the life of the tenth Master, and culminated in the creation of the Khalsa. To any student of the *Guru Granth* it is obvious that so far as the thesis of Sikh Bhakti is concerned it is complete in the hymns (*Bani*) of Guru Nanak. But, that thesis, in the Indian background, would have been completely misunderstood if it had not been institutionalised and implemented in the manner of its logic. Guru Nanak's spiritual thesis of love is so original and radical that to persons conditioned under quietist traditions, whether Indian, Buddhist or Christian, the Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination looks incongruous. That is why doubts about its integrity and logic were first expressed by Nath Yogis to Guru Nanak who replied that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path. Similar doubts were conveyed by the Maharashtra saint, Ram Das, to the Sixth Guru whose reply we have quoted earlier. To a similar question, the Tenth Master replied thus:

"He (Nanak) established religion in the kali age...
 Nanak assumed the body of Angad...
 Afterwards Nanak was called Amar Das,
 As one lamp is lit from another...
 And Amar Das became Ram Das,
 The pious saw this, but not the fools,
 Who thought them all distinct.

But some rare persons recognized that they were all one."³¹ As explained earlier, seen by the logic of his thesis, if Guru Gobind Singh had not appeared and not accomplished his work, Guru Nanak's thesis would appear to be inadequate, incomplete or incongruous.

In this context, it is important to state what is the goal of man in Sikh Bhakti. In the very first hymn of the *Japuji* Guru Nanak clarifies the issue or the ideal. He asks a question as to what is the way to be a true human being (*Sacbiara*) and to dispel the false wall obstructing our vision, and, then, himself replies to it by saying that the method is to live and work in accordance with the Will of God.³² The Will of God being altruistic and constructive, for the religious man the path to follow is one of virtuous deeds. Because "singing and dancing in ecstasy are no worship; love and the giving up of ego are the way to real worship."³³ The Sikh Gurus clearly envisage a path of spiritual progress and evolution for man. The Guru says, "God

created first himself, then Haumain or individuation, third multifarious entities or *Maya* and at the fourth stage the gurmukh or the true man who always lives and works truthfully."³⁴ It is this fourth stage the Guru exhorts man to achieve, that being his spiritual destiny, the Gurus say, "For several births (you) were a worm, for several births an insect, for several births a fish and animal"³⁵ "after ages you have the glory of being a man,"³⁶ "after passing through myriads of species, one is blest with the human form,"³⁷ "O man you are supreme in God's creation, now is your opportunity, you may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny,"³⁸ "You have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your opportunity to meet God."³⁹ As stated above, for the God-conscious man the ideal is not merger in God or Brahman, but a life of love and perpetual truthful activity.

This religious system may, therefore, be called Activity Bhakti, since the goal is to carry out the Attributive Will of God.

Hindu Bhakti

Bhakti in Hinduism has a chequered history covering a period of over 2,500 years. Since the Vedic system, especially in the early days of Brahamanas, was primarily ritualistic, the first system of Bhakti, Bhagavatism, arose as a non-Vedic cult.⁴⁰ At this stage, Bhakti meant only a form of adoration.⁴¹ This side-stream, combined with the ideas of reverence for Narayana, Hari and Visnu, Vedic gods, was incorporated in the system of the *Bhagavad Gita* which is an eclectic compilation.⁴² For the first time sanction was given to this system of Bhakti as an alternative means of *Moksha*. It has also been asserted that the system of the incarnation of Visnu and the acceptance of Shudras and women for Bhakti were included in Hinduism as the result of Buddhist influence.⁴³

In Bhagavatism the system of worship is generally ritualistic. Following are the modes of worship: (1) Going to the temple with mind fixed on the deity, (2) Collecting materials for worship, (3) Actual worship, (4) the muttering of Mantras and (5) Yoga or meditation. By worship in this manner for years on end, all sins are destroyed. As to the method of worship of Hari, there are six steps: (1) remembering Him, (2) the uttering of His Name, (3) salutation, (4) resorting to His feet, (5) constant worship with devotion, and (6) the surrender of the Soul.⁴⁴

It is necessary to understand that except for the purpose of Bhakti, the *Gita* gave full sanction to the caste ideology of Hinduism and accepted all its different modes of *Moksha*.⁴⁵ It is also significant that Ramanuja, the chief religious exponent of the Bhakti system, prescribed only Prapatti for the low castes. The metaphysical position in the *Bhagavad Gita* is a little puzzling as both pantheistic and dualistic views, suggesting co-eternal *Prakriti*, are indicated. During this second phase of Hindu Bhakti, whether in the *Gita* or with Ramanuja, Bhakti meant only Upasana or a system of meditation. The goal is a contemplative or meditational union with God. The idea of devotional love or personal relationship with God is simply not there. Because of its combination with other Yogic, meditational or ritualistic modes of *Moksha*, the stress is on self-surrender, self-control, contentment and non-attachment. The *Gita* involved a compromise "between the worldly life of allotted duties and the hermit's life of absolute renouncement." "On the one hand we purify our minds by non-attachment, and yet, on the other hand, we continue to perform all the ritualistic and other duties belonging to our particular caste or stage of life, i.e. the prescribed stages of four ashramas."⁴⁶ *Gita* approves the system of four castes or varnas and virtually prohibits mobility in the performance of caste duties by saying that it is more meritorious to do the duties of one's own caste, even though inefficiently, than to do even efficiently the duties of another caste.⁴⁷

It is during the second phase of Bhakti that arose the theory of the incarnation or Avatarahood which is a significant feature of Hindu Bhakti. While this theory enabled the system to own and absorb other cults and creeds by declaring their gods to be the manifestation of the Supreme God, it obviously did not make for any unified system of religious worship or doctrines.⁴⁸ In due course, the number of Avatars rose to twenty-three in the time of Bhagwat Purana. Apart from Lord Rama, man-lion, dwarf, tortoise, swan and others, gods of extremely divergent systems like Sankhya-Yoga, Jainism, and Buddhism which do not believe in a Supreme God, were also declared Avtaras. Even dualistic systems like Sankhya and Jainism were owned. Obviously, in this attempt at synthesis, the integrity of a unified theistic thought was lost, though the scriptural authority of the Vedas and the caste ideology of Hinduism were maintained as in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The position continued to be the same even in the Vashista Advaita of Ramanuja. Lord Rama was included

as an Avtara in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Next we come to the phase of Alvar saints, Bhagavat Purana and Sandilya. In this system, Bhakti becomes the sole method of *Moksha*. It involves deep emotional affection and a sense of spiritual intoxication and joy. Like Chaitanya, the devotee sings, dances and goes into ecstasy, he is no longer a person of the world. The Bhagavad Purana mentions nine modes of worship each of which could lead to *Moksha*. These are all formal without any obligation for activity.⁴⁹ The modes are like listening to the praise of God, reading of sacred books, the repeating of God's name, etc. Image worship was accepted. The role of Jivan Mukta remains other-worldly. Sandilya's definition of Bhakti runs as follows. "Bhakti is not an action (a work). It does not depend, as knowledge does, upon an effort of the will. Hence, as it is not an action, its fruit (beatitude) is endless. Every action on the other hand, ultimately perishes." "The means are knowledge, concentration, etc. The end is Bhakti." "Bhakti (or faith) is not 'sraddha' (or belief). Belief may be merely subsidiary to ceremonial works, not so faith. Belief is a preliminary or subsidiary to faith, but is not faith."⁵⁰

A chain of Alvar saints appeared in the South. Quite a number of them belonged to the lower castes. Dr. Tara Chand believes this happened as a response and reaction to Islam in India.

As to the philosophy of this Bhakti, the chief exponent is Ramanuja, though quite a number of others like Madhava and Nimbaraka, have also expounded their systems. Ramanuja says that individual souls and the insensate world are the body or attributes of Brahman. They are different but are basically one, being manifest and unmanifest forms of Brahman. The creation of Ahankara and activity are explained virtually as in Sankhya except that God guides that activity.⁵¹ Ishwara has a wonderful celestial body. Ishwara appears in 5 forms: (1) as Narayana or Para-Vasudeva, he lives, adorned with ornaments and gems, in Vaikuntha on a throne surrounded by Sesa (serpent), Garuda and other delivered souls, (2) as his four forms in the world, including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship Him, (3) as the ten Avtaras, fish, tortoise and others, (4) as present in each being even when one goes to heaven or hell; and (5) as in the idols kept in houses. Souls are of three kinds: (1) the bound ones, (2) the delivered ones and (3) the eternal souls like

Garuda.⁵² This system of Bhakti is open to only three higher castes.⁵³ Shudras can resort to Prapatti or surrender to God, after renouncing the world. For the efficacy of Bhakti, Karma Yoga and 'Jnana Yoga' are essential. The first involves the performance of all prescribed acts, rituals, sacrifices, ceremonies, pilgrimages, and the worship of idols. Jnana Yoga means the gaining of cognitive knowledge of one's separateness from *prakriti* and being an Attribute of God. Women were not accepted as Vaisnavas.

In the Padma-Purana seven other modes of worship are also suggested. They are all ritualistic and formal, e.g. (1) the imprinting of marks on the body and the forehead, (2) the repeating of Mantras, (3) the drinking of water used for washing the feet of the idol of Hari, (4) the eating of the cooked food offered to the idol, (5) the service of devotees, (6) the observing of fasts on the fixed days of the lunar month, (7) the laying of Tulsi leaves on the idol, etc.⁵⁴

Maitra who has discussed the ethics of all Hindu systems, including those of Ramanuja, Madhva and Vallabha Charaya, comes to the conclusion that a common feature of all these doctrines of the ideal life or *Moksha* is "the conception of the ideal as a negation, or at least as a transcendence, of the empirical life proper, and that this state is thus a super-moral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral ideal."⁵⁵ "It is a transcendental state of deliverance from all the struggle of life. It is generally and essentially a state of quiescence."⁵⁶

For Vallabha and Chaitanya Bhakti is the sole method of salvation. In Vallabha's systems, the modes of worship are all formal or ceremonial like singing and praising God, Arti, image worship, etc. The householder's life is accepted and the devotee visits the temple of the Guru at fixed intervals. Chaitanya's method of Bhakti consisted of fervent singing and ecstatic dancing. Chaitanya while singing would even swoon under the intensity of his emotion. Chaitanya, like Nimbarka, believes in identity with a difference between the soul and God (Bheda Abheda). The goal is the bliss of union of soul with God. Chaitanya's followers included all castes and even Muslims. But, except for Bairagis or recluses, followers of Chaitanya generally observed caste distinctions especially in the matter of cooking of meals and in mundane matters.⁵⁷ Chaitanya recommends the Madhure kind of loving devotion, as between wife and husband,

to God, this being the deepest and sweetest. Shankaradeva, a saint from Assam, however recommends the Dasya type of Bhakti, as between servant and master.

Vaisnava Bhakti has five fundamentals. Its scriptures are Vedas and Upanisads. The second fundamental is the doctrine of Avtarhood, the third fundamental is the ideology of caste and *Varan Ashram Dharma*. As to the modes of worship and Bhakti, these are all formal, ceremonial, or intensely emotional, without reference to the affairs of life. The fifth fundamental is the doctrine of Ahimsa which is accepted by all the devotees. Except in the case of Vallabha celibacy is preferred for the Bhaktas. The goal of life is a blissful union with or merger in God as an end in itself. One thing is evident that all these modes of Bhakti were so absorbing that they isolate the devotee from the world as much as was done by asceticism or monasticism and did not allow him to enter the field of social responsibility. About Shankaradeva Murthy says: "He saw his vocation only in establishing religious freedom and fellowship rather than social overhaul. To trouble about the improvement of social conditions perhaps, deemed to him as little profitable."⁵⁸

Saiva Bhakti

Though not markedly different in its ideas and goals, it would be necessary to mention also the system of Saiva Bhakti which has a longer history than Vaisnavism because Lord Siva is considered a pre-Vedic god. Svetasvatra Upanisad is probably the first Upanisad mentioning the adoration of a god who is Rudra and not Visnu. Pasupata system is the oldest Saiva system. It seeks deliverance from the misery of the world. The methods of salvation are other-worldly, yogic and even seemingly queer. Pasupata and Saiva systems both assume the separate entities of souls, though the souls are dependent on the Lord. The doctrine is a qualified spiritual monism like that of Ramanuja, in as much as Siva, in a way, manifests himself as the constituent cause of the world. In Kashmir Saivism the soul is identical with Siva, it being Siva in self-limitation. The world is not something worthwhile and is a bondage. It is monism or pantheism, nearer to Sankara in one respect, and to Ramanuja in another respect. The worldly life is an impurity. The aim is identity with or merger in Siva, and the method of release is intense meditation or contemplation.⁵⁹

So far as the element of Bhakti is concerned Southern Saivism is, like other later Hindu Bhakti systems, more concerned with a loving devotion. The system is less priest-ridden and caste-ridden. Theoretically, the system is nearer to Kashmir Saivism or Ramanuja's Vashista Advaita. Like other Saiva systems, its scriptures are the Vedas the Agamas, these being the creation of Lord Siva. There are three elements, Siva, souls and the world, but the souls and the world are dependent on God. Activity in the world creates further bondage and the aim is deliverance from it. Deliverance is through prayer and yogic meditations and by the grace of God. The method of Bhakti is four-fold. All the four stages of worship are formal and ceremonial, except that these also involve yogic concentration of mind and loving devotion to Siva. The approach is other-worldly. A Saiva saint says that there is no remedy from the disease of embodiment except by His grace.⁶⁰ The goal is blissful union with or merger of soul in the Supreme God. Self-realisation is the means of release.

All these methods of Vaisnava and Saiva Bhakti may, thus, be called Quietist Bhakti Systems.

Conclusion

We have delineated two contrasted systems of Bhakti. In Hindu Bhakti Reality, God-head or Brahman is *Sat-Chit-Anand* (Truth-Consciousness-Bliss). The goal of life is, thus, merger in or union with this Reality; it is the achievement of a state of Blissful tranquility. Logically, the methodology used is either meditational or intensely devotional. It is a quietist ideal with a quietist methodology. Hence, it is Quietist Bhakti. In the case of Sikh Bhakti, God is Love, the ideal is to be the instrument of God's Love and the methodology is remembrance of His Name (*Naam Simran*), coupled inalienably with virtuous deeds and social responsibility. It is Activity Bhakti epitomised in the empirical world in the Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination.

The two systems of Bhakti, Activity Bhakti and Quietist Bhakti, are independent and different. There is a tendency among scholars trained in quietist traditions to criticise Activist religions and even to consider the activist tendencies to be degenerate or a fall. On the other hand, scholars from the Activist systems are equally critical of the quietist systems which they even call escapist and deficient. Scholars viewing

an opposite system through the blinkers of their own culture or tradition are apt to suffer from this failing. It is on this Score that James Lewis criticises the approach of some Western scholars in their study of Sikhism : "Nonetheless, because of the resonances which the Nanak-Gobind Singh contrast elicited from the inner tensions of European Christians, trace of the degenerationist paradigm was retained in discussions, particularly academic discussions, of the development of the Sikh religion. In fact, the theme of the supposed contradiction between early and later Sikhism, often carrying with it the same undertone of moral censure that it originally carried, is repeated in Western discourse about Sikhism to this very day, and will, undoubtedly continue to be present in such discourse as long as scholars from Christian background fail to come to terms with the contradiction in their own culture."⁶¹ One major cause for these conflicting interpretations of different religions is what may be called the modem, mechanical or sociological methodology under which we seek to view different religious growths not as having separate ontological roots but as parts of a single cultural, social or evolutionary development. Such simplistic studies, apart from being academically faulty, cause confusion and conflict, because these are merely phenomenological studies of religions without understanding their ontological fundamentals, base, or contributions. Hence, our stress that different religious systems have to be understood and appreciated as independent and separate growths, these being separately revealed. That alone will make for academic health and integrity and religious understanding.

**GURU NANAK:
THE PROPHET OF A UNIQUE IDEOLOGY**

1. Introduction

In this essay we shall attempt to outline that the religion of Guru Nanak is unique in many ways. For, Guru Nanak is the first man of God to break in India the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man and to establish a clear and integral combination between the two. His was not what is termed a salvation religion; in fact, in his religion he specifically linked the spiritual salvation of man with his social salvation. That is also why in its ideology and its doctrines Sikhism is radically different from all the earlier Eastern and contemporary Indian religions. This linkage is of immense and revolutionary importance which many students of religion have failed to grasp. In this context, we shall explain (1) what is the spiritual experience of the Gurus and what is the kind of reality of God Guru Nanak proclaims, (2) what is unique about the spiritual system of Guru Nanak and what radical departures he makes from the other spiritual systems that had arisen in India, (3) why Guru Nanak chose the householder's life to be the forum of spiritual growth and what are its logical implications, (4) why Guru Nanak started the system of succession, why the system of succession was continued by the fifth Guru even after the Sikh scripture had been compiled and authenticated by him and why the tenth Guru stopped the institution of succession, and (5) why persons belonging to the pacifist religions find it difficult to understand the spiritual system and the historical role of the Sikh Gurus. For this reason, we shall state, as briefly as Possible, only those aspects of Guru Nanak's system that are strictly relevant to our present discussion.

2. Idea of God and Spiritual Experience

Guru Nanak is a monotheist; but to say that is to say very little about him because monotheism has a number of varieties, and the classification of his system merely as monotheism would only confuse the issues. First, it is necessary to know what is the nature of the spiritual experience of the Gurus. It is because of a significant variation in this religious experience that doctrinal changes arise. For the Gurus "God is All Love and the rest He is ineffable."¹ In other mystic systems as detailed by Stace, this religious experience is in the nature of blessedness, peace, holiness, universal-consciousness, etc.² In the Hindu systems too it is "Truth, Consciousness and Bliss", (*Sat Chit Anand*). Secondly, it is important to know what is the kind of God Guru Nanak envisages and how he has tried to define his system and more especially to live it and carry out his mission. In fact, it is the lives of Guru Nanak and other Gurus that explain and illustrate the logic of his system, namely, Sikhism. For Guru Nanak, God is both Transcendent and Immanent. "He that permeates all hearts is transcendent too."³ He mentions numerous aspects of God but in this essay we shall primarily be concerned with the Attributive, the Loving and the Creative aspects of God whom he calls the Ocean of virtues, Creative, Benevolent and Gracious. "In the realm of truth is the Sole One, Ever Creative, keeping a Benevolent and Gracious eye on the universe."⁴ This perception of the Guru about God has fundamental implications. Let us just mention five of them. The first inference is that the universe is real and meaningful. For, attributes of God could be expressed only in a real world. Because when God was by Himself the question of the expression of love and other attributes of God could not arise. Thus, this description of God gives both authenticity and spiritual significance to the world of man and his life. This inference is entirely opposed to the earlier Buddhist approach which believes the world to be a place of suffering, involving consequential withdrawal from it to a monastic life. Even the Vedantic approach considers the world to be *Mithya* and world activity to be just illusory. In order to illustrate this point and the contrast between the approach of Sankara and that of Guru Nanak, let us just quote them. Guru Nanak sings:

"The sun and moon, O Lord, are Thy lamps; the firmament Thy

salver, the orbs of the stars the pearls encased in it.

The perfume of the sandal is Thine incense, the wind is Thy fan, all the forests are Thy flowers, O Lord of light, what worship is this, O Thou, Destroyer of birth?

Unbeaten strains of ecstasy are the trumpets of Thy worship.

Thou has a thousand eyes and yet not one eye;

Thou has a thousand forms and yet not one form;

Thou has a thousand stainless feet and yet not one foot;

Thou has a thousand organs of smell and yet not one organ.

I am fascinated by this play of Thine.

The light which is in everything is Thine, O Lord of light.

From its brilliance everything is brilliant;

By the Guru's teaching the light becometh manifest.

What pleaseth Thee is the real worship.

O God, my mind is fascinated with Thy lotus feet as the bumble-bee with the flower; night and day I thirst for them. Give the water of Thy favour to the Sarang (bird) Nanak, so that he may dwell in Thy name."

Sankara writes

"I am not a combination of the five perishable elements. I am neither body, the senses, nor what is in the body (antar-anga: i.e., the mind). I am not the ego-function; I am not the group of the vital breath-forces; I am not intuitive intelligence (buddhi). Far from wife and son am I, far from land and wealth and other notions of that kind. I am the witness, the Eternal, the Inner Self, the Blissful One (sivo-ham; suggesting also, 'I am Siva')."

"Owing to ignorance of the rope, the rope appears to be a snake; owing to ignorance of the Self the transient state arises of the individualized, limited, phenomenal aspect of the Self. The rope becomes a rope when the false impression disappears because of the statement of some credible person; because of the statement of my teacher I am not an individual life-monad (jivo-naham). I am the Blissful One (sivo-ham).

"I am not the born; how can there be either birth or death for me ?

"I am not the vital air; how can there be either hunger or thirst for me ?

"I am not the mind, the organ of thought and feeling; how can there be either sorrow or delusion for me ?

"I am not the doer; how can there be either bondage or release for me ?

"I am neither male nor female, nor am I sexless. I am the Peaceful One, whose form is self-effulgent, powerful radiance. I am neither a child, a Young man, nor an ancient; nor am I of any caste. I do not belong to one of the four life-stages. I am the Blessed-Peaceful One, who is the only Cause of the origin and dissolution of the world."

While Guru Nanak is bewitched by the beauty of His creation and sees in the panorama of nature a lovely scene of the worshipful adoration of the Lord, Sankara in his hymn rejects the reality of the world and treats himself as the sole Reality. Zimmer feels that "Such holy megalomania goes past the bounds

of sense. With Sankara, the grandeur of the supreme human experience becomes intellectualised and reveals its inhuman sterility."⁵

According to the Guru the world is not only real but it is a meaningful place where alone God's Creative and Attributive Will works. Secondly, and this is very important, it gives a clear direction as to the way the Attributive Will of God works. It sets the goal for man. Thirdly, God being riches to the poor, milk to the - child and eyes to the blind,⁶ the seeker has to follow the ethical path of values and virtues laid down by God and the Guru. This lays down the methodology and ethics for the spiritual path. Fourthly, it shows how intimate is God's interest in the world and its progress. Not only is God the sustainer of life, but He also nurtures it with a loving care. God is described as the Enlightener or Guru. This gives great hope and confidence to man in his spiritual endeavours. Fifthly it lends a clear spiritual character to the ethical and moral life of man. Thus, in Sikhism moral life by itself gains spiritual colour and character. Because, the world being a creation of God, and God being the Ocean of virtues, moral life is in line with the Attributive Will of God. In the *Japuji*, the Guru clearly lays down that the ideal life for man or the *Sachara* is to move and work in accordance with the Will of God.⁷ Thus, in Sikhism the spiritual life and the empirical life are clearly and closely linked. The dichotomy between these two kinds of lives as it exists in most other traditions is emphatically removed. We shall amplify this point later.

In short, the attributive aspect of God logically generates an attitude of life-affirmation in the religious man. We shall now explain the major implications of this approach and see how widely contrasted these are with the features of other Indian religions.

3. The Path of Love

A revolutionary system in which the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man was emphatically broken.

It was Guru Nanak who laid and led the path of universal love and the emancipation of man without distinction of caste and creed. The call for this mission was given by him in unambiguous terms. "If you want to tread the path of love, come

forward with your head on your palm."⁸ And his mission, as mentioned earlier, was to ferry men across the turbulent sea of life. It is clear that in Guru Nanak's mission of love, two objectives became logically uppermost and these he emphasized unambiguously in his *Bani*, namely, that he was to establish equality and fraternity among men, and that it was the duty and responsibility of the religious man and the religious society he was creating to resist oppression and safeguard human rights and values. It is in this context that the importance of Guru Nanak's criticism of the doctrine of Ahimsa should be understood. "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating, they do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or what is sin and what is not sin."⁹ "Life he said was in every grain of corn or seed."¹⁰ Again, it is in this background that we have to charter the course of Sikh history from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. After Guru Nanak, the period of the next three Gurus relates mainly to the creation, expansion, and organisation of a cohesive society or *Panth* Guru Nanak had started. The next major landmark was the time of the fifth Guru, who not only compiled the scripture of the new society, thereby weaning it away from all earlier beliefs, sought confrontation with the empire and not only made the supreme sacrifice of his life and set the tradition of martyrdom but also created in his life time what Dr. Gupta calls "a state within a State." No wonder emperor Jahangir took note of this mounting challenge and attacked the Sikh society. For him the movement was of such importance and potentialities that he not only took personal note of it and ordered it to be demolished, but also found this event to be of such great socio-political significance as to be mentioned in his autobiography.¹¹

Guru Nanak brought about a complete reversal of the socio-religious life and values of his time. Against life negation and withdrawal from life, he recommended life-affirmation and complete social participation. Against monasticism and asceticism, he accepted a householder's life and full social responsibility. Against celibacy and a woman being sin-born, he gave religious sanctity to married life and equality to women. Against the rigidity of the *Varan Ashram Dharma* and the institution of caste and pollution, he, from the very first day of his mission, accepted and practised social equality and the brotherhood of man. This act of Guru Nanak after his

enlightenment and his first words that "there is no Hindu nor Muslim" are extremely meaningful. At least, two points stand emphasized. First, that in his thesis and mission deed was of primary importance; and, second, that human equality and consequent social responsibility were to constitute the bedrock of his mission. Against the world being *Mithya* and a suffering, he found it to be real, beautiful and the realm for the spiritual growth of man. Against Tapas, ritualism and meditation alone, he accepted the primacy of work and one's religious assessment being based purely on man's deeds, i.e moral deeds, in this world. Asceticism and Ahimsa are the fundamental features of all Indian religions. But, Guru Nanak rejected both of these doctrines. We do not think there were any traces of these elements of his system in the earlier traditions. And, considering the times in which he was born, nothing could be more radical or revolutionary. Because it is one of the few systems of the world in which the dichotomy between the spiritual life of the soul and the temporal life of the body has been broken and an inalienable link between the two established. In order to distinguish such a system from a quietist religion, Hocking and Iqbal call it a Prophetic Religion. Otto calls such a system Activity Religion as distinguished from the Vedantic system of Sankara. Here the goal is to work in all walks of life as the instrument of God's Attributive Will and not to withdraw or isolate oneself from the world in order to merge in The Absolute, Void, or Godhead, or to achieve a blissful and tranquil union with God as an end in itself. For Plotinus or Sankara, after the final spiritual achievement, activity is a fall. Even in Mahayana Buddhism after Nirvana there is no return, much less moral activity or expression of compassion which ends at the penultimate stage of Ahrat. But, for the *Sachiara* or the superman, even after being in tune with God, it is essential to carry out His Attributive Will. In fact, he prays not for Moksha but "for millions of hands to serve Him."¹²

4. Householder's life to be the forum of spiritual growth

In Guru Nanak's system, thus, asceticism, renunciation and withdrawal from life were completely rejected. Not only Guru Nanak, but all the Gurus, except Guru Harikrishan who died at an early age, were married householders. It is significant that after return from his missionary tours, Guru Nanak settled at

Kartarpur as a peasant, sent for his wife, worked and preached there to the end of his days. Again, when he appointed Guru Angad to be his successor, he advised him to send for the members of his family and settle at Khadur Sahib and carry out the mission entrusted to him. In fact, when Guru Nanak later visited him and found him living a somewhat quietist life, he advised him to be active as he had to organise a community and fulfil the mission entrusted to him.¹³ It was Guru Nanak who stated that "his mission was, with the help of other God-conscious persons to ferry everyone across the sea of life"¹⁴ i.e. his aim was social salvation of the society as a whole and not the individual salvation of a few or a group only. It is in this light that we have to understand why the second and third Gurus, while they included anyone in their society, without distinction of class and caste, excluded recluses (ascetic celibates) from being members of the Sikh society, and that is also why the Guru condemned the Yogis for being idlers and their not being ashamed of begging for alms at the very doors of the householders whose life they spurned.¹⁵ In fact, the Guru envisaged all problems of life to be religious problems to be solved in a righteous or truthful way. That is also why Guru Nanak says, "Truth is the highest of all but higher still is truthful living,"¹⁶ and that is also why in Guru Nanak's system moral life is of the highest significance. For, he lays down that all assessment of man will be based on his deeds in this world and, it is by our deeds that we become near or away from God.¹⁷ All these are, indeed, corollaries of the world-view of "despise not the world, it being the creation of God."¹⁸

It is in this context that we should understand why it is Guru Nanak who not only identified and commented upon all the social and political problems of his times but also laid down the principles of his ideology and the foundations of the Sikh society that was created to solve those problems.

We indicate here his comments and views on some of the major social issues of his times. Allied with the issue of life affirmation is the matter of the status of women in the society. Before we record Guru Nanak's view on the subject, it would be relevant to state the position of women in the then Contemporary world. The Digambara Jains believed that a woman could not attain Moksha or salvation and that she must first be incarnated as a male before she could reach Kavalīya.¹⁹

Buddha very reluctantly agreed to enrol women as Bhikshus. Even after entry in the Bhikshu order, her status remained second rate. The woman Bhikshu even if she were an old entrant in the Bhikshu order was considered junior to a male Bhikshu who joined the order later than she had done.²⁰ The male monk was not supposed to rescue a drowning woman even if she were his own mother.²¹ In the caste order of the Brahmans, a woman had been classed with the *Shudras*. For Sankara woman is the gateway to hell.²² Even in the liberal Vaishnav order of Ramanuja or Shankradeva of Assam, women were not accepted as Vaishnavas. She was deemed to be basically a temptress or sin born. Shankradeva, a liberal saint of the later Bhakti movement, felt that "of all the terrible aspirations of the world, a woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the heart of celebrated sages. Her sight destroys, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of women."²³ Nathism was another religious cult when Guru Nanak appeared on the religious scene. "A Nath had to take a vow not to marry and they did not even sit or dine with Nath women."²⁴ It is also significant to record that the attitude of a saint like Bhagat Kabir towards women has been considered to be mesogynist.²⁵ Even Christian missionaries had extended their organisation to India in the time of Guru Nanak. In Catholic Christianity women have not been ordained as priests even upto today. It was in this climate that Guru Nanak spoke "why call woman impure when without woman there would be none."²⁶ The contrasted position of women in the Sikh society was such that later when the third Guru created districts of religious administration, women were appointed to head some of them.²⁷

Another major problem of the times was the social ideology of caste which had a triple limitation. First, it was basically hierarchical. Men were deemed unequal by birth, the Brahman caste being at the top of the ladder and the *Shudras* being at the bottom of it. Apart from that, social intercourse between the *Shudra* castes and the upper three castes was virtually barred. In fact, the institutions of untouchability and pollution were a fact of the social life of the times. Thirdly, apart from the fact that a person could take up only the profession of his caste or sub-caste, a change of profession was religiously barred. The *Bhagavad Gita* clearly laid down that it was religiously, more meritorious to do, even inefficiently, the duties of one's own

caste or ancestral profession than to do efficiently the duties of another caste or profession.²⁸ In this background it is extremely significant that Guru Nanak's first statement after his enlightenment was that there was no Hindu or Musalman, meaning thereby that he saw only man everywhere, the distinction of caste and inequality being irreligious and an impediment in the path of spirituality. When Guru Nanak started his missionary tours, his sole companion was a low caste Muslim. It was, thus, a categoric declaration that in his society or system no one who had any belief in caste prejudices or discriminations could have any place. And when he returned from his tours he established the institutions of *Langar*, *Sangat* and *Pangat* which meant that his disciples not only mixed and worked together, but also sat, and ate together without distinctions of caste i.e. had a kitchen for having common and free meals. In fact, even during his tours he had organised local *Sangats* (societies) on the above lines. The record of Bhai Gurdas about the caste constitution of the Sikhs shows that all kinds of castes, including low castes were members of the Sikh societies of those times. In the conditions of that period, nothing could be more revolutionary than to establish the brotherhood of man and to say that the Vedas had wrongly laid down the distinction of caste."²⁹

An important corollary of the approach of life-affirmation is the institution of work. It is very significant to find that Guru Nanak, after his return from his missionary tours, regularly worked as a peasant. And this practice of earning one's livelihood was followed by his successors as well. The Guru says, "The person incapable of earning his living gets his ears split and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint. Do not look up to him, nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earning with others."³⁰ A marked work-ethics in the Sikh society is the direct result of the teachings of and the precedents set by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus. For no society can thrive and flourish for long in health unless the dignity and necessity of work are accepted as a virtue and as a part of one's socio-religious responsibility. Consequently, there has, from the very start, been a clear rejection of the institutions of monasticism, asceticism, renunciation and other worldliness.

Lastly, we mention his criticism of the rulers and the

invaders of the time. In the *Babar Vani*, he notably condemns the oppression of the invaders and also the moral unpreparedness of the local rulers. It is important to understand that this was not just idle criticism; the Guru was very serious and meaningful about it. In his verses he even complains to God, as the Master of the human flock, for not protecting the weak and allowing them to be trampled upon by the strong.³¹ This important criticism displays a fundamental feature of his spiritual thesis. It is, indeed, unfortunate that many of the scholars, and more especially those committed to pacifist doctrines, have completely missed the basic significance of this criticism by Guru Nanak. For when, he criticises even God for allowing oppression of the weak to take place, how could he preclude the god-man from accepting the responsibility of resisting or undoing oppression or encroachment on the basic human rights of man. Guru Nanak's criticism, as we have seen, is loud and significant. It is not an empty rhetoric. Its meaning is clear. Since God is the 'Destroyer of the oppressor or the evil,' 'Slayer of the enemy,'³² and 'Helper of the Helpless', this criticism naturally casts a clear responsibility on the god-man with an attitude of life-affirmation to create the wherewithal for resistance. In this connection the clarification given (in reply to a question by Sant Ram Das of Maharashtra) by the Sixth Guru that Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the worldly life as such, and that his sword was for the destruction of the oppressor and the defence of the weak, is very significant and revealing of Guru Nanak's system and mission.³³ Further, it is important to understand that the doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri* is the natural and inevitable corollary of the path of love and the service of man, of the rejection of asceticism and monasticism, of the acceptance of the householder's life, and of securing justice, equality and freedom for all men. For once the householder's life becomes the forum of spiritual growth and activity, the man of religion has to accept total responsibility for repelling all attacks on the moral life and interests of man, from whatever quarters, whether social or political, those should emanate. It is for this reason that Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was considered by the state to be organising a rebellion against the Empire, spurned the offer of the Emperor that if he gave up his political activities and confined to only religious preachings, he would get imperial grants.³⁴

5. *The institution of succession and Ten Masters*

This sense of social responsibility in the god-man clearly involves that he has to create institutions and a society with which he could, to an extent, solve the problems of oppression, aggression, discrimination, and conflict. The god-man does no miracles, but, as the instrument of God, he is obliged to create the necessary means and institutions for resisting political and social oppression and social or caste discrimination. But, socio-political oppression and injustice can be countered only by a committed and motivated society and not just by individuals, nor by mere preachings. Accordingly, new institutions had to be created and faulty institutions had to be supplanted. And, obviously, this great task could not be accomplished in one generation. A society with new motivations and ideals, and new cultural patterns, had to be created, wholly divorced from the hierarchical and the divisive caste society of the times. It is in the above context that we have to understand Guru Nanak's organisation of Sikh *Sangats* at all the places he visited and the appointment of a successor who was given a clear direction not to be a quietist but to organise a *Panth* or a society with the mission as mentioned above. An important feature of Guru Nanak's mission is the appointment of a successor and the line of Ten Masters. If it were a question merely of communication of his spiritual thesis, the *Bani* of Guru Nanak completely embodied the same and no new fundamental was added to it in the *Bani* of the subsequent Gurus. Again, if it were merely the question of personal or individual salvation, or of creating a comprehensive scripture, the role of the last five Gurus cannot be understood. Because so far as the scripture was concerned, the same had been compiled and created by the fifth Guru. The entire objective of his mission becomes clear only if one accepts that Guru Nanak's ideal was equally the social salvation of man and the creation of a God-oriented society that was to resist and combat the evils he had enumerated. That society had to seek to solve the social problems he had identified in his *Bani*. In fact, Guru Nanak's mission would have been unfulfilled, if he had not created the institution of succession in order to create and organise a society, or if the fifth Guru had stopped the succession after the compilation of the *Adi Granth*. For, without the appearance of the Tenth Master and the creation of the Khalsa, Guru Nanak's mission would have remained incomplete.

Sainapat clearly records that the creation of the Khalsa was an important goal of the Guru which was revealed on the Baisakhi day of 1699 A.D.³⁵ It is only in the context of his socio-religious ideals that the role of each of the subsequent Gurus, particularly that of the Tenth Master to create the Khalsa *Panth* and stop the line of further Gurus, becomes clear. The emphatic point that emerges is that for Guru Nanak's religious thesis the creation of a *Panth* or a society motivated with Guru's religious ideals was essential. In pursuance of this mission the institution of succession and the logically integrated work of the nine succeeding masters culminating in the final 'creation of the Khalsa are parts of a clearly directed historical process. This is also evident from the doctrine of five freedoms (five Nash) gained by the Sikh when he was initiated into the Khalsa and given Amrit (baptised). Guru Gobind Singh clearly stressed the radical departure Guru Nanak's system had made from the earlier religious systems. The five freedoms were freedom from all the earlier religious traditions or systems, freedom from the shackles of the earlier practices and deeds, freedom from the influence of caste or family lineage, freedom from the stigma attached to any profession or the compulsion to follow a hereditary calling, and freedom from any earlier inhibition, prejudices or rituals.³⁶ The Amrit ceremony prominently signified a clear break with the earlier religious systems, customs or practices. Since human prejudices, conditionings, and fixations die hard, the new religious and cultural orientation of an entire society had to take a long time, especially when in most of its religious principles and doctrines it had completely deviated from the path of the traditional systems.

Here it is necessary to mention the important episode of the first Baisakhi day (1699 A.D.). After Guru Gobind Singh selected the Five Piaras (The beloved ones), baptised them, Le., performed the Amrit ceremony, and created the Khalsa, he requested and insisted that the five baptised Sikh, the select leaders of the Khalsa *Panth*, should formally baptise the Tenth Master as a Singh. This event is in many ways of a crucial and revealing significance. It happened when the sons of the Guru were still alive. It indicates as recorded by Sainapat, that the event epitomised the culminating act in the mission of Guru Nanak, that the socio-religious Sikh society had become mature enough to carry forward the mission of the Gurus now entrusted to them, that the line of personal Gurus to guide the Sikhs

would end as no longer necessary, and that the Sikh society would be able to play its historical role. The lessons of this episode are too evident to be missed. Guru Nanak proclaimed that he had been charged with a mission. His spiritual thesis stands embodied in the authenticated scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, the doctrinal guide. The lives of the ten Gurus amply and completely illustrate how the spiritual thesis had to be implemented. Henceforward the Tenth Master closed the earlier chapter and placed the responsibility of future action squarely on the shoulders of the Khalsa, the 'Guru Panth'. 'Shabad' or *Guru Granth* became the scripture, or the thesis, and the Khalsa, the society created by the Guru, became the instrument.

In the light of the mission of Guru Nanak let us now see the role played by his society in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In its internal constitution and social intercourses and mobility, it was casteless, with complete fraternity amongst its members. Without a deep cohesion and commitment to its mission, it could never challenge the empire which was out to destroy its root and branch and had placed a price on the head of every Sikh. Significantly, it was a revolutionary religious society, constituted of a committed people, and led by persons who in the Brahmanical society were considered to be the lowest. Rangrettas, Kalals, *Shudras* were its generals and leaders. The marvel of this achievement can be gauged by the fact that in the Indian society in 1947, after India attained Independence, the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Ministers of practically all the States belonged to the Brahman class. Even in the French Revolution which took place half a century later, the leadership of the revolutionary movement was always with the middle class and not with the peasants or the fourth estate.

Externally, the achievement of the society was the Uprooting of the Mughal empire in the north-western India. What we wish to emphasize is the evident relation between the Criticism by Guru Nanak in his Babar Vani and the achievements of his society in securing complete freedom not only from the Mughal yoke but once for all from the march of Invading hordes that plagued the country for almost a thousand Years. This explains the dictum that the steel of the sword of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa was created and welded by Guru Nanak.

Basically, Guru Nanak was not only the prophet of the individual or personal salvation of man, but in his religious system the personal salvation of man and the social salvation of the community of men were intimately and inalienably linked. It is true, that as in the case of Neo-Platonism and Sufism, salvation religions and monasticism arise when cultures are in decay and weary, and men of religion, finding the challenges of life and society to be too great to deal with, seek refuge in renunciation, asceticism, stoicism, and Ahimsa. In fact, all such religious movements involve, by and large, withdrawal from life. But, on the other hand, a religion like that of Guru Nanak distinctly aims at the social salvation of man by the creation of new institutions and culture. A typical instance of the former is Neo-Platonism that arose when Greek culture and character were at its lowest ebb. As against it, we have referred to the system of Guru Nanak and the role of a society that brought about social freedom and salvation of man in north-western India. It is, thus, a religion that seeks to break the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is in this light that we have to understand the natural and inevitable combination between the thesis of Guru Nanak and the role of the Tenth Master in the creation of the Khalsa and its historical operation and achievements.

Even today all misinterpretations of the Sikh religion and its history are partly due to the failure to understand the significance of the institution of succession of the Ten Masters, the creation of the Khalsa, and closing the line of succession by entrusting the Guruship to the *Guru Granth*. The need and the uniqueness of this institution become glaringly clear when the ideology and the mission of Guru Nanak are properly understood as laid down in his Bani. For that matter any interpretation of his thesis which fails to grasp these basic points is just naive.

6. A Problem of Understanding

It is Guru Nanak's radical break with all the earlier religious systems in India that has caused, among votaries of other religious or cultural systems, a problem of understanding Sikhism. Persons conditioned by quietist or pacifist traditions or thinking find it hard to grasp the inalienable unity of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination. This lack of

understanding his system occurred first with the Nath Yogis who finding him in a householder's garb asked him why he was pouring acid into the pure milk of spirituality by leading an ordinary householder's life. The Guru's reply to the Naths was that it was they who did not understand even the elementaries of the spiritual life³⁷ because the Guru had in his hymns, unambiguously condemned withdrawal from life, asceticism and other-worldliness. The same problem occurred with Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra when he found Guru Hargobind riding a horse fully armed. He questioned him by saying that being a successor of Guru Nanak how he reconciled his military attire and role with the piety and saintliness of Guru Nanak. The Guru's reply was clear and categorical. 'Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the world; my sword is for the defence of the weak and the destruction of the tyrant.' In equally emphatic words Dasam Granth repeated the same concept:

"He (Nanak) established religion in the Kali age...

Nanak assumed the body of Angad...

Afterwards Nanak was called Amar Das,

As one lamp is lit from another...

And Amar Das became Ram Das,

The pious saw this, but not the fools,

Who thought them all distinct.

But some rare persons recognized that they were all one."³⁸

Thus, the Gurus themselves have clarified and stressed the radical character and the unity of the Sikh thought and doctrines when some religious men of their times, because of their own education under earlier religions, failed to grasp the integrity of Sikhism. The difficulty of rising above the conditioning of one's own training and tradition is so great that even a historian like Toynbee, with a pacifist Christian background, fails to understand the philosophy of Islam and attacks the role of prophet Mohammad for his politico-military activities. Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Jadu Nath Sarkar have violently criticized Guru Gobind Singh for his militancy and wars with the Mughal Empire. In contrast Pir Budhu Shah, a Muslim saint, was so bewitched and inspired by the spiritual stature of Guru Gobind Singh that he not only joined and aided his struggles but two of his sons also lost their lives while fighting in the forces of the Guru. History hardly records the like instance

of a saint sacrificing the lives of his sons for the cause of a person of an opposing faith especially when his co-religionist should be heading the Empire of the day. For Pir Budhu Shah, it was the cause of God that the Guru was fighting for. This unparalleled event that speaks volumes for the spiritual height of the Tenth Master, the devotees of pacifist or salvation religions are unable to understand, much less appreciate. Again it is a Muslim theologian and philosopher, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, who in the entire panorama of Indian history finds only two tall spiritual personalities, namely, Gautam Buddha and Guru Nanak who have enriched Indian religious thought and life with their light, vision, and wisdom. He says:

"The nation paid no heed to the message of Gautam;
It failed to appreciate the value of its resplendent jewel,
Ah ! the ill-fated remained deaf to the Voice of Truth.
The tree is unaware of the sweetness of its own fruit;
He revealed to man the secret of life;
But, India remained intoxicated with its speculations in philosophy;
For, it was not a society the light of truth could illuminate;
God's mercy rained, but the land was barren;
Ah ! for the *Sudra*, Hindustan is the house of sorrow,
For its heart is devoid of the sap of compassion.

The Brahman is still intoxicated with the wine of his ritualistic injunctions. The flame of Gautam is alight but in alien societies.

After ages this house of false gods was illumined again;
And, the light of God (Ibrahim) again radiated in the house of man (Azhar);
Then, arose in Punjab the call for the Oneness of spirit (Tauheed).
And, the ideal man wakened India from its world of dreams."³⁹

James Lewis has also recorded the problem of Western scholars in viewing Sikhism in its proper perspective and light. He writes: "Nevertheless because of the resonances which the Nanak-Gobind Singh contrast elicited from the inner tensions of European Christians, trace of the degenerationist paradigm was retained in discussions, particularly academic discussions, of the development of the Sikh religion. In fact, the theme of supposed contradiction between the early and later Sikhism, often carrying with it the same undertone of moral censure that it originally carried, is repeated in western discourse about Sikhism to this very day, and will, undoubtedly continue to be present in such discourse as long as scholars from Christian background fail to come to terms with the contradiction in their own culture."⁴⁰

A question arises why it is that neither Indian nor Western scholars are able to understand the philosophy of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh combination and its integrated unity and why only Muslim scholars and saints appreciate it. The reasons are obvious but doctrinal. In the Middle Eastern and the Western religions and culture, it is only Prophet Muhammad who created a clear link between the spiritual and the empirical life of man. In the East it was only the Sikh Gurus who brought about this inalienable combination and did so despite the entire Indian tradition having been ascetic, monastic, other-worldly, pacifist or caste ridden. Both these religions as a necessary corollary of their thesis accept the use of force for a righteous public cause where other means fail to redress the wrong. For the Gurus, reason and force are both neutral tools of man. They have both been used and more often abused by him. But no life is possible without their discreet use for the good of the society. It is no accident that the story of Abu Ben Adam suggesting that those who love man are more dear to God than those who love Him is a product of the Muslim religious culture. The same idea is emphasized by Guru Nanak when he says that "Truth is the Highest, but higher still is truthful conduct or living." The lesson of the parable of Abu Ben Adam and of Guru Nanak's basic statement quoted above is the same, namely, the religious primacy of the goal of service of man. And, this goal can materialize only if the spiritual level of man is raised and strengthened by the divine sap of God-consciousness, and his egoism is increasingly subdued or curbed in the socio-political life.

7. Sikhism and Modernity

A question arises how far is the system of Guru Nanak relevant to the problems of modern man? Scientism, evolutionism and materialism are the religions of the modern man. During the days of scientific euphoria in the second part of the 19th century and before the First World War, it was felt that the scientific outlook and progress would not only relieve man of his religious opiates and his sense of insecurity but these would also lead him to a future of hope and happiness. But the present day realities are far different, and even dismal, both in relation to his external and his internal environments. As to the external security and peace, the position is that apart from having two major world wars in the first half of this century we

have, a decade before the closing of the century, fought over 50 bloody wars. In fact, man has killed, in the wars of the 20th century, more human beings than he did the world over in the earlier centuries. All this, and the colossal expenditure of about 1,000 billion dollars on armament each year, have, far from diminishing the danger of another war and increasing his sense of security, only added to his fears of the dreaded danger of a nuclear holocaust that might involve almost the death of life on this planet. The prospects of such an eventuality are so haunting that it has not only contributed to mental instability of the youth and to their lack of commitment or zest, but it has also given to them a feeling of the very meaninglessness of life, leading in consequence to the erosion of values and to seeking satiation of the baser instincts of man. No wonder a modern scholar, writing about this approach to life that science and our culture have adopted says, "This philosophy can lead to dead-end, the annihilation of mythology, religion, all value systems, all hope." On the moral side all values have been dubbed as a mere defence mechanism or a reaction formation which appear, they say, in human culture as the result of the impact of the environment on the psyche of man. All this has further led to unbridled materialism and individualism and a serious questioning of the old value systems. For, we are told that all evolution and progress are due to a keen struggle of existence, involving the survival of the fittest. The result is a battered family system, a high rate of divorces, a rising number of mentally disturbed and insecure children, mutilated, lopsided and dwarfed personalities, and a mounting rate of drug-addiction and alcoholism. True, science has given us an amazingly equipped vehicle to drive. But, the tragedy is that the ape in man still continues to occupy the driver's seat.

It is in this context that, we believe, Guru Nanak's message is very relevant. For, he emphasizes that the problems of conflict and war, insecurity and frustration, and poverty and disease cannot be solved till man sheds his ego-centrism. Man, the Guru says, has both the opportunity and the destiny to be a superman i.e., to become God-centred instead of being ego-centred. His progress does not depend on the survival of a chance mutation but in his following the path of altruism; for, God's Will is altruistic. Instead of raising the dark spectacle of purposelessness and pessimism for the future of man, the Guru's message is of hope and meaningfulness. It is a message for God-

consciousness, and for belief in both the transcendence and the immanence of God. The fundamental principle of Guru Nanak's religion is the establishment of a spiritual link between the individual salvation and the social salvation of man, and to emphasize that there can be no social salvation of man till his spiritual level is raised, and that there can be no spiritual salvation of man till it is integrated with his social salvation or till it is reflected in man's social field. Progress in the two fields is inseparable and mutually dependent or connected.

8. Conclusion

The conclusion from our discussion is obvious. In the Indian and the Eastern context the thesis of an inalienable combination between the spiritual life of man and his empirical life was first enunciated, proclaimed and established by Guru Nanak. It is also equally evident that there was nothing in the Indian historical context and the environmental forces that could give rise to such a thesis. This gift to both the prophets, Nanak and Mohammad, was God given. Hence the problem of some pacifists, materialists and pseudo-scientific scholars to understand the world-view of Sikhism. Because the Gurus believe not only in the spiritual dimension of Reality but also that the best periods of human history are those when the spiritual and the empirical or rational dimensions of Reality are combined to lift man to new heights. Collingwood stresses the point aptly, "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as reaching God and of God's thought as reaching me; an, indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God and an act of God's by which he establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion, or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of the religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connexion with it and with each other in it."⁴¹ In Sikhism the ideal is the kingdom of God not in heaven but on earth, and in the creation of it man has to be the humble instrument of God. The Gurus repeatedly address man to give up his egocentric activities and

rise to be a superman. "Among eighty-four lac of species, man is assigned the supreme position, whosoever misses the opportunity suffers the pain of transmigration."⁴² "You have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your opportunity to meet God."⁴³ And the role of the superman or *Gurmukh* is to follow the path the Gurus treaded and led. For the seeker the path is to shed egoism by the practice of love and virtues and humbly to seek the grace of God, to gain the perception of God-consciousness in order to be the instrument of God's Attributive Will. It is also important to understand that Sikhism is universal in its character and distinctly co-operative in its approach to other religions for the spiritio-social progress of man.



SIKH RELIGION AND POLITICS

1. Introductory

The basic question in any world-view is whether or not it assumes the existence of a Spiritual Reality; and if the answer to this first question is in the affirmative, the next issue is what is the relation of the Spiritual Reality to the empirical life of man. Since replies to these questions will mostly be theological or ontological in nature, we shall seek in this paper to state the views of the Gurus as explained in the *Guru Granth* and as exemplified in their lives.

2. Sikh Thesis

The rationale of every religious system follows the kind of spiritual reality the author envisages. For the Guru, 'God is All Love, rest He is ineffable.'¹ And, God's love can be expressed only in a real world; besides, Love is both dynamic and the mother of all values and virtues. In the very opening line of the *japuji*, God is called, 'The Creative Being', and further He is described as 'Ever Creative, watching His Creation with a Gracious Eye.'² 'The Guru calls the world real and, 'The place for the practice of righteousness.'³ God is the 'Ocean of values and virtues'; 'Eyes to the blind, milk to the child and riches to the poor.'⁴ The Guru, thus, emphasizes four things. First, the world is real and meaningful, being the place for the practice of virtues. Second, God too is deeply interested in it. For, He not only looks after it with benevolence, but also expresses His Love and Attributes in this world. Third, this gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man. That is why Guru Nanak lays down for the seeker the goal of 'carrying out the will of God's. God's will being altruistic and the fount of all values, the Guru further emphasizes this creative or activity aspect of his system when he

says, 'Higher than everything is Truth, but higher still is truthful living.'¹⁶ It is in this context that we understand Guru Nanak's call to the seeker, 'If you want to play the game of love, come with your head on your palm.'¹⁷ Guru Nanak prescribes a methodology of deeds when He says 'that it is by our deeds that we are assessed in His Court.'¹⁸ And, 'it is by our deeds that we became near or away from God.'¹⁹ The above leads to the fourth principle, the most significant one, that there is an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. These four fundamentals form the very base of Guru Nanak's system which is radically different from the earlier Indian religions.

3. Indian Background

In all the earlier Indian religions whether Buddhism; Jainism, Vaisnavism or others, the dichotomy between the spiritual life and the empirical life was an accepted fundamental. In fact, three features are an integral part of all life-negating systems, namely, asceticism, Sanyasa, or monasticism, the down-grading of women and celibacy, and Ahimsa. Whether the goal is Kaivalya, Nirvana or Mukti, in each case it is an ideal of personal salvation or Isolation. Guru Nanak rejected all the above principles because his is a life-affirming system and his spiritual goal is to 'carry out the Will of God'. And, God's will is altruistic and for that matter, wholly Active and Creative. Here it might be asserted that the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita recommend a life of activity. But, it is well known that the epics, as well as the Bhagavad Gita, fully accepted and sanctioned the Brahmanical system of caste and Varna Ashram Dharma,¹⁰ and Lord Krishna asked Arjuna to fight because it was his caste duty to do so. But, Guru Nanak completely rejected caste and his first act after his enlightenment was to take a low caste Muslim as his life companion.

Secondly, in systems that involve withdrawal from life or Sanyasa, celibacy and the consequent down-grading of women became natural features. It is so even with Vaisnavism and Bhagats like Shankradeva and Kabir¹¹ who do not recommend celibacy as an essential part of their systems. Similarly, Ahimsa or complete pacifism is a necessary ingredient of salvation religions or systems in which there is a dichotomy between the spiritual life and the physical life of man. This dichotomy, we find, is an essential part of all monastic, life-negating or pacifist

systems, in fact, of all Indian systems except those who do activity as a part of their caste duty. In the Indian systems the goal, as indicated already, is personal salvation, merger in or union with the Spiritual Reality. Such being the goal, other-worldliness, isolation from the activities of life or total or partial withdrawal from it, becomes a natural corollary. Consequently, problems of life and society cease to be the concern of the seeker who tries deliberately to disentangle himself from them.

4. Why a Radical Departure from Indian Religions

Even a glimpse of the earlier Indian religious systems and of Guru Nanak's religion clearly shows the contrast of perceptions, methodologies, essentials and goals between the two. Guru Nanak's God is 'Ever Creative and Altruistic' and so is His goal set for the seeker, namely, of always carrying out His Attributive Will. In short, Guru Nanak was the first man of God to break the dichotomy that existed among all the earlier Indian religions and, instead, to establish an inalienable link between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. It is only on the basis of this fundamental change, which Guru Nanak brought about, that we can understand his hymns about the attributes of God, the goal of man, emphasis on deeds, equality between man and man, and man and woman, the importance of householder's life, and the necessity of work and sharing, his tirade against idleness, the definition of sin and about the cant of the so called piety of non-meat-eating or Ahimsa,¹² his criticism of every corrupt social functionary and institution, whether religious, social, official, administrative, or political, and the tyranny of the invaders and the failures of the rulers to ensure safety. His spiritual soul is so sensitive to injustice in every walk of life that he complains to God for allowing the weak to be oppressed by the strong.¹³ His calling God 'the Slayer of the villains,' and Destroyer of the evil,¹⁴ has not only an anti-ahimsic import, but it also indicates clearly the role the seeker or his society has to play as the instrument of God. The *Bani* of Guru Nanak has three clear implications. First, that Guru's God and the seeker are deeply interested in the world, involving the combination of the spiritual with the empirical. Second, Guru Nanak makes a detailed survey of all aspects of the religious, social and political life around him and specifically identifies and criticises the evil spots therein. Third, during a life full of

activity, he takes all tangible steps to found and frame a socio-religious structure and society that should scrupulously pursue the aim and objective of his radically new system and world-view.

Our discussion and description given above make two things quite plain, namely, that Guru Nanak's religious system is entirely different from all the earlier religious systems, and, secondly, that the radical departure he makes is due to his intrinsically combining the spiritual with the empirical, thereby breaking the dichotomy that had existed in the earlier religious life in India. This break with the past was so great that the Naths were surprised and questioned Guru Nanak how he claimed to pursue a spiritual path while living a householder's life. The Guru's reply that the Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path is equally emphatic about the clear contrast between his world-view and those of earlier systems.¹⁵ While the reason for making the radical break with the past is plain enough, the actual contrast is so great that the failure fully to comprehend the significance of that break continued and continues even today, among students of religion, especially among votaries of pacifist religions. In fact, no understanding of Sikhism is possible unless the meanings, compulsions, and corollaries of the break with the past following Guru Nanak's spiritual empirical world-view of life is clearly grasped.

5. Foundations of a New Structure Laid

The next issue concerns the practical and organisational methods Guru Nanak employed to implement his religious thesis. We shall see that while those methods are clearly in line with the system, those are like his religion, very variant from the methodology of the earlier religions. By taking Mardana, a low caste Muslim with him, he gave a sledge-hammer blow to the then existing caste hierarchy of Varan Ashrama Dharma, and Hindu-Muslim antipathy. Besides, it stressed that Guru's system was not only new and universal in its character, but it was neither Hindu nor Muslim in its basis. The second step he took was to organise, at places he visited, local *Sangats* of his followers who were ordinary householders drawn from all sections of the society, and who met locally at a fixed place called a Dharmshala for purposes of religious worship and training. The significant feature of these societies was that their members were not just seekers of personal salvation or Nirvana

practising some esoteric discipline, but were ordinary persons wanting to follow the spiritual path while pursuing their normal vocations in life. This was, we find, completely in consonance with the system of Guru Nanak indicated above. Here it is important to mention that after his missionary tours Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur with members of his family and started work as a peasant. By his personal example he stressed the importance of work and production and the sharing of it. The basic change Guru Nanak made was his emphasis on deeds and discarding ritualism. While addressing the Jogis, he told them that real Yoga lay in treating people equally rather than rubbing ashes on one's body;¹⁶ or that real prayer was to be compassionate and do good works instead of doing ritualistic prayer.¹⁷ Since Guru's followers were normal householders, for them the spiritual path lay in righteous living and not in following any tortuous ascetic or ritualistic routine of system.

Another institution started by Guru Nanak was that of *Langar* which had a dual objective, one of breaking caste barriers and ideas of pollution, and the second of contributing to a centre which fed the poor and the needy.

But, the most important step, indicative of profound implications, which Guru Nanak took was to select and appoint a successor in his lifetime. It meant, first, that Guru Nanak's aim was not merely to lay down the outline of a theoretical religious system but it was to organise a society which should accept the social responsibility of confronting, fighting and eliminating injustice and aggression in the socio-political field. Because, so far as the theoretical system was concerned, it had been fully prescribed in the '*Bani* of Guru Nanak; the subsequent Gurus added nothing to it. But, his system was neither for a few, nor for an elite seeking spiritual attainments. He wanted to build a society with new motivations that should simultaneously pursue social and spiritual ideals, since the two could not be separated in his system. The appointment of a successor, thus, made it plain that the work of creating a social and institutional structure and building a new society was till then incomplete. In the development and growth of the Sikh society, two things are important to study, first, whether or not the institutional build-up of the society made by the later Gurus was squarely based on the foundations laid by Guru Nanak; and second, whether during that period the activities undertaken and objectives pursued or achieved by the Sikh society were strictly in line with

the spiritual ideals laid down by the first Guru. The thrust of Guru Nanak's system is evident from one significant event. When Guru Nanak went to meet Guru Angad at Khadoor Sahib he found that he was leading what he felt to be a life of somewhat isolation. Guru Nanak, therefore, advised him that his primary duty was to organise a mission and lead a new society.¹⁸ This sheds a revealing light both on the system and the mission of Guru Nanak.

It is also significant that it is Guru Nanak who eliminated the hurdle of Ahimsa that stood in the way of a religious seeker from joining a righteous struggle against tyranny. In most of the socio-political systems, organisations or societies, the greatest instrument of injustice or oppression is many a time the Political Establishment. Since Guru Nanak wanted clearly to cultivate a high sense of social responsibility in his society, he very sagaciously took the far-sighted step of removing the handicap of Ahimsa from the path of the religious man; and described his God to be the 'Slayer of villains and the Destroyer of tyrants'. It is, thus, plain that Guru Nanak clearly envisages for his society a role, if necessary, of confrontation with an unjust Establishment whether social or political.

The next question is why did the Guru contemplate such a role for his society. The answer to this question already stands given, namely, that Guru's God is a 'Just Emperor' and embodies the roles both of *Miri* and *Piri*. Since the Guru and the seeker have to be the instruments of God's Will, they too have to play their part in both the spheres of life. Thus, the compulsion and the rationale behind the doctrine of *Miri* and *Piri*, is Guru Nanak's view of God and his essential combination of the spiritual life and the empirical life. An important corollary of this combination and the consequential *Miri Piri* doctrine is the emphasis Guru Nanak laid on deeds and the moral life of man (Truthful living being the highest mode of living). Here it is necessary to state the contrast between the priority given to moral life in Sikhism and the virtual lack of that emphasis in the Hindu way of life where 'all ethics is super moral i.e., it has not much to do with the empirical life of man.'¹⁹ Thus Guru Nanak's combination of the spiritual with the empirical not only leads to *Miri* and *Piri* doctrine but also to his emphasis on deeds in the moral life of man. This principle implies two-fold duties of a Sikh both as an individual and as a member of the Sikh society to fight social evils.

In sum, the life-affirming thesis of Guru Nanak meant that one should live in the social world and build it on the bedrock of a combination of the spiritual dimension of man with his empirical dimension. Thus, participation in the social life involved four sets of responsibilities, namely, of ensuring justice and equality between man and man, and between man and woman, of creating production and sharing it equitably, and, fourthly, of reacting against every injustice and wrong in the socio-political field both as an individual and as a society.

In this context, Guru Nanak took three important steps. He laid down all aspects of his life-affirming spiritual thesis in his *Bani*. Second, he organised a society and by his personal example and leadership, he tried to educate and eliminate from it evils of caste and social discrimination. Third, he clearly identified the socio-political problems of injustice and oppression. Since political problems could not be solved in a short time, he identified them and laid down the target for his society to achieve. What we mean to imply is that Guru Nanak's strong criticism of the rulers and invaders and the oppression of the weak by the strong was not merely a piece of rhetoric. It was virtually a direction in which his society was to move and a target it was to achieve in due course of time. For, the target of supplanting an empire could not be achieved in a life-time. And, Guru Nanak specifically removed the religious inhibition of Ahimsa that existed for earlier Indian seekers of a religious life. He not only stressed that people did not know what was flesh and what was not flesh and what was sin and what was not sin, but also stated that life was there in every grain of food we take.²⁰ The clarification was essential to make for a prophet who wanted his society to take up political challenges. Two things are very significant about the diametric change Guru Nanak made in the religious life of his society. He wanted it to ensure justice and equality in the social field. Hence the necessity of production, equitable distribution, and equality in social status. Secondly, removal of socio-political oppression was also made a target to be achieved by the Sikh society. It is indeed, unfortunate that many a scholar has been unable to correlate the clear meaning and significance of three uncommon but emphatic facts. First is Guru Nanak's Babar Vani and a statement that a political system in which the strong oppress the weak is an aberration in the spiritual world of God. Second is his organisation of a society, and the appointment of a successor

to develop, strengthen, and mature that society. Third is his elimination of the centuries-old constraint of Ahimsa for the spiritual seeker. We are not aware of any prophet or Bhagat, except Prophet Muhammad, who had related these three points. But in a system in which the spiritual is combined with the empirical, this combination, as it happened, would evidently be natural and necessary, being the base of *Miri Piri* doctrine.

6. Developments during the Guru period

Seen from the angle of the two objectives mentioned above, the Guru period may be divided into two parts, the one upto the time of the fifth Guru, and, the second thereafter. Here a word of caution. In describing the further growth of the Sikh society, we shall confine our narration only to two aspects of it mentioned earlier, namely, its organisation as a cohesive and responsible society and, second, its capacity to discharge its responsibility in the socio-political field. But it does not mean that the other aspects of the religious society and its members were not developed or taken care of.

Guru Angad took two important steps. First, he improved the Punjabi script so that it could suitably become a complete vehicle of Guru's spiritual message and thereby wean away the Sikhs from the die-hard and caste-ridden tradition of the Sanskrit literature considered to be the sacred and sole vehicle of the Hindu spiritual tradition, with Brahmins as its exclusive masters and exponents. Secondly, he excluded the ascetics and other worldly recluses from the Sikh society. It is clearly recorded that in his time the use of meat as food in the *Langar* or otherwise was accepted.²¹ The Third Guru took three further steps, First, he made the institution of *Langar* so important that no one big or small, could see him or partake in his *Sangat* till he had given evidence of his anti-caste and anti-pollution views by partaking of food from the Guru's common kitchen. Second, he created 22 preaching and administrative centres for the organisation of the Sikh society in areas far and wide. Even women were appointed to head them.²² Third, in order to establish the separate identity of the Sikh society and to dissociate it from the Hindu practices and pilgrimages, he created a *Bauly* at Goindwal, where the Guru lived, as the alternate place for the religious visits, education, and regeneration of the Sikhs. The ministry of the fourth Guru lasted only for seven years, but he too made the momentous decision of founding Amritsar as the sacred center

of a new community, and developing a new township, which has since then played a crucial role in Sikh history. The role of the Fifth Guru is extremely important. He did the momentous work of compiling and authenticating the Sikh Scripture, thereby making the ideological break with the traditional Indian society complete and unbridgeable. It is in his times that the Sikh society had become 'a state within a state',²³ in which the Guru was called the real emperor (*Sacha Patshah*). He asked Sikhs to work as traders who brought from the north-west of India horses for sale in the country. It was the Sikh society of the time of the fifth Guru that Jahangir felt could form a potential political challenge that needed to be nipped in the bud by the execution of the Guru.²⁴ The Guru not only accepted the challenge boldly, but by his martyrdom also prepared his people for the confrontation that he had initiated. And it was he who left instructions for his son to start military preparations for the ensuing struggle. Here it is significant to state that Guru Hargobind had started joining hunting parties even in the life-time of his father.²⁵ The period of Guru Hargobind was of open militarisation and conflict with the Empire. At the time of his initiation as Guru he donned two swords—one of *Piri* and the other of *Miri*, thereby making it clear the future role the Sikh society was to play. Military training was started and even mercenaries were enlisted. There were open clashes with the forces of the state: A fort was constructed at Amritsar and Akal Takhat, the centre of political activity, was created side by side with Harmandir Sahib. Two flags of *Miri* and *Piri* were raised at the common compound between Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat, being the symbols of the doctrine of Guru Nanak combining spirituality with empirical life.

It is significant that the changes initiated by the fifth and the sixth Gurus in the Sikh life were deliberate and calculated. It is, therefore, naive to say that militarisation of the movement was in anyway influenced by Jats in the Sikh society who were clearly in a small minority then.²⁶ In fact, a notable feature of this radical change the Gurus brought about in the course of the Sikh movement and the Sikh practices is that while the Gurus were very clear and determined about their ideological direction and drive, even some of the Sikhs around them found it difficult, because of the old Indian religious ascetic conditioning, to comprehend and follow their ideological significance. So far as the outsiders are concerned, their lack of understanding it, is

epitomised by the question of Sant Ram Das of Maharashtra to Guru Hargobind (as earlier of Naths to Guru Nanak) as to how it was that while he called himself a successor of Guru Nanak, he was so anomalously wearing a warriors' armour and riding a horse. The Guru's reply, as was earlier the reply of Guru Nanak to Naths, was prompt and categoric. 'Guru Nanak had given up mammon and not the world. My sword is for the protection of the weak and destruction of the tyrant.'²⁷ It is relevant here to recall that it is Guru Nanak who first calls God the Destroyer of the tyrant and the villains. Initially, even men like Baba Budha, Bhai Gurdas and others not only failed to comprehend the true ideological implications of militarization, but they even tried to remonstrate with the mother of the Guru suggesting the risks of the Guru's policy. In fact, the ideological revolution Guru Nanak had brought about was so great that many scholars fumble in grasping the doctrinal unity of the lives and the practices of the ten Gurus. But, it is quite unfortunate that while they try to give a materialist explanation for this change, they almost invariably suppress the historical evidence left by Sant Ram Das about Hargobind's clear clarification of the militarization and the change he had deliberately initiated.

The seventh and the eighth Gurus not only pursued the policy of militarization, but the seventh Guru even went to the extent of meeting the rebel Dara and offering him military help.²⁸ Evidently, the Guru while he offered military assistance to Dara could not be ignorant or oblivious of the fate of the fifth Guru who had given some help to rebel Khusro. And yet, knowing this, he openly made the offer. All this demonstrates how clear were Guru Nanak and his successors about their ideology, and how with a single-mindedness of purpose they pursued their aims and objectives and executed their policy even though some of their own followers were sometimes slow in keeping pace with them or understanding and imbibing the spirit of the movement. No wonder outsiders had difficulties in properly appreciating the real message of Guru Nanak.

Just as the martyrdom of fifth Guru had synchronised with a major change in Mughal policies from Akbar to Jahangir, in the time of the ninth Guru, Aurangzeb's policy of Islamisation had become intensely oppressive in its execution. To save the people out of their fear and timidity and to strengthen his own community for the major struggle ahead, the ninth Guru felt that the occasion was ripe for him to sacrifice himself for the

faith. Here it is relevant to state that the Guru had clearly declined the offer of the emperor that if he desisted from political activities he would not be disturbed in his religious interests.²⁹ But the ninth Guru, whose *Bani* epitomises the tranquility of spiritual depth, chose to intervene and protest against religious persecution and attack by the Empire on the freedom of conscience in Kashmir. He was beheaded in Delhi in 1675 A.D.

After this martyrdom starts the final phase of the Guru period. Guru Gobind Singh was fully conscious of the trials that lay ahead. He organised and militarized his people and trained them in local wars in which he had to partake. Two features of this period come out very prominently. The Guru asked the hill princes to join his struggle against the Empire and make a common cause with him. But they declined to do so,³⁰ because the Guru stood for the equality of men and had broken all caste barriers which the hill princes wanted to preserve, as also their feudal interests. Not only that. Later the hill Rajas even invited the imperial forces to curb the Guru and joined them to attack and fight him. Evidently, the religious and ideological contrast between the Hindu hill princes and the Guru was complete. But, Pir Budhu Shah, a Muslim saint of the area, was ideologically so impressed by the spiritual stature of the Guru that he not only sent his followers to fight for the Guru, but two of his sons actually died fighting in the Guru's army. These two events, on the one hand, bring out the ideological and religious gulf between Guru Gobind Singh and the old Hindu tradition of Rajput hill princes. On the other hand, these show that the Guru's mission and his struggle for the cause of man were such as to command the affection and affinities of even a Muslim Sufi saint.

It was on the Baisakhi day of 1699 A.D. that the Guru did the epitomic work of creating the Khalsa and revealing the prime object of his mission.³¹ In many ways, it was a momentous day. He selected the five beloved leaders of the Community on the basis of their willingness to sacrifice their all for the Guru's cause. Four of these belonged to what the Hindus called the *Shudra* castes. In order to establish the Khalsa brotherhood, the Guru first baptised (performed Amrit ceremony) all five of them and later requested those five to administer Amrit to the Guru himself. The Guru gave five freedoms to his Khalsa (*Dharam Nash*, *Karam Nash*, *Bharam Nash*, *Kul Nash*, *Kirat Nash*)³². It involved a complete break with

the past traditional religion, customs, social prejudices, and structures. It was a stage when the Guru felt that the Sikh community had become mature, self-reliant and responsible enough to fight the socio-political injustices and battles of life that lay ahead. A momentous socio-political confrontation had started with the greatest empire of the day. In that struggle the Guru lost his mother and all his four sons. Yet the confrontation was continued by the Guru undismayed and he sent Banda Singh to invade the Mughals in Punjab.

The mission of Guru Nanak was fulfilled, a religiously motivated casteless and classless brotherhood, the Khalsa, had been created to fight for righteousness and against all socio-political injustices. In 1708 A.D. the Guru passed away, leaving the *Guru Granth* as the spiritual guide of the Sikhs and the Khalsa as the active instrument of conducting the ideological battles of life. This dual succession epitomises the combination of the spiritual with the empirical system of Guru Nanak and the consequent unity of *Miri Piri* doctrine. It would be naive to suppose that further succession was stopped because the Guru had no progeny or for any like reason. The succession was stopped because Guru Nanak's mission of creating a religious society, fully earth-aware, socially and morally responsible, and ever ready to fight injustice and oppression had been created. It is in this perspective that the history of the Sikhs has to be understood and viewed.

7. The Post Guru Period

The so do-moral organisation and society the Guru had created, bore one of its fruits in the half century following the demise of the Tenth Master. After the capture of Sirhind, a strong imperial centre in the north, by the Sikh forces led by Banda in 1710 A.D., the Mughal campaign and attacks against the Sikhs started in full-swing. A price was put on every Sikh head and twice it was reported that all Sikhs had been exterminated.³³ It is during this very period that Abdali, the greatest general in the East, started his invasions of India; and Sikhs as the self-reliant and responsible community of the area had to face and confront him. They had no state or political organisation of their own, nor had they any trained leadership as in the Guru period. But, despite persecutions by the state, and pressures from the invaders, the Sikhs as ideologically fired and intensely motivated guerillas, triumphed to form a state of their

own in the area. After their success they upset the Zimindari System and distributed land among the tillers of the soil. A remarkable achievement of the Sikh forces, despite these having suffered the worst persecution and, which drew admiration even of their opponents, was their humane treatment of men and women of their defeated adversaries in war.³⁴ This conduct of the Sikh soldiers in victory was such as no modern army has been able to equal so far. It is nothing short of a miracle that a leaderless community, without any state, and drawn from the lowest sections of the society was able successfully not only to supplant the empire of the day, but also to repel the greatest invading general of the time and to seal the north-western border against all future inroads into India. Ranjit Singh's rule was, by the standards of its times, fair and tolerant towards all communities, and humane to the extent that he never found it necessary to sentence even a single person to death.

The struggle of the Sikh society for basic rights of man during the British and the Independence periods of history has been equally outstanding. The first two rebellions against the British, the Kuka Rebellion and the Ghadar Rebellion, were almost wholly manned by the Sikhs. While the Sikhs form only two percent of India's population, during the struggle for Indian Independence of the 121 persons hanged, 2644 imprisoned for life, and 1300 massacred in the Jallianwala Bagh protest meeting 93,2147 and 799 respectively were Sikhs. Again, of the soldiers who fought under Subash Chander Bose in the Indian National Army, 60 per cent were Sikhs.³⁵ In 1975, when the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, imposed the Emergency Law, curtailing all human rights, the Sikhs were the only people who sustained and organised a struggle against this invasion on all human freedoms, involving the arrest of over 40,000 Sikhs, when, in the rest of India, not even half that number offered arrest as a protest. It is necessary to state that particularly all these movements initiated by the Sikhs against the state were executed from the precincts of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple and Akal Takht Complex) Amritsar.

The point of importance is why a small and insignificant community is always in the vanguard to make tremendous sacrifices and struggle whenever it is a question of a guarding human rights and freedoms. And the sense of their earth-awareness and social responsibility is significant enough to make them create bountiful production not only to feed and

sustain the population of their own state, but also to contribute each year over 60 per cent of the central food reserve that feeds all the deficit areas in the rest of the country. Evidently, it is believed that these achievements are due to the thesis of Guru Nanak combining the spiritual life of man with his empirical concerns, thereby breaking the dichotomy that had existed in the earlier Indian religious systems. It is the thesis of Guru Nanak that the empirical life of man dissociated from his spiritual dimension reduces itself to stark ego-centrism, individualism and materialism, leading to perpetual clash and conflicts in the human society. In the same way spiritualism divorced from the empirical life is just barren, ending in escapism and a kind of selfishness for individual salvation.

8. The Western Scene

In this background we shall now discuss the ideological place and relevance of Secularism, as an institution, which has gained a growing recognition in the western culture in the last two hundred years. Since the days of Constantine, in the Christian society, the Church was considered supreme and gave legitimacy to the kings and political institutions of the state. But, the unfortunate fall in the moral life of the Church gave rise to Protestantism and Calvinism in the 16th century. The Reformation while it purified and shook life in the Church, brought about a major change in the equation between the Church and the State, or between the religious life and the empirical life of man. For, it once for all brought about the supremacy of the national State over the Church, which ceased to be universal, and became virtually a limb of the national State. During a war between two national states, the position of Church became quite anomalous, and each Church prayed for the success of its own State. As Toynbee laments, the Graeco-Roman ideals of the worship of the National State as the goddess was revived and accepted.³⁶ This was the first major blow the Church Universal suffered at the hands of the State following the Reformation.

The second slow but major erosion of the power and the status of religion took place with the rise of Science, Darwinism, Evolutionism and empiricism. The unstable marriage between Religion and the State gave rise to the off-springs of Monopoly Capitalism in the West, and Communism in the East. The heady wine of power which Science and Technology gave to man so clouded his vision and sense of proportion that religions came

to be considered an area of darkness which Science would duly probe, explore, and clear. All progress of man was measured by the power over nature it gave to him. Without realising the inherent limitations of the scientific method in the field of religion and values, its use became so pervasive and dominant even in the field of humanities that ontology virtually lost its hold, and the study of phenomena became an end in itself. Human evolution was deemed dependent on a chance mutation and the definition of values that made for survival ended in mere tautology. Mechanical methodology or reductionism became the standard mode of understanding and interpretation even in the fields of religion and the so-called social sciences. As with Pavlov and Skinner, human behaviour came to be studied on the basis of animal behaviour, and the phenomena of biology came to be understood on the basis of 'Physics and Chemistry.'³⁷ Human free will became just a quirk of atoms, and 'works of art' were sought to be understood 'in terms of animal behaviour.'³⁸ Nowhere was confusion more apparent than in the field of ethics.³⁹ In this age of scientism or materialism, the moral life of man ceased to have any basic validity, his moral sense being just a 'defence mechanism, or a reaction formation' following the impact of the environment on man's psyche. Consequently, the spiritual dimension of Reality ceased to have any fundamental meaning; nor could this aspect of man be the subject of any serious academic study, except as a piece of external phenomena or as a part of social history. Slowly but naturally, Individualism and Consumerism gained social relevance as worthwhile values and Secularism became, a part of state policy.

But the two world wars within a period of two decades have shaken the scientific man's faith in himself and the ideal of a continuous linear progress the West was seeking to pursue. It became increasingly clear that if the scientific assumption of the space-time continuum being the complete base of our universe was true, we were living' in a world that was wholly void of values and completely amoral in its structure. Values were considered mere utilitarian tools of human creation without any fundamental base or validity. In the wake of this mood of introspection came the warning from the authors of the Limits of Growth that our world system was neither abundant enough nor generous enough to permit for long, our self-serving ego-centrism to continue recklessly on the path of aggressive,

narrow and suicidal individualism or nationalism.⁴⁰ A decade earlier Toynbee had already sounded the note 'wondering whether the technologist's professional success had not been a social and moral disaster' and whether he had not placed in the hands of the naked ape the power to destroy the human race.⁴¹ These were lone voices, but in the socio-political field the mad race of Goliaths went on with the lolly-pops of Consumerism being offered to lull the peoples at large. On both sides of the line between Capitalism and Communism increasing symptoms of alcoholism, drug addiction, divorces, broken homes and unbalanced children have appeared in the life of man. The basic issue remains, whether man's rational and moral faculties arise from the same Base of Reality which is the subject of scientific study and is material, neutral and amoral in its structure. With the growing impact of Naturalism and Evolutionism, the landslide which had started with the Reformation, making Religion to be the hand-maid of the State, ended in a virtual divorce between the State and Religion in the conduct of the empirical life of man. Instead Science sanctified, on grounds of dealing with a political world, a close liaison between the State and its new-found Secularism, giving unbridled and uninhibited opportunities to the politicians to serve and satiate their individualism and ego-centrism. It is in the resultant suffocating climate that a person like Galbraith has raised the protest that in the American and British politics greed had openly started masquerading as morality. But, the greatest danger in the modern West is the Frankenstein of a mighty military machine which each national secular State is creating under the garb of ensuring security of its people. Increasingly it has been felt and feared that besides the stranglehold of the military machine, the modern state has an enormous power and subtle and pervasive means of influencing, enervating, and debasing the minds of its people. A day may come, when it would become impossible for the harassed people to dislodge this self-seeking Secularism from the driver's seat and control.

In this dismal scene there are visibly some welcome developments. The social stagnation in Latin America and Africa has given rise to Liberation theology. It invokes the Bible for its moral sanction and empiricism for its rational analysis. It seeks to highlight the fundamental fact that Christ's primary dictum of love for one's neighbour becomes meaningless if the man of religion is unable to confront every instrument of injustice and

aggression against the weak. And the States, as in the past, sometimes become the greatest instruments of oppression, involving cold extermination of millions of its own people. Second, there is a growing realisation that it is sheer moonshine to talk of the brotherhood of man without accepting the fatherhood of God, or that God as Christ says, is Love. Accordingly, the American Churches have raised a clear voice that in order to fight the menace of Secularism, Christianity should invite the cooperation of all Higher Religions in the world.⁴²

Conclusion

In this context, let us have a look back at Guru Nanak's system. He made it clear that the fundamental Reality was not amoral but it was the Ocean and Fount of all altruism. Thus, the contrast between Scientism, with its methodology of mechanism or reductionism, and Sikhism with its holistic approach of the inalienable and fundamental link between the spiritual component and the empirical component of man, is quite clear and complete. In Guru Nanak's view ego-centrism is our constitutional handicap. It is man's chief malady that obstructs his vision from taking a holistic world-view. The *Adi Granth* and the lives of the Gurus make the Sikh position on the issue abundantly clear. The *Miri-Piri* ideal is an integral symbol and projection of the unified thesis of Guru Nanak and his successors, who have demonstrated its spiritual validity by their very lives. The domain of values is the spiritual or the transcendent level of Reality. We shall never find altruism if we follow the reductionist or the mechanical method of going down the road from biology to physics or from man to the ape, the amoeba or its genes. We can, at best, talk of a logical or constructed ethics, but we can neither live it nor participate in it voluntarily or spontaneously. The Gurus say that the way forward is to go the path of altruism and combine the spiritual with the empirical, and not the way of dichotomy or of secularism the modern sceptical mind is pursuing. The secular path will inevitably lead to stagnation and discord.

The spiritual path through altruism is for the development of a higher consciousness to enable us to perceive that the Basic Reality, as the Gurus say, is All love. In Sikhism, we conclude, there is no place for dichotomy between the spiritual and the empirical, and the humble hand of friendship and cooperation

has to be extended to everyone who believes in Transcendence as the Base or Cause of Love, Altruism and life. And, in life one cannot be a disinterested bystander, since withdrawal is to help the opponent of God's will, namely, ignorant egoists or *Manmukhs*.



THE GURMUKH

The ideal man forms the epitome of a religious system. In fact, the concept and characteristics of the ideal man reveal the entire structure, the salient features and the world-view of a religion. In order to understand the role of the ideal man in Sikhism, it is necessary to know its ideas about God, the reality of the world, and the human goal.

The Idea of God

Sikhism is fundamentally monotheistic. For, in it God is Gracious and has a Personality; prayers to God in order to seek His Grace are an essential component of the Sikh discipline. God is the Creator and the world is His creation in which He is immanent. 'He is Self-Existent, Himself created *Naam*, then He created the world and permeated it.'¹ But the more important fact is that He is God of Attributes and Will. For, a God of Attributes has a triple significance. God being Transcendent and Eternal, attributes have a meaning only in relation to the changing world of man. As such, this aspect of God has an integral connection with the world which is the only field for the operation of God's attributes. Secondly, God being the Help of the helpless, Shelter of the shelterless and Protector of the weak, this not only gives sanction to the moral life of man, but also indicates the clear direction in which spiritual life should move. Thirdly, it points out God's deep and intimate interest in the world. For, God rewards even an iota of a good deed done. He helps with a loving care 'all human efforts towards progress and being divine.'² Similarly, the idea of a God of Will also leads to the same emphasis and inferences, as following from the concept of an Attributive God. Attributes clearly stress the purposes for which the Will of God works. The world then becomes the sole area of His creative activity. For, 'God showers

his Grace where the weak and the lowly are helped and cared for.¹³

The Reality of The World

The Gurus' idea of God gives a meaningful status to the world. For them the world is true. 'True is He, true is His creation' (p. 294). In numerous such hymns the Gurus have called the world authentic and real. True, there are some hymns in the Guru Granth which declare the world activity to be wasteful if it is not conducted with right objectives in view. Such activity is not only useless and without any significance but is also harmful and delusive. But, this is entirely different from holding the world to be illusory or having an other-worldly attitude. Rather the Gurus consider the world to be the medium for attaining human divinity. So much so that they go to the extent of saying that 'by despising the world one gets not to God.'¹⁴

The Malady of Haumain

Time and again the Gurus state that all the problems of man, his conflicts, sufferings and insecurity arise from human egoism and his failure to realise his living kinship with his fellow beings. It is the egoistic consciousness of man that causes his alienation from Reality and consequently his pains and problems. It is by 'one's egoistic deeds that one becomes separated from God.'¹⁵ And it is by our deeds and looking upon all as equal that we can be near Him and break our alienation from God. This, the Gurus repeatedly stress, is the sole way to solve our difficulties and realise our oneness with all human beings. The Gurus say that man's present consciousness and make up are egoistic or self-centred. In his entire thinking and working he looks only to his own interests. The Gurus call such a person *manmukh*, selfish or individualistic. As opposed to the *manmukh*, the ideal is to be a *gurmukh*, God conscious or God-centred in one's activities. As the words 'self-centred' and 'God-centred' indicate, it is basically an ideal of deeds and not of words, nor of withdrawal from the world, nor of isolation or salvation, nor of merger in Reality or God. Therefore, the concept of the ideal man is integrally connected with the subject of goal in Sikhism. No appreciation of the role of the ideal man is possible unless one grasps the ideal set by the Gurus for all human beings. While it is not necessary to make a detailed

treatment of the subject of goal, a broad indication of the different doctrines laid by the Gurus governing the spiritual path may be worthwhile.

Goal

(i) *Of doing righteous deeds*: In the hymns of *Dharam Khand*, Guru Nanak says that all assessment of man is made in accordance with the quality of his deeds⁶ and that by His Grace only the righteous persons are approved by God. Again, it is laid down that 'with God only the deeds one does in the world count.'⁷

(ii) *Of carrying out God's Will*: In the very beginning of the *Japu* Guru Nanak puts a pointed question as to how to become an ideal man, *Sachiara*, or a true being. The Guru states that the only spiritual path is to carry out His Will.⁸ As God's Will is attributive and purposeful, it leads man towards a life of universal love. The ideal, thus, is to move in line with His Will and be the instrument of His Love and Virtuous Direction.

(iii) *Higher than truth is truthful conduct*: Guru Nanak says that higher than truth is truthful living or conduct.⁹ It means that in Sikhism the ideal is not to withdraw from the world, nor to indulge in ascetic austerities and practices, nor to merge in God; but the goal is to live truthfully and lead a life of virtue and creative activities.

(iv) *Of Link with Naam* : Students of Sikhism know that almost at every step the Guru prays for being linked or yoked to *Naam*.¹⁰ *Naam* is a synonym for the Immanent, the Attributive or the Creative Aspect of God directing and moving the world towards an evolutionary development. Thus, the ideal of seeking the gift of *Naam* only means involving oneself in creative and virtuous activities, *Naam* being the treasure and fount of all values of creativity.

(v) *Of being God-centred*: The Gurus repeatedly stress that egoism or self-centredness (*haumain*) is the fundamental human malady which has to be cured. The way out is to develop a higher consciousness. It is only by this achievement that one can be freed from the narrowness that deludes us into taking a carped and selfish view of things, leading to conflicts and dash, dread and destruction. This higher consciousness may be called God or *Naam*-consciousness. For the Gurus say that 'where there is egoism, there cannot be God, where there is God, there

cannot be egoism'. 'Naam and egoism are opposed to each other, the two cannot be at the same place'¹¹ consciousness is thus a synonym for expresses universal love in its activities.

(vi) *To emancipate everyone from pain and insecurity*: In answer to a question of the *Siddhas*, Guru Nanak replies that his' mission in life is that he should, with the help of other God-conscious beings, enable every man successfully to steer clear of the pitfalls of life.¹² This has been the avowed mission of Guru Nanak and his successors.

It is obvious that all the six doctrines laying down the goal in Sikhism unmistakably prescribe, though in different language and terms, the same ideal for man. God being the Source of all Creativity, Love and Values, the aim for man is an active life of virtue so as to develop a higher consciousness. This alone will enable man to shed his egoism, live a harmonious and secure life and become the vehicle of God's love for man. It is in this context that one should understand the description of the *gurmukh* or the Superman that follows.

Gurmukh

The Gurus have praised the God-conscious person or the superman in glorious terms. Their description of the God-conscious person by itself gives a clear and concise picture of the concepts of the Gurus about the goal of man, the ideal life, their value system, and their entire approach to the world and life.

(a) *Gurmukh has all virtues and no Haumain* : The superman is free from *haumain* and the vices, conflicts and problems, the ego creates. He sheds duality; his ego goes. His "intuition is awakened, evil is turned to good, noise of reason goes and also self-will."¹³ His achievements are not negative, or that of an ascetic, but he is all virtues and activity in the service of God and men. "They who hearken to the Word fathom deeps of virtue."¹⁴ "they who believe, have all virtues."¹⁵ "He lives truth and practices truth and truthful is his conduct. "¹⁶ "He discriminates between good and evil and does virtuous deeds." "He is compassionate to all."¹⁷ In short, he "sees God in all hearts" and "One alone everywhere."¹⁸ "He looks alike upon all." His is not a conditioned or rationalised practice of virtues, but "he practices good spontaneously"; "he is the fountain spring

of benevolence."¹⁹ He serves truth, practices truth and earns truth."²⁰ He serves everyone and removes pain. He is like God with whom he is filled.

(b) *He carries out God's Will: God has an Attributive Will.* The *gurmukh* is "imbued by His Will, and carries it out."²¹ "Wonderous is His Will, one knows it only, if one walks in His Will;"²² for knowledge and deed are integrated and simultaneous. "Those who know His Will, practice it."²³ This point is of fundamental importance, namely, that knowing His Will is carrying it out. The two activities are inalienably linked because a Will known is essentially a Will carried out. They who know His Will carry it out. It emphasises the essentially active character of the *gurmukh* and Sikhism.

(c) *He partakes actively in all fields of life:* God is the source of all values and virtues. He "is milk to the child staff to the blind and help to the poor and is protector of the weak."²⁴ It is a point of great significance that the *gurmukhs* virtues are not merely pious and preparatory, meant to secure salvation for him; but his role is positive and dynamic, vis-a-vis vice, evil and human problems in all fields. "He compromises not with evil, nor yields to it." "God's hero is he who fights for the oppressed."²⁵ He sees God everywhere and remains in God's fear.

(d) *He is the seroant of God and man :* The *gurmukh* is the servant of God and man. "They dedicate life to Him"; "they are destined to obey His Will"; "he is combatant in God's Legion."²⁶ He is "His pedlar", "His instrument". "Service of God is the way to be fulfilled". "He does not forget God even for an instant", "God is the intuition, intellect and capital of saints". "He is the servant of God."²⁷ His service of God is really the creative service of life and man because Immanent God and the world are conjoint. The Guru says he "is the slave of all creation"²⁸ and prays "the world is sick, O God, save it by any means you may be pleased to do."²⁹ The *gurmukh* is not for his own salvation or glorification. He helps man by all means available to him and creates organisations for that purpose. "God, give me millions of hands to serve thee."³⁰ The goal is the service of man.

(e) *He is godly:* The Guru describes the *gurmukh* as possessing all the virtues. "He is ocean of virtues and truthful"³¹, "shelter of the shelterless"; "God is compassionate and so is the nature of saints"³²; he "saves all and removes pain". "He becomes

like Him with whom imbued"; "by serving God one becomes like God."³³ He is like God, but he is not God.

(f) *He helps all to be God-centred*: He aims to make all others God-centred. Such a person helps others to become God-conscious. "He unites himself and unites others too"³⁴; "he is emancipated and emancipates others."³⁵ The Guru says, "I am sacrifice to him who sees Him and makes others see Him."³⁶ In the Gurus' system the ideal to make everyone a superman remains supreme. It is the highest aim of the *gurmukh*. This priority, therefore, becomes the very reason why the *gurmukh* deals with all men and participates in all fields and aspects of life, the object being to persuade and drive everyone towards the goal of God-consciousness. The emphasis on this ideal of making everyone God-conscious is fundamental. For the Guru says that "God established the earth for the sake of God-conscious persons."³⁷ This, in essence means that the creation or the evolution of the superman on earth is the purpose of God towards which all life is striving.

The Guru says "knowing His Will, I serve Him"; "I cannot live without God"; "my life and body are thine, without you lose life". *Naam*, Word and Will represent the dynamic aspects of God which is full of Life. These three aspects of God are integrally operative in the world. These direct the world towards an ever-emerging purpose. God is attributive. It is in this light that the devotee of God has to be all activity, creative and virtuous. The Guru Granth is full of prayers to God for the gift of *Naam*, which means a creative and virtuous role of looking alike upon all men, helping the weak and fighting the oppressor. The superman, being imbued by the dynamic and attributive aspects of God, carries out such a role in the world. So often the God-centred has been likened to God, because he is His instrument, soldier, pedlar and servant. He carries out God's every creative and attributive Will. The picture which the Gurus draw of the God-centred person is entirely of a creative being. His role is not only to fight the oppressor, actively to help the weak, and to practice virtue, but also to help every one in his development towards a God-conscious being. God established the earth in order to bring out the superman to do His Will or live truthfully.³⁸ The *gurmukh* being the epitome of God's creation, he has a master role to play.

It is in this context that the gurmukh understands his role, and looks upon the world and life as a beautiful and meaningful creation of God. He has a message for man, namely, that (a) man's difficulties and miseries are due to a life of baumain or self-centredness, (b) man has the capacity and the opportunity to shed egoism and develop a higher consciousness, (c) all spiritual progress is possible through moral or righteous deeds alone, and (d) all progress is sought for the enrichment of life so that the kingdom of God is established on earth and every man becomes a God-centred being whereby alone his problems of insecurity and alienation from God, fear and frustration, pain and conflict, and disharmony are solved. The Gurus leave no doubt about the content of their message and their mission in this world. This, for that matter has to be the mission of every gurmukh, because a truly spiritual being is wholly and spontaneously moral. That is the result and test of his new awakening or God-consciousness. It transforms him into a new being with the innate nature, like God, of helping every erring man. The ordinary man is no doubt moral but his moral actions are conditioned, calculated and, to an extent, artificial. He, therefore, continues to be in pain, conflict and suffering. That is why with the best of intentions man, groups of men, societies, and nations are always involved in internecine conflicts, despair and destruction. In a way, this is the price man pays for his freedom and the capacity to rise higher. This freedom or capacity, man fails to utilize. It is only the gurmukh who is truly moral and responsible. He is never in doubt, fear or pain. Under all eventualities and trials, he is in bliss and poise. He fears none and reacts to wrongs and challenges, from wherever those should emanate. All life is the sphere of his activity and operation. In order to avoid his responsibility he does not divide life into man-made and arbitrary compartments like religious, social and political ones. He does not narrow down his activities to the so-called spiritual spheres and exclude the political ones. It is he who by his life demonstrates that there is a God of attributes and carries out His Will by living truth. He does not tend to limit his responsibility only, to the monastic or so-called religious spheres. For him all fields are religious, including political, social and the rest. Wherever there are the greatest problems to solve and challenges to meet, the gurmukh must react in order to tackle them. That is exactly the reason that Guru Nanak in the very beginning of his years pointed out

the faults and failings, inequities and oppressions, whether institutionalised or otherwise, in all spheres of life whether political, social or others.

The Indian Tradition

We have had a brief glimpse of the ideal man in Sikhism and of the Sikh world-view. The Gurus' concept of God, their approach to the world, the problem of *haumain*, its suggested solution, and the role of the ideal man in life have an integral connection with one another. They form the inalienable parts of a single harmonious thesis. Before we come to our conclusion, we shall consider if this thesis, or parts of it, existed in the Indian milieu.

In the Vedic system everything could be obtained through sacrifices and mantras and rituals. What was important was the complete obedience to the Vedic commands that were *apaurusheya*. Vedic rituals done with complete accuracy and meticulous care could secure anything in this world or the next,³⁹ thereby eliminating the role of God in the process. This mystic system we shall find has hardly anything in common with the concepts accepted in Sikhism. Here the highest honour went to the priest who had the Vedic knowledge and chanted the mantras for the benefit of others.

Next we come to the *Upanishadic* system. It propounded the doctrine of Brahman and everything being a part of the one whole. The chief emphasis was on other-worldliness. This secret doctrine was open only to a few, fit for the purpose. Yajnavalkya, the chief sage of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* finally resolved to leave the world.⁴⁰ It was in the *Upanishadic* times that the system of four *ashramas*, the last two periods of *Vanprastha* and *Sanyasa* being purely other-worldly, came to be religiously prescribed. While indicating the attitude of the ideal man towards the world, Gaudapada says that one should behave in the world like an insensible object.⁴¹ It is a goal of complete disinterestedness in and withdrawal from the empirical world. Such is the role prescribed for the ideal man.

In the Vedantic system too the world is deemed to be illusory or *mithya* or of a lower category of reality. Involvement in the worldly life is a fall, it being a State of relative existence which has to be transcended in order to be a *Jeevan Mukta* and reach the level of *aham brahmasme*.⁴²

The position is no different in Shaivism and Vaishnavism. Both of them accepted the complete scriptural authority of the Vedas and the *Upanishads*. The Vaishnava saints like Ramanand, Chatainaya, Mirabai and the rest remained completely absorbed in a life of devotion or meditation. They were all broadly speaking, otherworldly. None of them prescribed, much less organised or created, new institutions in order to tackle the socio-political problems of their times. The very fact that none of them even attempted to do so shows that such an activity was beyond the scope of their spiritual thesis. The *Bhagawat Gita*, while it accepted the validity of Vedic ritualism and gave precedence to the *Upanishadic* path of *gian*, did approve of the performance of one's caste duties. This has nothing in common with the Sikh ideas and activity or its ethical system. In the *Gita* Lord is made to accept the divine authorship of the system of four castes, and completely prohibited mobility between different castes.⁴³

Buddhism, Jainism and Yogic Nathism were the other prevalent traditions in the time of the Gurus. The Gurus emphatically record their differences with these systems, particularly with their asceticism, other-worldliness and direction.

There is little doubt that in Jainism all world activity is an involvement, the ideal being the complete separation of the spiritual monad (*jeeva*) from its combination with matter (*jeeva*). All acts, good or bad, soil the purity of the *jeeva* for which complete isolation or *Kaivalya* is the ideal. Despite even prayers, the *teerthankara* is never inclined to return to the world of man.⁴⁴ In the *Digambara* system, life of a woman was considered to be of a lower status. She could not achieve *kaivalya* till she gained birth as a man. For, a masculine incarnation was a prerequisite for achieving *kaivalya*.⁴⁵ The extremely ascetic and other-worldly character of this system is not in doubt.

In its other-worldliness Buddhism was no different. Good acts could lead to a better birth but not to nirvana. Buddhism was completely monastic in its religious organisation and aims. The Buddhist *bhikhsu* was no different from the *sanyasin* or the *Upanishadic* hermit.⁴⁶ The *bhikhsu* had to be celibate. Women were admitted to the monasteries but their status, because of their sex, was lower than that of the male *bhikshu*. It has been

recorded that Buddha, who was reluctant to accept women in the monasteries or sangha, felt that the inclusion of women would reduce the life of Buddhism from a thousand years to half that period.⁴⁷ It has been stated that a drowning woman, even if she were one's mother, should not be rescued, by the monk. After his enlightenment, when requested, Buddha never returned to his domain as a king, such a role being not in consonance with one who had achieved nirvana.⁴⁸

Yoga was another prevalent system of those times. Nath and Yogic asceticism and other-worldliness were severely condemned by the Gurus. The Nath Yogis criticised the worldly role of Guru Nanak. But, the latter denounced their asceticism by saying that Naths did not know even the elementaries of the spiritual path.⁴⁹

In the fifteenth century, Sufism was a living creed in this country. But Sufism in India, as elsewhere, has always been dominantly otherworldly. Khankahs, were the Sufi monasteries. True, married life was not taboo among the Sufis, but life at the Khankah remained virtually divorced from the world around it. Renunciation and ascetic practices have always been an important component of the Sufi discipline and life.

Even Christian missionaries had extended their organisation to this country in that period. But, it cannot be denied that Christianity not only accepted the principle of "give unto Caesar what is Caesar's", but for hundreds of years after the crucifixion of Christ remained completely monastic. Celibacy and nunneries became recognised institutions. So much so that even in the year 1979, the Pope, despite the demand of equal rights for women, declined to accept the ordination of women as priests in the Catholic Church. In Christianity the monastic legacy has been strong and apparent.

Conclusion

In the context of the Indian Tradition, we find that the role of the *gurmukh*, his approach to the world, and his world-view are a complete departure from the position in the other religious traditions prevalent in the country. The Gurus conceive of God as a Creator, God who is operating his Attributive Will in a world, that is real, authentic and meaningful. Man's basic malady is his egocentric consciousness (*haumain*) which like the prison walls obstructs his vision from realising his basic relationship

with all beings. It is this *haumain* that drives man on the path of narrow individualism and destructive conflicts. The solution lies in developing a higher consciousness through the means of virtuous deeds and altruistic activities. The *gurmukh* or the superman is the instrument of God's Attributive Will. He practices universal love, protests and helps the weak and fights the oppressor. This, in short, is the world-view of the Gurus as is apparent from their statements and a description of the *gurmukh* indicated earlier. The fundamentals of this world-view were nowhere visible in the Indian background nor in the contemporary world scene. Earlier, all spiritual energies were being withdrawn from the world and directed towards the field of other-worldliness in the hope of *kaivalya* (isolation), nirvana, realisation of oneness with Brahman, or merger or union with God. In each case it was a state of blissful enlightenment and withdrawal from the empirical world.

But the logic and compulsion of the Guru's spiritual thesis have an entirely different direction. After his enlightenment Guru Nanak made a very fundamental pronouncement saying, 'there is no Hindu nor any Mussalman'. This statement had a revolutionary significance. It not only proclaimed the equality of man but also emphasised the Guru's interest not in any abstract metaphysical proposition but primarily in the fate and future of man. With this mission he started his world tours for the organisation of his followers. After the declaration of his mission, the Guru took some major steps which were opposed to the then existing religious trends in the country. He changed the entire direction of the flow, aims and objectives of the spiritual life. We shall indicate only five such steps as the Guru took in pursuance of his declaration. The Guru proclaimed that his mission was to help all men and not to seek any so-called personal salvation or merger in God. With Mardana, a low-caste Muslim as his companion, he started his world tours in order to preach his religion and organise its institutions.

Evidently because of the logic of his system, Guru Nanak was not only opposed to asceticism, monasticism, priestcraft and other-worldliness, but his followers constituted almost entirely of ordinary householders of all levels and castes. Again, it is very significant that all the Gurus, except Guru Harkrishan, who died at an early age, were married householders. Unlike Lord Buddha who, after his enlightenment, refused to return to his kingdom

and lead a family life, Guru Nanak on his return from his missionary tours, settled at Kartarpur, sent for the members of his family, and started earning his livelihood by working as a peasant. He continued as such till the end of his days. It is a very significant contrast with the other religions of India that in the Guru's system not only the householders were freely admitted to its fold, but the second and third Gurus, even excluded the ascetics from becoming the members of the Sikh organisation.⁵⁰ When Guru Nanak asked his successor to go to Khadoor Sahib and continue the mission there, he clearly advised him to send for the members of his family and keep them with him.⁵¹

In line with the spiritual rationale of the first step, is Guru Nanak's insistence on everyone being engaged in productive work. One should not only earn one's living, but also share one's income with others, particularly through the establishment of *Langars* for the free distribution of food at every Sikh centre, and later through the contribution of one-tenth of one's income to the community fund. The Guru says that he alone knows the spiritual path, who works hard and shares his earnings with others.⁵² As the pioneer of a new religious system, he gave a clear lead which was followed by his successors and followers.

Thirdly, he started the institution of *Langar* which, apart from feeding the needy persons, became the chief instrument in demolishing the rigid caste barriers that hindered free social intercourse and the equal treatment of all castes. On this issue Guru Nanak's stand was clear. For, at the very outset, he took Mardana, a low caste Muslim, as his regular companion during his tours. The third Guru made it a rule that no one could see him unless he had partaken of the food from the common kitchen, while sitting at a common platform with members of the other castes.

By raising the religious level of the householders' life, Guru Nanak brought about another revolution in the socio-religious field. By demolishing the taboo against the householder's life and condemning asceticism, the Guru ipso facto raised the status of women. We have already indicated that most of the religious systems placed a clear disability against women following the religious path. Guru Nanak stressed that the women, the mother who gave birth to every person, could not be deemed impure.⁵³ The second Guru made his wife

incharge of the community kitchen. The third Guru appointed women as incharge of missionary work in different areas (diocese).⁵⁴ Again, it was a woman, Mai Bhago, who reprimanded the Bedawias (those who had left the tenth Guru) and led them back to the field of battle at Mukatsar where they all fought the Mughal army and laid their lives for the Guru.

Lastly, we come to the problem of political set-up. Guru Nanak is one of the very few prophets who made a strong criticism of the political and administrative set-up of his times. This criticism had a specific meaning, purpose and direction. With clear objectives, he laid the foundation of a new society which was expanded by his followers. When the community took a sizeable shape and cohesion, with a central scripture and organisation of its own, it was the fifth Guru, who by helping Khusró, who was then commanding an army, sought confrontation with the Empire.⁵⁵ This confrontation was deliberately continued by his successors. That the sixth and the tenth Gurus took the initiative against the Mughal Empire is not in doubt. But the seventh and ninth Gurus did no less.

Guru Har Rai at the head of his army met Dara, the rebel prince, and offered him his help.⁵⁶ Guru Tegh Bahadur asked the Kashmiri Pandits to convey to the Emperor that he should deal with the Guru, before he compelled the Kashmiris to change their religion. later, he declined the proposal of the Emperor that in case the Guru confined his activities purely to the so-called peaceful and religious spheres, the Guru would remain unmolested.⁵⁷

The history of the Sikh movement shows in bold relief these five features of the Guru's religion and their lives. There are two important points about these features of Sikhism. First, these are in glaring contrast with the essentials and trends of the earlier traditions. In fact, there was no sign of these developments in the contemporary religions. Secondly, all these features are intimately interconnected, with one step following from the other. These features of Sikhism are not an assorted formation borrowed from here or there. But, these constitute an integrated development emerging from the basic logic of the system itself. In fact, it is the failure to grasp the fundamental logic of the system and its determining direction that has led to a number of its misinterpretations. In the other systems, withdrawal from the world, ascetic, ritualistic, formal or

devotional practices, isolation of Pumsba merger or union with Reality are a part of the spiritual path. In Sikhism, the trend and the emphasis are in exactly the opposite direction. For, as an attributive God, He is not only conjoint with the world but is engaged in a movement for the evolution of man is his baumain. The only remedy is God-consciousness or development of a higher consciousness by which everyone is treated alike and with love. Here the expression of God's universal love for man is the ideal. God is deeply interested in the world and in the elevation of man into a higher being. The superman, thus, is the instrument of God in doing His Will and in furthering this process.

As all spiritual endeavour is directed towards the world, the duties of the householders and the need of productive work evidently becomes important. As such, the status of women too becomes high and equal with men. Not only social life and the equality of man become major spiritual objectives, but the raising of every being to the level of God-consciousness becomes the chief goal. Therefore we conclude that in the spiritual system of the Gurus, the five developments mentioned earlier assume a basic importance.

It is in this context that the direction and goal of spiritual life, and the description and role of the gurmukb in Sikhism should be understood. Bhai Gurdas calls Guru Nanak a gurmukb. Guru Nanak stated that his mission in life was to help everyone to become emancipated.⁵⁸ Hence, the contrasted differences between the role of the superman in Sikhism and that in other Indian religions. It is, therefore, clear why the Gurus, in view of their spiritual world-view, insisted on setting new goals and objectives before man and on creating new institutions and a society that should accept, own and pursue those ideals. This explains the concept of gurmukb in Sikhism and the part he, as the instrument of God, is expected to play in the world. For, though he is not. God, he is His humble servant or agent on earth.

CHAPTER XII

A CRITIQUE AND A CLARIFICATION OF SIKHISM

For some years past there have, even in the academic field, been politically oriented writings, some open, some oblique, attacking the identity of Sikhism as an independent religion. In this article we propose examining the issue with particular reference to the statements of Sardar Khushwant Singh. In 1963, he recorded in his *History of the Sikhs* under the caption 'The Teaching of Nanak', "Nanak not only founded a new religion and started a new pattern of living, he also set in motion an agrarian movement whose impact was felt all over the country."¹ In 1984 he wrote, in *the Punjab Story*, "Being himself a Hindu was at the same time concerned with reforming Hinduism. But as the years went by and his message caught on among the masses, he decided to give his teachings permanency through a sect of his own."² Evidently, the "Sect" which he indicates is of Hinduism. In 1991, in the *illustrated Weekly* he stated: "Sikhism is an offshoot of Hinduism and is only distinguished from it by the external symbols of the Khalsa faith. The theology is entirely Hindu." "Almost nine tenths of *Granth Sahib*, composed largely by Guru Arjun, is in fact Vedanta, and essence of all that you read in the Upanishads and the *Gita*."³ Apparently, for a normal reader, these are three variant statements, although the usual plea taken by some writers is that the context has not been taken into account. The first statement clearly states that Guru Nanak's teachings and his religion are new. The second statement does give Sikhism the status of a sect, but within the Hindu fold. The last observation says that it is a Hindu branch, being virtually Upanishadic and Vedantic in character. May be, consistency has not been the virtue of political writers, or, may

be, there are other reasons or compulsions for the seemingly shifting stand of the learned writer.

It is also understood that in an entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th Edition Volume 27), considered to be authored by him, he observed, "Sikhism was historical development of the Hindu Vaishnava Bhakti movement-a devotional movement among followers of god Vishnu-that began in Tamil Country, and was introduced to the North by Ramanuja (traditionally, 1017-1137).

Accordingly, it is necessary to analyses and compare the doctrines of Vedanta, Vaishnavism and Sikhism so as to understand the ideological stand of the three systems, and to know whether there is any affinity between Sikhism, on the one hand, and Vedanta and Vaishnavism, on the other hand; or, whether they are systems fundamentally opposed in their essentials. We shall consider the subject in reference to the spiritual experience of the Gurus, their concept of God, their goal, their methodology and their approach to the empirical life.

Sikhism

Sikhism is a revelatory religion, and this claim is made by Guru Nanak himself, "O Lalo, I speak what the Lord commands me to convey."⁴ Other Gurus have also spoken similarly. In the Siddh Gost he says in reply to a question that his mission in life is, with the help of other godmen, to ferry persons across the turbulent sea of life.⁵ As to the Gurus' concept of God, it is recorded, "Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord. He is All Love; rest He is ineffable."⁶ He is also called the "Ocean of Values and Virtues", 'Benevolent', 'Gracious', 'Eyes to the blind' 'Milk to the Child', "Riches to the poor,"⁷ etc. He is interested in the world. For, "True is He. True is His creation;"⁸ "God created the world and permeated it with His light;"⁹ "God created the world of life and planted *Naam* in it; making it the place for righteous activity;"¹⁰ "it is the innermost nature of God to help the erring."¹¹

God being Love, it means He is Creative and Dynamic; second, he is the Fount of all values; third, He has' a direction or a Will; and, fourth, He is deeply concerned with the world, since Love can be expressed only in a becoming universe. For, the Guru says that when God was all by Himself, and the world was not there, the question of devotion or love or time could not arise. Further, it is because of his concept of a Loving

Divinity that Guru Nanak calls life a game of love, saying "If you want to play the game of love, come with your head on you palm."¹²

There are five clear corollaries of 'God is Love', and, life being a game of love. First, that the world is real, against its being *Mitthya*, a misery, or a suffering as in other Indian systems. The second corollary is that Sikhism involves a combination of the empirical life and the spiritual life of man. In other words it is a whole-life system, a *Miri-Piri* system whereunder man has to be both God-aware and Earth-aware. This is against the generally known life-negation of the Hindu systems. The third corollary is that the house-holder's life is accepted, and monasticism and *Sanyas* are rejected. For, "The spiritual path can be trodden not by mere words or talk, but by treating all alike. Yoga does not lie in living in cremation grounds, doing one-point meditation, or visiting places of pilgrimage, but by remaining God-centred and doing the affairs of the world."¹³ It is for this reason that Guru Nanak made Guru Angad, a house-holder, his successor, and by-passed his son, Baba Sri Chand, a recluse. The fourth corollary is that since God is working with His Altruistic Will in the world, the goal of life of the seeker and the *gurmukh* is not withdrawal, but to work actively according to God's Altruistic Will. 'One gets not to God by despising the world,'¹⁴ one gets liberated even while laughing and playing;¹⁵ 'the God-centred lives truthfully while a householder.'¹⁶ Hence the goal is not merger in Brahman, but an active life of the '*gurmukh*' 'living truthfully'. Such being the goal, Guru Nanak and the other Gurus prescribe a religious methodology of deeds. For, 'with God only the deeds one does in the world count;¹⁷ 'True living is living God in life;¹⁸ 'It is by Our deeds that we become near or away from God¹⁹; 'Good, righteousness, virtues and the giving up of vice are the ways to realise the essence of God²⁰; 'Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtue enable the seed of *Naam* (God) to sprout²¹; and 'everything is lower than Truth, but higher still is truthful living'. Guru Nanak was called a *gurmukh*, and how the Ten *gurmukhs*, lived, has been historically demonstrated by their 'truthful living.'

Next we come to the implications of the system of Guru Nanak defined above. Truthful living involves five responsibilities of the religious man. The first is to accept equality between man and woman, instead of considering her to be a temptress or an impediment in the religious path. In fact, considering the Position of woman in other religions, including Christianity, it is

a revolutionary implication of Guru Nanak's recommending the householder's path, and rejecting celibacy, which in other religions is an essential discipline for the seeker. The second implication is of accepting equality between man and man. It was a major blow to the system of *Varnashram dharma* and the allied concept of pollution. The Gurus have emphatically stated that the religious man must treat everyone equally. Guru Nanak by taking Mardana, a Muslim *Mirasi* as his life companion, took a great step against untouchability, caste system and the Muslims being considered *malechhas*. The institution of *Langar*, started by him, had also the same objective in view. The third implication of the Guru's system is work and production. Guru Nanak says: "The person incapable of earning his living, gets his ears split, (i.e. turns a Nath Yogi), and becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a guru or a saint. Do not look up to him nor touch his feet. He knows the way who earns his living and shares his earnings with others."²³ Hence work becomes an essential duty of the religious man. Up to the time of the Fifth Guru all the Gurus were married householders doing a profession or business. It is only when the organisation of militancy and confrontation with the Empire became an absorbing and hazardous duty, involving frequent movements and military clashes that the later Gurus remained wholly concerned with the work of the Sikh Movement. Fourth is the important implication of the sharing of wealth. The Guru says, "God's bounty belongs to all, but men grab it for themselves;"²⁴ 'Man gathers riches by making others miserable.'²⁵ 'Riches cannot be gathered without sin, but these do not keep company after death.'²⁶ Guru Nanak's acceptance of Lalo's invitation and rejecting that of Malik Bhago indicates his censure of exploitative living. The fifth implication is 'Guru Nanak's condemnation of injustice and oppression. He calls God 'The Destroyer of Evil-doers'²⁷ and also the 'Punisher of the Demonical.'²⁸ The hymns that He is 'Shelter to the shelterless'; and 'showers His grace where the weak are cared for,'²⁹ also indicate the same thing. Guru Nanak decried the rulers who were unable to provide security and safety to their subjects, and condemned the tyranny of the invaders. His complaint to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong, clearly means two things. First, that injustice and oppression are violative of the Order of God, and the other implication, equally clear, is that, as such, it is the duty of the man of religion to see

that injustice and oppression do not occur, and, if they do, the man of religion must individually and socially confront such injustice and oppression. Since large scale aggression and encroachments are always done by political groups or the State, hence the essential need of organising a society that should take up such challenges and resist injustice. The important fact is that the five implications of Guru Nanak's system mentioned above are not just paper directions. But in his system, these are the five responsibilities enjoined on the man of religion, and this is why Guru Nanak asks for total commitment, while giving the call for the game of love. Similar total commitment was indicated by the Fifth Guru, when he advised Bhai Manjh that he should better continue being a Sakhi Sarwaria, instead of being a Sikh, which involved a major risk both to his life and his wealth.³⁰ And, it is the same total commitment the Tenth Master asked for while selecting the Five Piyaras for administering Amrit. In Sikhism spiritual responsibilities and worldly responsibilities are combined inalienably, it being a *Miri-Piri* system.

It is in this context that the three uncommon steps, which Guru Nanak took, show the independence and radical nature of his system. The first step is the organisation of a Sangat or society at his own place and at every place he visited. Because Sikhism is not a salvation religion for a few individuals, but it is a whole-life system with socio-spiritual responsibilities both to God and man. The second uncommon feature was his starting the institution of succession. As the society he had organised, was only at the infant stage, and as its principles were entirely different from principles in vogue in the country, the motivation of his flock and its organisation into a well-knit society had naturally to take very long. The third step is his clear rejection of Ahimsa. He stated "Men discriminate not and quarrel over meat-eating. They do not know what is flesh and what is non-flesh, or in what lies sin and what is not sin."³¹ He also stated that life was in every grain of food. What he meant was to reject the seeming value or the piety of observing certain rituals or of religious prohibitions against meat-eating. Actually his particular definition of God as 'Destroyer of the Evil-doers' and the 'Demonical', mentioned above, also shows his rejection of Ahimsa. He explained all this because he envisaged his society to take up political challenges. This was also repeated by Guru Hargobind when he spoke to Sant Ramdas of Maharashtra,

saying that Guru Nanak never gave up this world, and that his sword was to protect the weak and destroy the tyrant.

So far as his whole-life thesis was concerned, it stood clearly explained in the *Bani* of Guru Nanak; and yet he started the system of succession indicating that his mission, as a whole, still required completion and for that reason continuance. In any case, the *Gum Granth*, the Scripture, had also been compiled by the Fifth Master, and yet the succession was continued, until the Tenth Master created the *Khalsa*, introduced the Nash doctrine of five freedoms from earlier religions, customs, lineage, taboos, etc.,³² and closed the institution of succession, obviously because the Sikhs had been well organised as a cohesive society, and which under Banda Singh brought about an unprecedented social revolution.

We do not want to go into the details how each Guru calculatedly enlarged, organised and motivated the Sikh society into a well-knit and responsible organisation. But we should like to state one fact as to how detailed was Guru Nanak's criticism of various evils in the contemporary society. He criticised the greed and hypocrisy of the priests, pandits and Mullahs, the corruption, injustice and blood-sucking practised by the officials of different levels in the administration, the discriminatory and high-handed misrule, oppression and tyranny of the rulers, the barbarity and brutality of the invaders, etc. There was hardly any dark spot in the religious or the socio-political life of his times which he did not point out. His criticism meant two things. First, that faults in empirical life were the concern of the religious man, and, second, that their rectification was also the moral responsibility of the spiritual man. Guru Nanak's criticism was not idle rhetoric. The contrast between his criticism and point of view, and the approach of a religious man like Saint Augustine, one of the greatest exponents of the Christian Gospel and theology and the author of *City of God*, is clear from the following observation of Bertrand Russell: "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned not with saving of civilisation, or expelling the Barbarians, or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merits of virginity and the damnation of the unbaptised infants. Seeing that these were the occupations that the Church handed on to the converted Barbarians, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition."³³ The contrast between the concerns

of Guru Nanak, a *gurmukh* of a *Miri-Piri* system, and the interests of a pious theologian from a pacifist system, is too obvious to need further comments. The spiritual experience and the concept of the Ultimate Reality of the founding prophet, forms the bedrock, on which are based the goal, the methodology, the ethics and the doctrines of a system. A brief outline of the essentials of Sikh Monotheism has been given above. Hereafter follows a corresponding description of Vaishnavism and Vedanta.

Vaishnavism

It is generally accepted that Bhagwatism arose as a non-Vedic cult³⁴ which, for the first time, was included in the Hindu Complex, as an alternative mode of *Moksha* in the *Bhagwad Gita* which is admittedly an eclectic compilation.³⁵ The system is ritualistic, and involves (i) visit to the temple, (ii) selection of material for worship, (iii) salutation and resorting to the feet of Hari, and (iv) surrender of the soul with devotion.³⁶ It is significant that this Bhakti is entirely ritualistic, without any reference to socio-moral conduct. Second, it was accepted only as an alternative mode of *Moksha*, and was given a lower priority. *Bhagwad Gita* does not prescribe a unified system. Apart from the different modes of *Moksha* being unintegrated into any unified whole, the metaphysical position is also incongruous, because the dualism of Yoga and the Pantheism of Upanishads, exist side by side with the concept of Vedic ritualism and mysticism.³⁷ It is believed that the *Gita* was more concerned in bringing variant systems within the Hindu fold than with their integration into a systematic rational whole; and that the permission of *Shudras* and women to the path of devotion was allowed because Buddhists had allowed them to their monasteries without discrimination.³⁸ This is supported by the fact that the *Gita* gives full sanction to the discriminatory rigidity of the caste system. It says that Lord created the four Varnas with their separate specified duties; and that it is more meritorious to do, even though inefficiently, the duties of one's Own caste, than to do, even though efficiently, the duties of another caste. "Congenital duty, O, son of Kunti, though defective, ought not be abandoned."³⁹ "On the one hand we purify our minds by non-attachment, and yet, on the other hand, We continue to perform all the ritualistic and other duties belonging to our particular caste or stage of life, i.e., the

prescribed stages of Four Ashrams."⁴⁰ In the *Bhagwad Gita* and the system of Ramanuja, Bhakti meant only Upasana and just meditation with a contemplative union with God as the goal. This Bhakti does not involve any devotional or personal love.⁴¹ The duties prescribed are just those of one's caste or profession. Any mobility in choosing professions is barred. In the social field caste ideology was supreme. Arjun was induced to take up arms, because that was his caste duty as a Kshatriya. It has been the duty of kings to keep Brahman advisers, maintain the caste order, and do justice according to caste rules.⁴²

Later arose the theory of Avtaarhood meaning that God incarnated Himself in order to save man. This doctrine is a Vaishnava contribution. It is believed that, as in the case of eclectic *Bhagwad Gita*, the doctrine of Avtaarhood was only a way of absorbing heterodox and variant cults, by declaring their gods to be the incarnations of Vishnu.⁴³ Accordingly, founders of even Dualistic systems like Sankhya and Jainism, Kapila and Rsabha, respectively, were declared Avtaras. While this doctrine helped the absorption of heterodox creeds, and made the new entrants to accept the authority of Vedas and the Brahmanical ideology of the caste, it could evidently not make for the development of a coherent or unified religious or metaphysical system, prescribing an integrated methodology or goals.

The next phase in Vaishnavism is the period of Sandilya and Bhagwat Purana. Alwar saints appeared in the South, and saints like Tukaram, Ramanand, Mirabai, Chaitanya and others, arose in the West, North and East of India. Dr. Tara Chand believes that this development took place, quite often in the lower sections of Hindu society, following the influence and impact of Islam, which was non-hierarchical. Although there are many exponents of Vaishnavism like Nimbarka, or Madhava who is a dualist, Ramanuja, the author of Vashist Advaita, is considered to be the best of them. His system is Pantheistic, Brahman being both manifest and unmanifest. The individual souls and the material world are considered the body or the attributes of Brahman.⁴⁴ He accepts the presence of *Ahankara* and explains human activity virtually on the basis of Dualistic Sankhya. *Ishwara* exists in five forms, (i) as Narayana or Paravasudeva, wearing jewels and ornaments, he lives in Vaikuntha on a throne, surrounded by Sesa (the Serpent), as Garuda and other delivered souls, (ii) as in four forms including that of Vasudeva to enable men to worship him, (iii) as in the

Avtaras, Lord Rama, Fish, Tortoise, Swan and others, (iv) as soul of each being when it goes to heaven or hell, and (v) as in the idols kept in the houses. Souls are of three kinds: (i) eternal souls like that of Garuda, (ii) the delivered souls, and (iii) the bound ones.⁴⁵

The Bhakti is integrated with ritualism and Jnanayoga, which are its essential components. Ramanuja considers Vedic ritualism and Brahm Vidya of Upanishads as of equal validity, so much so that ritualistic acts have to be practised even by a Jnani. This Bhakti is open only to the three higher castes. To *Shudras* only the system of surrender or *Prapati* is open.⁴⁶ The caste ideology and ideas of pollution, are accepted and practised. Brahmans only can be priests for idol worship. The concept of pollution is so important that if while cooking or eating one's food, another person casts a glance on it, the entire food has to be thrown away.⁴⁷ Celibacy is recommended and women are considered sin-born. They are, therefore neither admitted as Vaishnavas nor to the study of Vedas.⁴⁸

In Bhagvat Purana nine modes of worship are suggested, which are all ritualistic, like listening to the praise of God, repeating the name of God, image worship, etc., without any socio-moral activity. Padma Purana prescribes seven modes of worship, (i) imprinting of marks on the body and forehead, (ii) repeating *mantras*, (iii) drinking water used for the feet of the idol, (iv) eating food offered to the idol, (v) service of the devotees, (vi) fasting on designated days of the lunar month, and (vii) laying tulsi leaves at the feet of the idol.⁴⁹

Both Vallabha and Chaitanya accept Bhakti as the sole mode of *Moksha*. In Vallabha's system the modes of worship are all formal, like singing the praises of God, Aarti, image worship, etc. Householder's life is allowed, but the devotee visits the temple of the Guru for worship of the idol at fixed intervals.⁵⁰ For Chaitanya, Bhakti is extremely emotional, involving ecstatic dancing and singing. His devotees were from all castes and creeds, including Muslims. But, the followers, except for Bairagis, observed the caste system, regarding cooking and other matters. The spiritual teachers are celibates.⁵¹

It is necessary to state that Karma yoga meant ritual acts and not so do-moral deeds.⁵² Because of general insistence on celibacy, socio-moral activity is virtually excluded. Maitra who made a detailed study of the ethics of all Hindu systems, writes

that a common feature of the doctrine of the ideal life, is "the conception of the ideal as a negation or atleast as a transcendence of the empirical life proper and that this 'state is thus a supermoral spiritual ideal rather than a strictly moral idea."⁵³ "It is a transcendental state of deliverance from all struggles of life."⁵⁴

In sum, Vaishnavism has seven fundamentals. Its scriptures, as of all Hindu systems, are the Vedas and Upanishads. Second, it accepts the doctrine of Avtaarhood. Third, the ideology of caste is accepted fully as also the concept of pollution. Fourth, the methodology of worship or devotion is formal, ritualistic, contemplative, or intensely emotional, without any reference to socio-moral activity. Hooper, who has made a detailed study of Alwar saints, says that moral character is hardly a strong feature of their Bhakts⁵⁵ Fifth, the entire approach is other-worldly, and for liberation from the tangles of life. Consequently, except in the case of Vallabha, celibacy is the rule, and the position of woman is distinctly downgraded, being considered a temptress. Ramanuja denies Vedic studies to women. They were not allowed to become nuns. Shankradeva, a liberal saint, says, "Of all the terrible aspirations of the world, woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of celebrated sages. Her sight destroy prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this, the wise keep away from the company of women."⁵⁶ This saint did not allow women to join the religious functions of men. It is stated that he was interested only "in establishing religious freedom and fellowship rather than a social overhaul. The trouble about the improvement of social conditions, perhaps, deemed to him as little profitable." Seventh, Ahimsa is prescribed as a cardinal rule for all Vaishnavas. Eighth, the goal is union with or merger in God or Brahman. The *Jivan Mukta* has no role to play in life, although ritualistic duties are prescribed until the end of one's days. In Hinduism the sexual or Tantric method is accepted as an alternative system of *Moksha*, and a saint like Ram Krishana⁵⁷ also accepts its validity .

Vedanta

Basically Upanishadic thought is the Vedantic thought. This system is mainly opposed to the earlier Vedic ritualism (Purva Mimansa). But in itself it is very variant. It can form the basis of Pantheism, Monism, Materialism, etc., i.e. of the world being the

emanation of Brahman, the world being just illusory and Brahman alone being real, etc.⁵⁸ Philosophers like Shankra, Ramanuja, Madhava, Nimbarka and others, have all given divergent interpretations of the Upanishads. Upanishadic thoughts were not meant to be a religious system. These comprise teachings meant only for a small section most of whom had withdrawn to the seclusion of the forest. The search was for an intuitional and mystic experience of unity with Brahman, with the knowledge of which everything became known. The fundamental reality is not personal, like God of theists to whom one prays with devotion and love. Hence the concepts of "That thou art", "I am Brahman", of Katha Upanishad, "He who perceives diversity in this world, suffers the death of all deaths", and of Brahman alone being real, the rest being false and illusory.⁵⁹ Upanishads being speculative, contained divergent and contradictory thoughts without any attempt to reconcile them. The methodology is primarily meditational with the ideal of four Ashramas, the last two ashramas being basically other-worldly and ascetic, involving disconnection with the delusive secular life.⁶⁰ The final achievement is the result of one's own efforts and not the gift of God or His grace. The *Jivan mukta* has no role to play and is indifferent to all activity, good or bad.⁶¹ For, he transcends the condition of worldly existence. Later, the authors of the Upanishads also accepted the validity of Vedic ritualism and its social commands regarding caste. As such, they have become a component of the overall Vedic system, and have got scriptural sanctity as a limb of the Vedas. This background of the various Upanishada has to be kept in view in understanding Vedanta. Hiriyantha writes, "The diversity of teaching noticed in connection with theoretical teaching of the Upanishada has its reflex in their means of achieving it."⁶² For example, "One Upanishad alone mentioning three such different means of attaining immortality-devotion to truth, penance, and Vedic study and ascribing them to three specific teachers."⁶³ Second, the Upanishads and the sanctioned social system of the period gave clear approval to the caste system. The Chandogya writes, "The wicked are born again as outcastes, dogs or swine."⁶⁴ The Brihadaranyaka (VI. 2, 15-16) gives a similar account. Evidently, the Upanishadic system, although other-worldly and meditational, accepts the ritualism and the caste ideology of the Vedas. We have briefly indicated the views of Ramanuja and his

Vashist Advaita. We give hereafter the Vedanta of Shankra, which is the most popular Vedantic system.

Shankra and his predecessors Gaudapada pursue the line of thought in the Upanishads which considers world to be just *Mithya* (illusion), and Brahman alone to be real. Gaudapada writes, "The manifold universe does not exist as a form of reality, 'nor does it exist of itself." "Having attained to non-duality one should behave in this world, like an insensible object."⁶⁵ According to Shankra, all diversity is false (*Mithya*). Therefore to work while accepting the phenomenal existence of the world is sheer Avidya. The goal is to realise the truth of Brahman alone being real. *Ishwara* and individual souls are parts of Brahman. Man is ignorant, since he fails to realise that all change in the world is without meaning or validity. This denies the very basis of all socio-moral life. Shankra says, "I am not born. How can there be either birth or death for me ? I am neither male nor female, nor am I sexless. I am the blessed peaceful one who is the only cause of origin and dissolution of the world."⁶⁶ Change in the world is due to Maya which is neither real nor unreal, nor related to Brahman. The methods of devotion or worship are considered fruitless, the goal being the Absolute and not Saguna Brahman, God or *Ishwara*, which is a lower stage to be transcended by the Jnani. The path of devotion, he says, is for persons of narrow or poor intellect.⁶⁷ As he cannot deny the scriptural character of the Vedas, he says that the path of ritualism or sacrifices is prescribed out of compassion for persons of low or average intellect, and it can gain for them only heaven.⁶⁸ As in Sankhya yoga, withdrawal from the illusory adjuncts of Maya is suggested. Starting with Vairagya and dissociation with the world, the mystic achievement can be made only as a Sanyasin, giving up all works good or bad, and as one who is unwilling to accept even the grace of God. The methodology is of Vedic study, reflection and meditation. The goal is to realise, 'I am Brahman, (*Aham Brahm asmi*).'⁶⁹ It is an intellectual realisation accompanied by *Anubhava*. The *Jivan mukta* has no role to play in life.⁶⁹ Swami Sivananda writes about the modern Jnanis, Kalkotswami and Mowni Swami, saying that they "were unconscious of the movement of their bowels, and the Sevakas had to wash their bottoms."⁷⁰ Such a *Videhi mukta* "whose individuality is absolutely merged in Brahman, cannot have the awareness of the world which is nonexistent to him. If his body is to be maintained, it has to be fed

and cared for by others, the *Videhi mukta* is thus not in a position to engage himself for the good of the world.⁷¹ Selfrealisation breaks the chain of causation and the world appears false to him. Even the idea of God being of a lower level, has finally to be transcended. For, "God is only the most subtle, most magnificent, most flattering false impression of all in this general spectacle of erroneous self-deception."⁷²

Evidently, celibacy is recommended and Shankra calls women to be the 'gateway to hell.'⁷³

Classification

In the above background, we should like to give a broad classification of the different religious systems of the world. First, is the category of religious systems, including practically all Indian systems, except Sikhism. They are dichotomous in the sense that the paths of spiritual life and the empirical life are separate. The two Hindu systems outlined above, belong to this class. In them monasticism, asceticism, pacificism, Sanyasa, celibacy, downgrading of women, caste ideology in the social life, and Ahimsa are normal features. For that reason, they are considered life-negating, socio-moral activities, as concluded by Maitra, being irrelevant and of no consequence. The goal is merger in Brahman or the realisation 'I-am Brahman'. Metaphysically, these systems are either pantheistic or monistic.

To the second category, belongs Christianity. It is a lifeaffirming system, but accepts pacificism, monasticism, celibacy and nunneries as a valid path of spiritual life. To that extent there is dichotomy in Catholic Christianity. Women are still not ordained as priests. Life participation is accepted, but the Sermon on the Mount prescribes non-resistance or pacificism. It is a Theism, accepting participation in life and calls God Love. But, because of the appearance of monasticism and celibacy, it has, like dichotomous systems, become a salvation religion, more especially after the coming up of Science and Technology, when Secularism has become supreme in the empirical life. The religion is exclusive in the sense that salvation can be sought only through Christ.

To the third category, belong the whole-life and *Miri-Piri* systems of Judaism and Islam. Prophet Moses and Prophet Mohammad were simultaneously spiritual and political leaders. In both the systems organisation of the social life and the religious society are accepted as the duties and responsibilities of the religious man. Similarly, the use of force for a

righteous cause is also sanctioned. But, in both these religions, in the later part of their history, pacificism, monasticism, asceticism, withdrawal from life and even celibacy, have appeared forming separate sects of these religions, like Essenese, Kaballists, etc., in the former case, and different *Silsilas* or sects of Sufis in the latter case. This has led to dichotomous tendencies in the life of these otherwise whole-life or *Miri-Piri* religions. Besides, both these religions are exclusive.

To the fourth category belongs Sikhism. It is a whole-life or a *Miri-Piri* system, involving participation in life and total socio-political responsibilities. In addition, it has three other features. By prescribing the *Kirpan* as a part of the wear of Sikhs two things have been emphasized by the Tenth Master. First, that the Sikh should not at any time forget his social responsibility concerning injustice and oppression. The *Kirpan* as a *Hukamnama* of the Guru reminds him of the history and tradition created by the Gurus regarding the social responsibilities of the Sikh society. Second, the *Kirpan* stands as a warning that in Sikhism the paths of withdrawal, pacificism or monasticism are considered invalid. The point is clarified by the fact that the Sufis never organised a resistance against the tyrannical rule of the times, although some of them did side with the Gurus; and it was left to the Sikh Gurus to confront the misrule of the Empire. Its two other features relate to its universalism. For, the Guru prays to God to help the troubled world by any means, He may be Gracious enough to do. Second, it is Guru Nanak who says that his mission is, with cooperation of other Godmen, to ferry men across the troubled sea of life.⁷⁴ Hence the above four clear categories, each one of which has many of its essentials quite distinct from those of the other three.

Conclusion

We have stated that the fundamental that determines the essential principles of a religious system, is the spiritual experience of the Prophet, Saint or Seer, and his vision of the Ultimate Reality. In the case of Hindu systems, especially in Vedanta, the Reality is *Sat-Chit-Anand*. It is thus a quietist concept of tranquility, peace, truth and bliss. As against it, in the concept of the Gurus, God is Love and Ocean of Values. This shows that He is Dynamic and Creative, Source of Values, a God of Will giving direction to the World, and a benevolent

Enlightener. This determines for the seeker, who is to carry out His Altruistic Will, total responsibility in all walks of life, God's domain being unlimited. The distinction about the Fundamental Reality, we have indicated, is real, and not just argumentative. For, this is the fundamental cause of difference between dichotomous religions mentioned above and the life-affirming religions like Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. Stace has tabulated the spiritual experience of mystics from the world over. He records blessedness, tranquility, holiness, unitary consciousness, etc., as the features of their experience.⁷⁵ Similarly, William James also records that experience to be passive, noetic, ineffable, transient, and unitary in consciousness.⁷⁶ Neither of them states 'Love' as the feature of that religious experience. Bergson, too, in his statement about the ultimate mystic experience calls 'love' to be the principal feature; the other or quietist experiences, he thinks, do not constitute the final achievement of the mystic path; and it is for that reason that such mystics are not fully creative and life-affirming. For him, the test of such experience is that for mystics having the summit experience, the love of God is transformed into God's love for all beings in the shape of their activities and functioning.⁷⁷ That is the reason that the parable of Abu Ben Adam is a model in a whole-life religion like Islam. That the distinction is not artificial, has also been stressed by Aldous Huxley. He writes, "The Indians say, the thought and the thinker and the thing thought about are one, and then of the way in which this unowned experience becomes something belonging to me; then no me any more and a kind of *Sat-Chit-Anand*, at one moment without *Karuna* or charity (how odd that the Vedantists say nothing about Love)... I had an inkling of both kinds of *nirvana*-the loveless being, consciousness, bliss, and the one with love, and above all sense that one can never love enough."⁷⁸ "Staying in this ecstatic consciousness and cutting oneself off from participation and commitment to the rest of the world-this is perfectly expressed today, in powerful slang, in the phrase "dropping out". It completely denies the facts; it is morally wrong; and finally, of course, absolutely catastrophic."⁷⁹ "Absolutely Catastrophic." Love and Work-if I should put in a nutshell the essence of Aldous's life. I could not find a more precise way of saying it," writes his wife.⁸⁰ What needs emphasis is the fundamental difference between the spiritual experience of the Gurus and that of the Hindu mystics-cum-philosophers. It

is because of this basic difference that one system becomes dichotomous, involving the separation of the empirical life from the religious life, with its features of monasticism, asceticism, Sanyasa, celibacy and Ahimsa, in the spiritual life, and the discriminatory and hierarchical caste structure in the empirical life; and the other system becomes whole-life, sanctioning moral activity and total responsibility in the empirical life as outlined earlier.

Guru's God is both transcendent and immanent, Sargun and Nirgun⁸¹ as against the Vedantic concept of Brahman being higher than the concept of *Ishwara* or God, unrelated to the delusive world. Third, following from the above, in one case life is real, and in the other case it is *Mithya* and an entanglement. Fourth, as against monasticism, asceticism, withdrawal and Sanyasa, a householder's life is accepted. Fifth, against the recommendation of celibacy and woman being considered a temptress, she is regarded as the equal of man and the mother of all life⁸². Sixth, against Ahimsa, the use of force for a righteous cause, as a last resort, is accepted. It is no accident that of the Ten Gurus, five kept armies, organised militarisation and confrontation with the Empire. Thus, the prescribing of the *Kirpan* as an essential wear for the Sikhs is just logical and natural in a whole-life system, recommending total social responsibility. Hence also the warning given through the *Kakka* of *Kirpan* against diversion or reversion to pacifism or monasticism ignoring social responsibility towards one's fellow beings, cardinal essential in a whole-life system. Seventh, the goal of life is to carry out the Altruistic Will of God⁸³, involving creative activity, as against merger in Brahman or realization of 'I-am Brahman'. Eighth, the methodology of virtuous deeds and an active moral life of securing justice and equality is recommended as against ritualism, reflection, contemplation or meditation alone, involving a super-moral ethics, and not a moral ethics as in a whole-life system.

Hence there is a complete contrast between the world views of Vedanta and Vaisnavism, on the one hand, and of Sikhism, on the other hand. Sikhism, we may say, accepts the "idea that specifically designated organised bands of men should play a creative part in the political world destroying the established order and reconstructing society according to the Word of God."⁸⁴ It believes, as observed by Collingwood. "The discovery of a relation is at once the discovery of my thought as

reaching God, and of God's thought as reaching me; and indistinguishable from this, the performance of an act of mine by which I establish a relation with God, and an act of God by which he establishes a relation with me. To fancy that religion lives either below or above the limits of reflective thought is fatally to misconceive either the nature of religion or the nature of reflective thought. It would be nearer the truth to say that in religion the life of reflection is concentrated in its intensest form, and that the special problems of theoretical and practical life, all take their special forms by segregation out of the body of the religious consciousness, and retain their vitality only so far as they preserve their connection with it, and with each other in it."⁸⁵ The Gurus state that unless man reaches the fourth stage of evolution or of *gurmukh*, whose consciousness is linked to the Universal Consciousness or Will, man's problems of conflict, poverty, immorality, and war would continue. It is stated, "God created first Himself, then *Haumain* (a sense of individualism), third, *Maya* (multifarious beings and entities) and at the fourth higher stage is *gurmukh*, who always lives truthfully."⁸⁶ Thus, Sikhism is a system of hope, activity and optimism about the future of man, with willingness to cooperate with other religions, while accepting God's graciousness in creating other paths as well.

Our analysis of the three systems reveals that the world-views of the Hindu systems, namely, Vaishnavism and Vedanta, are entirely different, if not in some sense diametrically apart, from that of Sikhism. Their religious perceptions are different, and consequently their goals, methodologies, approach to the world, ethics, and world-views are entirely different. One belongs to the class of dichotomous and salvation systems, and the other belongs to a whole-life or *Miri-Piri* system in which the Gurus have particularly guarded the society from becoming a monastic, pacifist, or life-negating system.

In this context, we fail to find any relevance, meaning, or validity of Khushwant Singh's observation that Sikhism is a sect or an offshoot of Hinduism, with a common theology, and with nine-tenths of *Guru Granth Sahib* being Vedantic in essence. It is well known that neither Shankra, nor any Jnani, nor a *Videhi Mukta* would ever, contemplate participation in the world which is non-existent for him and which activity they consider delusive and a fall. We hope that learned Khushwant Singh would concede that Guru Arjun who created a 'state within a state' and

the following five Gurus, who started militarisation and confrontation with the Empire, well understood the *Bani* of Guru Nanak and of the other Gurus. Guru Tegh Bahadur, whose *Bani* is also in the Guru Granth, himself distinguished as a soldier, and for that reason was called Tegh Bahadur. It is he who clearly spurned the offer of the Emperor that if he gave up socio-political activities, or organising what he considered to be 'Millat and a consequent rebellion', and confined himself to prayers and preaching, he would get official grants. For, in the perception of the Mughal Administration, the "Guru was moving around with his disciples, quite intoxicated with pride, with a view to revolt."⁸⁸ But, in the Master was burning bright the same Light of spirituality, the same Spirit of Saint Soldier as in Guru Nanak. Only because of our personal prejudices and predilections human perceptions vary.

Ideologically, the *Sant Sipahi* or whole-life concept is based on the view that cultures that fail to provide for moral moorings, which can be supplied only by religion, so as to enable the society to meet the challenges of the destructive and aggressive forces of life, inevitably decay into dichotomy, involving monasticism *Sanyasa* and other-worldliness as the path of salvation, and unbridled greed and injustice in the empirical life. It is for this reason that the inequity of the caste ideology could survive unchallenged for over three millennia in India. Similarly, even though Christianity and Christ were life-affirming, it is because of its pacificism and the exposition of its early theologians that made it other-worldly, dichotomous and a religion for the search of a life in heaven. For, Saint Augustine in his *City of God* clearly believed that the spread of Christianity would not "ensure political and economic improvement. The Earthy city of self-will would continue to exist amidst the rise and fall of states and empires."⁸⁹ It is this dichotomy that led to large scale massacres, ghettos and crusades in the early centuries of the Christian Rule, and Hitler and Stalin in our century.

We do not propose making any further comments and leave it to the readers to make their judgement on the issue of the independent ideological identity of Sikhism. It is not our intention, in any way, to misunderstand or misrepresent the two Hindu systems. For that reason we have, by and large, purposely confined our interpretation of those systems to what has been expounded by scholars from that society.

Lastly, one word more. It is essential to record that however honest and analytical may be the interpretation of a believer or of a non-believer in God or the Ultimate Reality, there will continue to be great differences between their views. King writes: "One general conclusion which I draw from a long study of critics, of which the above is a sketch, that it is most important to remember the personality and circumstances of the critic. In a Natural Science like Chemistry it may not be necessary to know anything about the human being who is writing. In any subject which entails human subjects the work must be put into a personal context. Accordingly, one feels every work of critical scholarship should have a government statutory warning that its consumption may be deleterious to the soul's health. If it is to do with religion, it should also have a statement of ingredients, including the religious standing of the writer. If he or she is a believer, it is necessary to know this, so that the critical reader can allow for bias. If he or she is not a believer, we should have some indication of that too, lest the disillusionment or enlightenment of a post-Christian, a post-Jew or post-whatever, should give the critic rosy coloured spectacles or a jaundiced outlook."⁹⁰ It is not our argument that non-believers, atheists or agnostics should not write about religion of their own society or about any other religion. But, we should like to stress that any attempt on the part of a non-believer to be dogmatic about a religion or its principles would be plain naivety.



CHAPTER XIII

THE IDEA OF FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SIKHISM

The question of freedom and necessity has been a difficult one in all religions or philosophic systems. It is our purpose here to give the Guru's views on the issue. The following points, we feel, will clarify it :

(a) As uncompromising theists, the Gurus obviously do not subscribe to any notion of materialism or mechanism. In their system, prayer, love and grace have a primary significance and place. These ideas *ipso facto* repudiate all notions about determinism or necessity.

(b) One of the greatest contribution of the Gurus is their idea of God being a Creator who, as God of Will and Attributes, is helping, in the world of men, an evolutionary movement towards a being who is God-centred. Let us try to elaborate and understand the significance of this concept.

The idea of determinism is only a logical abstraction from our daily experience of cause and effect. But we find that this idea of every effect being determined by a cause breaks pitifully when we carry the series of cause and effect backwards. We have perforce to come to a dead end, or to the First Cause. To this Causeless Cause or Un-created Creative Cause, the Guru gives the name of a Creator who has a Will. A Creator with a Will implies freedom on the part of the Self-created Creator to create. Otherwise, the very idea of a Creator with a Will would be a contradiction in terms. In other words God has a Free Will. God is a Being who is the Master of the ways of His functioning and we do not know them. He is Free. He is not determined by the laws of our world.

The Gurus envisage a clear process of evolution in this world of ours. Man, according to the Gurus, is the chief evolutionary being. He is not only conscious, but he is also self-conscious and has a clear capacity for discernment, reflection and deliberation., which is an attribute higher than that of other animals. In the *Guru Granth*, there is repeated persuasion to man to avail himself of this opportunity to become a God-centred being. "This alone is your opportunity; seek within," says Kabir, "you win, or lose. I have proclaimed this loudly in many ways."¹ "You have been given a human body; this is your opportunity to meet God."²

The very suggestion or persuasion to avail oneself of this opportunity implies a freedom and capacity on the part of man to do so. The Gurus indicate a clear movement from comparative determinism to Freedom taking place in this world. From apparently mechanistic matter, there appeared conscious life. Then appeared the self-conscious man with an increasing capacity for choice, deliberation and consequent freedom. And the final achievement is to be a God-centred man, the creative instrument of a Free God or a living centre of comparative freedom. Seen in this light, the Gurus envisage a distinct evolutionary movement from comparative necessity to freedom. The more a person is free and creative, for creation assumes freedom, the nearer is he to God. This is the yardstick with which the Gurus measure man and his progress.

(c) There is the moral argument which in a way is co-extensive with the argument of freedom. The Gurus call God as the Ocean of Attributes and Values and the True Judge. If everyone were governed by rigid determinism, the question of any moral assessment would not arise. In a deterministic world, words like true and false, right or wrong, good or bad, helpful or harmful, have no meaning; nor can words like "ought" and "ought not", "regret" and "happiness", "wisdom" and "folly", "just" and "unjust", have any significance in the case of man. These are never applied to the virtually determined and mechanistic world of matter. And, yet, the entire, mystic system of the Gurus is deeply moral and ethical in its content. God is called True One, Good, Just, Benevolent and Shelter of the shelterless. In the *Dharam Khand*, the Guru calls our world the very place of righteousness and all human assessment and approval being based on the character of man's deeds. If human actions are determined, they can hardly be called deeds, much less can they

have a moral character or be judged by the yard-stick of righteousness. No one can be morally assessed unless he has the freedom of choice which he exercises voluntarily. The Guru's entire emphasis is to persuade and exhort man to exercise the right choice. They blame man for his pain and frustrations since these follow from his wrong choice of deeds. The way out is to be moral and righteous, i.e. to be more free, responsible and creative. It is by this increasing choice of freedom and righteousness that man becomes God-centred, a synonym for release and freedom from comparative necessity and determinism.

(d) It would be necessary to state that the Gurus do not accept the doctrine of 'Karma', if it is to be understood in any fatalistic or deterministic sense. Their idea is of a creative God, with a Will and Purpose, Who is greatly concerned with the improvement and evolution of his creation and the imperfect beings. There are hymns in the *Guru Granth*, which clearly controvert deterministic *Karmic* doctrine by saying that, if 'Karma' is invariable, how did the first being inherit *Karma*, or who created *Karma* initially.³ You say, that body was made of five elements, from where were the elements created? You say that man is bound by his 'Karma', who empowered the 'Karma',⁴ "When there was no father, mother, body and 'Karma'; when you were not there, I was not there, what came from where? When there was no Veda and Shastra, from where did 'Karma' originate?"⁵ And then there is the basic idea of grace over-riding and controverting the doctrine of *Karma*. The ideas of creativity and growth are an integral part of the Gurus' view of God and morality. It is wrong to make distinctions, of caste, colour, high and low.⁶ If one sees God in all men, one becomes godly.⁷ We know right from wrong and yet fall into the well with torch in hand.⁸

The Gurus say distinctly that God creates man and leaves him free to decide things. Lord created the world and left it free to do as it will.⁹ "Good and bad deeds are adjudged in His Court. According to their deeds, some are near and some far (from God)."¹⁰ God assesses everyone according to his deeds.¹¹ "Man is blessed with the light of reason and discrimination."¹² "One has to account for every moment and suffer for his doings."¹³ "Walk on the straight path, otherwise you would receive a push."¹⁴ "The seeker discriminates between good and bad."¹⁵ "God creates the world and yokes everybody to his

task."¹⁶ "Earth is the true abode of righteousness. "¹⁷ "Serve God with a clean heart."¹⁸

All these utterances from the *Guru Granth* clearly envisage freedom on the part of man to make any decision he likes as to his deeds. Were man rigidly governed by his past, and the course of his present and future actions determined by what he had already done, all these exhortations to man to create his future would be without the importance and significance the Gurus attach to them. They evidently do not accept the validity of any karmic or deterministic law. Instead they pointedly stress the freedom of man to choose the course of his activities. It is only on this basis that all the above utterances of the Gurus can be explained.

True, there are sayings like "why blame another, it is our own doing that leads us astray."¹⁹ It is also true that the idea of "as you sow, so shall you reap."²⁰ is there; but all this only fortifies the principle of free will and moral responsibility of man. There is nothing in this to endorse a deterministic Karmic doctrine of traditional Brahmanism. The latter idea has been specifically refuted in the *Guru Granth*. The idea of "as you sow, so shall you reap", is just an appeal and exhortation to the rationality and limited sovereignty of man, so as to invoke his sense of initiative, responsibility and growth.

Another point needs clarification here. It has been stated by the Gurus that everything happens according to the Will of God. This is an assertion about the Omnipotence of God which is inherent in any theistic concept. It actually appears in all theistic religions like Islam and Christianity. The Quran says "His is the command and unto Him ye will be brought back." "Whom Allah Wills, he sendeth astray, and whom He Wills, He placeth on straight path." "Allah's is the final judgement." "Not a leaf falleth but He knoweth it."

Similarly, Jesus prays before his crucifixion, "Father, if You are willing, please take away this cup of horror from me, but I want Your Will, not mine." It only indicates that it is God's Will that is operative. God is the first and the last both in Christianity and Islam. God is Omnipotent. He being the sole Entity, the question of any other's will does not arise. His is the only Will. And yet in all theistic religions the emphasis on morality is primary. Unless man has the freedom and choice to make decisions, the question of man's responsibility and blame

for evil, or the very idea of sin, cannot arise and has no meaning. In fact, moral life is the only way to the spiritual achievement after which the superman's responsibility for moral life becomes doubly great. Therefore, it would be just naive to suggest that the concept of the Omnipotence of God and the primacy of God's Will lead to a deterministic movement and the negation of moral life. God's Will is moral, God being the Ocean of Attributes. As it is, nothing would be more contrary to the teachings in the Guru Granth, which lays repeated stress on righteous deeds. The entire responsibility for moral life is on man, because in Sikhism moral life and spiritual life are interrelated. The Guru says God created the world and left it free to do as it wills.
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Even from the last prayer of Jesus it is evident that Jesus could do his will but he did not want to escape the horror of crucifixion against God's Will. But he had the option which he exercised in favour of God's Will being done. Man has the choice to do his own will or that of God's. That is exactly the difference between a theistic system like Sikhism and a pantheistic or monistic system where man has no responsibility. This is illustrated by the story of a murderer and a sinner. After death, he was barred entrance into heaven by Indra because of his misdeeds. But the man's reply was that God being witness to all his deeds and having made him to do everything, he was blameless. The logic of the argument was accepted by Indra and he was admitted into Heaven. As against it, in Sikhism man is not only responsible for his deeds, but all his assessment is made by God on his righteousness or otherwise. In fact, this freedom of choice becomes the very basis of all moral life, man's assessment and his progress. In Sikhism, higher than Truth is truthful conduct, and thus the validity of the moral life forms the very fundamental tenet of the system. The concept of a God of Will is in no sense conflicting with the concept of the God of Attributes and Values and One who is Ever Creative. The Guru Granth repeatedly stresses the responsibility of man to choose good instead of evil. It says, "With torch in hand one falls in the well."²² We have both the freedom and the responsibility to be away from the well. It is the character of the choice we make that indicates the level of our growth and our sense of freedom and responsibility.

THE SIKH IDENTITY

Introductory

In order to understand the sovereignty and independence of the Sikh religion we shall discuss the subject under the following heads: (1) Spiritual experience and concept of God, (2) Ideology, (3) Class, (4) Scripture, and (5) *Panth* and Its Institutions. Since the subject of Sikh identity is very wide, only a brief reference to the various elements mentioned above, will be made.

Spiritual Experience and the Concept of God

It is significant that Guru Nanak clearly claims that he has a mission as ordained by God, "O Lalo, I say what the Lord commands me to convey."¹ This statement about their prophethood and mission has been made by the other Gurus as well, of course, the mission is the same as proclaimed by Guru Nanak. In describing the spiritual experience, the Gurus have unambiguously asserted the existence of the Fundamental Spiritual Reality, and its ineffability. Yet, they have described profusely the various attributes of God, social, political, ethical, metaphysical, etc. Three things they have repeatedly emphasized, first, that He is Unknowable, second, that He is the Source and Ocean of all values and virtues, and third, that He is All-Love: "Friends ask me; what is the mark of the Lord. He is All-Love; the rest He is ineffable."² These important characteristics described by the Gurus, stress the dynamic and creative character of God. Seen in the light of the Indian definition of *Sat-Chit-Anand*, and the characteristics tabulated by Stace³ and William James, this definition is clearly different in the sense that whereas the Guru's spiritual experience, the others indicate a sense of tranquility, blissfulness and

passivity.

It is not suggested that the Gurus deny the experience of blissfulness, but they highlight the dynamic aspect of that experience. In fact, the significant activities of the lives of the Gurus and the Sikh religion clearly bear the stamp of that spiritual experience. In this respect the Gurus also stress four aspects of their concept of God. First, that apart from being transcendent, He is also immanent; and being immanent, He is Creative and Directive, i.e., He has a Will. The second quality emphasized is that He is the Ruler, Protector and Sovereign (Rakba). The third attribute is His being the source of all values and virtues. And the fourth aspect emphasized is His interest in life and the universe. It is these principal attributes of God and the spiritual experience of the Gurus that give a new shape and identity to Sikhism and its life. Le., its dynamism and ethical activities.

Ideology

The chief elements of the Sikh ideology are based on the spiritual experience of the Gurus, as indicated above, and their definition of God. The subject may be dealt with under the following heads :

(a) Reality of World: The Gurus have repeatedly stressed the reality of the world. In fact, the very concept of God being Immanent in the world means the profound importance of the world and life. The Guru says: 'God created the world and permeated it with His Light.'⁴ Evidently, the universe in which God is immanent and is working with His Light, could neither be unreal, *Mitbya* or a suffering. So that is an important departure which Sikhism has made from the then existing Indian religions.

(b) Goal: The Gurus have already defined that God has a Will with which He works the world. This being so, Guru Nanak clearly lays down that the goal of life is to work in line with God's Altruistic Will. He rejects the path of ascetic silence and states that the human goal is to carry out or move according to the Will of God. Guru Nanak puts the question as to how to become a '*sachiara*' or True Man, and how to break the wall of falsehood (obstructing our vision)? Then he gives the answer, saying that the goal or the true path is to carry out the Will of God.⁵ This is also a very important departure from the goal prescribed in Indian religions, which is generally of merger in Brahman or extinction in the ocean of Nirvana or Brahman. This

very important departure from the goal in Indian systems, has great implications. For that reason, while it rejects the path of withdrawal and asceticism, it clearly prescribes a life of dynamic activity in accordance with the Attributive Will of God. It is because of this goal that the entire system of Sikhism is different from the other Indian religious systems, in which monasticism, celibacy, Ahimsa are accepted institutions. It is this contrast in goals that makes for the Sikh way of life being entirely different from the paths prescribed in other religions. The goal is so different that the Gurus have used the Semitic words 'hukm' and 'raza' to express their concept of this ideal.

(c) Methodology: The world being real, and the goal being to carry out the attributive Will of God, naturally this leads to a life of altruistic activities for the seeker. The Guru says that it is by our deeds that we are assessed by God.⁶ "It is by our deeds that we become away from or near to God."⁷ "Good, righteousness, virtues and the giving up of vice are the ways to realize the essence of God."⁸ Love, contentment, truth, humility and virtues enable the seed of *Naam* to sprout."⁹

"Everything is lower than truth; Higher is truthful living or conduct."¹⁰

In short, in Sikhism, according to the Gurus, it is by one's deeds and this character that one is judged by God.

(d) *Gurmukh* or the Ideal Man: We have already indicated the goal in Sikhism. Naturally, the ideal man is the one who lives God in life, and always carries out His Altruistic Will. In this regard the Gurus have indicated two concepts, one of *manmukh* and the other of *gurmukh*. *Manmukh* is the egoistic man who being unconscious of the universal Will of God, lives and works egoistically. The Gurus have clearly stated that man's problems and maladies, all arise from his egoism and selfish living. Clash, conflicts and wars in life arise, because at the present level of consciousness or our existence, we neither comprehend nor accept the universal character of life and the brotherhood of man. It is this egoistic living that brings us into conflict with other beings. The Gurus do not accept or assume any concept of fall, evil or Satan in life. They only state that at the present stage of development man is egoistic and for that matter imperfect. They prescribe the methodology, as mentioned above, of altruistic deeds, that alone can make for his spiritual progress. They clearly lay down a message of hope, right effort

and progress; "O man you are superior in God's creation; now is your opportunity. You may fulfil or not fulfil your destiny."¹¹ "You have obtained the privilege of human birth; now is your opportunity to meet God."¹² "God created first Himself, then Haumain (sense of individuation), third, Maya. (multifarious beings and entities), and the fourth higher stage is of *gurmukh* who always lives truthfully."¹³

This concept of *manmukh* and *gurmukh* is fundamental to the understanding of Sikh theology. The Gurus have emphasized three things. First, that at the present stage of development man is egoistic and all his problems of conflict, clash and suffering are due to his ignorant and egoistic living. But they, on that account, neither curse man nor life, rather they hold out hope for man saying that by living a life of virtuous deeds and accepting the universal character of God they can not only alleviate their suffering, but also make for spiritual progress towards their destiny. The third important thing is that the fourth stage of *gurmukh* is not of a man who merges in God, but it is of a *gurmukh* who always lives truthfully. Hence the fourth stage of *gurmukh* is of one who continuously carries out the altruistic Will of God. And God being the Protector of the weak, the Destroyer of the evil-doers¹⁴ and the demonical¹⁵, the *Sachiara*, or the *gurmukh* always participates fully in life and accepts total social responsibility. His sphere of functioning is as wide as the domain of God and no aspect of life is taboo for him. In short, he accepts all challenges of life, and seeks to solve them altruistically. Therefore, the Gurus prescribed for the *gurmukh* an ideal of *Sant-Sipahi*. This concept follows clearly and logically from the spiritual experience of the Gurus, their definition of God and their theology as mentioned above. As God is the Protector of the weak, Just (*Adli*) and Destroyer of the evil-doer, and this being His Will, acting and directing in the universe, the *gurmukh* as the instrument of God must inevitably follow that spiritual course. Hence this ideal of *Sant-Sipahi*, while in perfect consonance with the thesis of the Gurus, is entirely different, and in certain respects, diametrically opposed to some of the principal elements of the earlier religious systems. Accordingly, in no manner can the independent character of Guru Nanak's ideology be doubted or confused with any other identity or religious system.

Class

As following from the spiritual experience of the Gurus and their theology, is determined the class or category of Guru Nanak's system. Broadly, we may classify religious systems into four classes. First is the category of Indian systems which are dichotomous in the sense that logically the spiritual path is different from the empirical path. Therefore, in dichotomous systems monasticism, asceticism, Sanyas and withdrawal are prescribed as a part of their religious methodology. The second corollary of these systems or Sanyasa is that involvement in the world is a distraction and virtually a fall. The third corollary is that celibacy is a virtue and for that matter householder's life is generally discarded and woman is considered to be a temptress. The fourth corollary is that Ahimsa or pacificism is an integral"virtue. It is because of this dichotomy between the spiritual and the empirical lives, we believe, that the highly discriminatory and unfair system of caste, untouchability and pollution has continued to be a part of the Indian empirical life. The second category of systems includes Judaism and Islam, which are whole-life systems, because in these, spiritual life and empirical life are combined. But both these systems have two other features. One, they are both exclusive in their character. Second, in both of them in the later part of their history, monasticism and asceticism have appeared and been accepted. This happens in the form of Essenes, Kabbalists, etc. in the case of Judaism, and various sects of Sufism in the case of Islam. To the third category of systems belongs Christianity, which although it accepts involvement in life, strictly prescribes non-resistance to evil, and pacificism. Probably on this account, in Christianity, which was originally a householder's religion, later appeared monasteries and nunneries. It is for the same reason that later still the institutions of secularism and communism have arisen in the Western life, involving thereby a virtual dichotomy between the religious life and the empirical life.

To the fourth class of religious systems, belongs Sikhism. While like Judaism and Islam, it is a whole-life system, it is free from their other two features, namely, of exclusiveness and of accepting monasticism and withdrawal as a part of their religious system. In Sikhism, on the other hand, both these features have been rejected. Sikhism discards monasticism, asceticism and withdrawal. This rejection was made clear both by Guru

Nanak in not allowing Baba Sri Chand to be his successor, and by the subsequent Gurus by excluding Sanyasis and ascetics from the Sikh fold. Obviously, a whole-life system with the concept of *Miri* and *Piri* and the ideal of *Sant-Sipahi*, could not in any manner countenance the presence of recluses and Sanyasis as a part of their flock. For the same reasons, both celibacy and the downgrading of women, were emphatically rejected. Nor could a *Miri-Piri* system accept Ahimsa as a virtue or a part of its religious ethics. Further, the importance of work and sustaining life was clearly recommended, and yogic aloofness condemned. For similar reasons caste ideology was rejected since it militated against the Gurus' basic principle of fairness and brotherhood of man. Lastly, in order to give a clear and visible shape to his new ideology, the Sixth Master created the institution of Akal Takhat at the same place as Harmandir Sahib with separate flags representing *Miri* and *Piri*. An important feature signifying this combination is that the Sixth Master wore two *kirpans* meaning thereby an integral unity of spiritual and empirical life in the Sikh system. Because *Piri* was represented by a Kirpan as much as *Miri* was done. It is significant that in Nathism, which was a very old system, quite alive in the Punjab, the Nath had to take vows for remaining celibate, for not doing any work or business, and for strictly observing Ahimsa.¹⁶ Although these recluses did to an extent accept the validity of the caste system and the Hindu gods, Guru Nanak categorically rejected all these features, and organised a whole-life system of householders participating" in all walks of life and remaining socially responsible.

Another important fact which generally goes unnoticed is that the Tenth Master in prescribing the wearing of Kirpan for the Sikhs clearly reminds him of his duty against aggression and tyranny, and warns him against any relapse into a monastic or ascetic system of withdrawal from life. Hence in every respect and in the essentials of its theology, Sikhism belongs to a class of systems quite apart and independent in its ideology. For, Guru Nanak and the succeeding Nine Masters dearly demonstrated in their lives what Sikhism stood for and how it was to be lived in a manner emphatically different from not only the Indian systems but also from the three Semitic systems, current in his times. In fact, dear direction was given to see that features that had appeared in some of the earlier whole-life systems did not creep in Sikhism at some later stage. All this shows how clear were the Sikh Gurus in their vision and about

the independence and sovereignty of their system and the mission they were to pursue.

Scripture

Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture, is the most emphatic pronouncement about the distinct and independent identity of Sikhism. Apart from being the embodiment of the words or *Shabad* of the Gurus, and for that matter of the commandments of God and the Sikh doctrines, and being final in every respect, it is the living guide of the Sikhs and has been so apothecated by the Tenth Master. The phenomenon of Sikh Scripture is unique in the annals of religious history of man. In the case of every other religion its scripture was compiled decades, and mostly centuries, after the prophet had left the physical scene. In all these cases numerous problems of authenticity, textual accuracy and advertant additions and interpolations, have arisen, thereby creating many controversies, both among the faithful and the scholars. In fact scholarly debate has arisen in Christianity as to whether or not Christ wanted to initiate a new religion or intended only to reform Judaism. But the step taken by the Fifth Master makes its absolutely clear that the Gurus had a new thesis to give, entirely different from the earlier ones, and for that matter, it required a separate and authentic compilation. By this important measure, the Master eliminated all possibilities of attendant controversies that had arisen in the Case of other religions. Secondly, it made it equally explicit that in its message the Scripture was final and complete. And the Tenth Master, while stopping the line of human succession to the Guruship, made it clear what the position of the *Guru Granth* is in the Sikh religion. The Gurus thus created a tradition that not a word could be altered nor any line added to the *Guru Granth*. The story about Ram Rai, Guru's own son, and other similar incidents make it clear how particular the Gurus were in maintaining and securing the authenticity of the *Bani* (*Shabad*) and how sacred they felt to be its character as the vehicle of Truth.

In this context, one fact is very significant. In the presence of the existing position on the *Guru Granth* neither can there be an alteration in the Sikh thesis, nor can any saint or person, while claiming to be a Sikh, attempt to create any deviation or schism in the Sikh society. It is in this background that one can understand the activities and writings of two writers of long

association with a Christian Mission in Punjab, in making unfounded and misleading statements about the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir. The surprising part of such statements, in fact, some misstatements¹⁷, is that those have been made or repeated without a proper study or examination of the Bir or the authentic literature that existed long before these persons raised unwarranted doubts. And the very fact that some of those statements or the intentions behind making them, is being now denied, shows the fishy nature of such attempts. All we wish to emphasize is the great and unprecedented vision of the Sikh Gurus in authenticating the Sikh Scripture, thereby eliminating for the future the possibility of any such controversy. This shows both the clear identity of the Sikh thesis and the intention of the Gurus to secure its purity for all times to come. The Sikh Gurus were fully aware of numerous scriptures in India and outside, and it is in that background that they took the monumental step of authenticating the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The implications of this step about Sikh identity are indeed profound and emphatic.

Panth and Its Institutions

We have already indicated Guru Nanak's system was a whole-life or *Miri-Piri* system, and for that matter, it envisaged the creation of a society or *Panth*. For, it was not a salvation religion for the guidance or benefit of a few. In this matter Sikhism is entirely different from the Bhakti religions or the other Indian religions. This intention of Guru Nanak is clear from the very start. For, wherever he went, he created and organised Sikh societies with a place for the regular or periodical socio-religious meetings of his groups. And after the close of his travels, he organised such a centre at Kartarpur. It is clear that his purpose was not of merely giving a new thesis, but he also wanted to organise a society that should live the ideals laid down by him. It is for that purpose that he started the institution of succession, since he knew that although the thesis had been clearly expounded in his *Bani*, the society he had initiated, had still to be nurtured; motivated and developed. Of course, Guru Nanak had laid down the lines on which his society was to work, and the targets it was to achieve. His being a *Miri-Piri* system, it was he who had rejected the doctrine of Ahimsa. Apart from that, the institution of *Langar* was also initiated by him; it was something which was wholly

revolutionary in his times. For, not only Sbudras, but Muslims also participated and sat at the same platform. In the work and lives of the subsequent Gurus, we can see a clear development and ascent in the organisation of the Sikh *Panth*. Separate centres of the Sikh societies were created, which were all linked to the central place where the Gurus worked and where periodical meetings of the entire Sikh *Sangats* were held. Apart from that, the institution of Daswandb was created. It is significant that both the field centres and the place of the Guru dealt with social as well as religious problems of the Sikh society. The primary object of all this was, on the one hand, to knit together the Sikhs as a separate *Panth* or People, and, on the other hand, to wean them away from the other religions and cults, which were numerous in the country. The Sixth Master, in pursuance of the instructions of his father, started militarisation of the Sikh society, and raised the institution of the Akal Takhat side by side with the Harmandir Sahib. Almost since the time of the Fifth Master the Sikh society started growing as a parallel socio-political organisation. As it was also militarised, the tension between the Sikh society and the state naturally grew, ultimately leading to open clashes. The Seventh Master promised aid to Dara and the event was evidently not forgotten by the Delhi Emperor. Similarly, the organisation of a Millat, a people, by the Ninth Master came to the notice of Emperor Aurangzeb, who offered¹⁸ to give grant to the Guru, if the latter gave up his political and what he felt to be somewhat rebellious activities. The Guru declined the offer. The intentions of the Gurus became clear and open, when finally the Tenth Master formally organised the institution of Sant-Sipabis or the Khalsa with Amrit ceremony. What is very significant is that as an essential component of the Sikh thesis, he prescribed the wearing of Kirpan, which indicated that the Sikhs had neither to abandon or relax in regard to their responsibility of reaction against injustice and oppression, nor had this society to relapse into a group of *Sants* unconcerned with the problems of the empirical life and their responsibility to solve them.

The broad indication of the development of the Sikh society from the time of Guru Nanak to the Tenth Master, makes it clear that from the very start the Gurus were aiming at the creation of a people imbued with the ideals of *Sant-Sipahi*,

based on the *Miri-Piri* or whole-life doctrine of Guru Nanak. For, Sainapat records that on the Baisakhi day 1699 was revealed the plan, which, till then, was in the mind of the Master.¹⁹ The question is not of what an arm-chair scholar might feel today, but the important fact is what was the perception of the state during the period from the mid-sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century. The martyrdom of the Fifth and the Ninth Masters and the open military clashes between the armies of the state and the Sikhs showed that the Delhi Empire always took the Sikh society to be an unwanted political entity, which had to be curbed and destroyed. Hence the conflict between the Sikhs and the Mughal state and the ultimate triumph of the Sikh society, is not a phenomenon subsequent to the Guru period, but a continuing war of socio-political interests between two societies of which both sides were fully conscious and working for the success of their respective objectives. So far as the Gurus were concerned, we have already stated that they were developing a society or a people inspired with the values of the *Miri-Piri* thesis of Guru Nanak. Hence the identity of the society was unquestioned by the political rulers of the day, and is, for that matter, unquestionable, both in the field of religion and that of social growth. The institution of the *Panth* started by Guru Nanak, the system of succession and the Ten Masters who nurtured and matured the Sikh society, the institution of *Langar*, brotherhood and equality, coupled with the institution of work and production, can be explained only on the assumption that Guru Nanak had a separate thesis which was calculatedly sought to be implemented. Similarly, the institution of *Daswandh*, the history of martyrdoms and extreme sacrifice by the Gurus themselves, and the institution of Amrit and the Five *Kakars* equally highlight how this society was welded into a people with new motivations and ideals. In fact, this uniqueness is also evident from the failures of some scholars, drawn from pacifist or dichotomous religions to understand the logical unity and integrity of the Sikh thesis. Because according to the logic of their systems the development of the Sikh society from the seventeenth century does not appear to them to be congruous with the doctrines of their pacifist or dichotomous religions. On the other hand, seen in the light of the whole-life thesis of Guru Nanak, the entire history and institutions of the Sikh society appear so natural, logical, necessary, and

understandable.

Conclusion

We have discussed the Sikh identity under the five heads mentioned earlier. The spiritual experience of the Gurus being different from that in the case of other systems, their ideology is equally new and different; since, instead of being dichotomous or pacifist, it is a whole-life system that considers the development of a socio-religious society to be essential. But that society has not in any manner to be exclusive, nor the struggle for justice only for a narrow cause. In fact, its history shows that the approach of the Sikh society has always been universal. For, it was the Sikh society which for the first time brought a sense of equality among the different castes and creeds in India. An equally important fact is that although the Sikhs had a long history of struggle with the Muslim state, they, while in power, never tried to convert Hindus or Muslims to the Sikh faith. In fact, both the communities flourished because of respectful regard for their faiths. The treatment the Sikh armies gave to their vanquished adversaries or to the civil populations, can bear comparison with the conduct of any army, contemporary or modern.

It is significant that it was Guru Nanak's call for playing the game of love and sacrifice, which the Tenth Master repeated at the time of the Amrit ceremony. For, just as Guru Nanak wanted a total commitment for the cause of the faith, the same total commitment was desired by the Tenth Master in response to which the Five *Piyaras* offered their heads. And the important fact is that this commitment to the faith was led and sanctified by the Gurus themselves with their own blood. Apart from the five factors mentioned above, the Tenth Master himself emphasized this identity by the introduction of the *Nash Doctrine*,²⁰ while administering *Amrit* to the Five *Piyaras*. For, he said that break with the earlier religious traditions, with the earlier superstitions, rituals and taboos, with the earlier ancestry or lineage, with the earlier deeds and professions or their immobility, was complete. By this *Nash Doctrine* the Tenth Master endowed the Sikh society with Five Freedoms or Liberations from all earlier traditions and taboos. What we seek to emphasize is that Sikh identity is not in any manner artificial, it is the one that was clearly created and proclaimed by the Gurus themselves.

SECTION III
GENERAL

SIKHISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

We shall deal with the subject under the sub-heads:

1. Sikh Ideology
2. Categories of Religions
3. Approach of other religions towards Pluralism
4. Approach of Sikhism to Pluralism
5. Problems of Pluralism and Inter-Religious Dialogue
6. Conclusion

The salient points of the issues are discussed below as briefly as possible.

1. Sikh Ideology

Every religion follows the spiritual experience of its Prophet. The Basic Reality has invariably been described as unknowable. And, yet each prophet has given to his followers important principles and doctrines that follow from the spiritual experience that he has gained of the Basic Reality, God or the Transcendent. The Sikh Gurus have profusely defined the various aspects of the Reality, but their emphasis is that He is the 'Ocean of Virtues' and 'Love'. The Guru says: 'Friends ask me what is the mark of the Lord; He is all Love, the rest He is ineffable.'¹ 'Love being creative, dynamic, and the mother of all values, the Sikh Gurus have laid down a system which in its essentials is entirely different from the earlier Indian systems. Gurus' description of God has five corollaries. First, it implies that the world is real, for, love can have its expression only in a real world.'² Second, it means a system of life-affirmation, and consequently an inalienable combination between the spiritual life and the empirical life of man. The world becomes a real and meaningful place, since God is working therein with love. Third,

it prescribes a religious methodology of deeds, and gives spiritual sanction to the moral life of man. The Guru says that all spiritual assessments of man will be based on his deeds.³ And, it is by our deeds that we become near or away from God.⁴ Fourth, the goal of spiritual life is not merger or union with God as an end itself, but it is a life of activity, God's Will being Creative and Altruistic. Guru Nanak has in unambiguous words stated that spiritual life means to work according to the Altruistic Will of God,⁵ and that the highest spiritual life is of a truthful conduct.⁶ Fifth, it assures man of God's Benevolence and interest in life, and, for that matter, gives hope, confidence and optimism to man. In short, Guru Nanak's thesis is basically and essentially a whole-life or *Miri-Piri* system.

The above system involves six responsibilities of the spiritual life that have been emphasized by Guru Nanak in his *Bani* and demonstrated by the Gurus in their lives. As a consequence of his *Miri-Piri* system Guru Nanak rejected asceticism, monasticism, life-negation and withdrawal from life, as also celibacy, the caste structure, downgrading of women, and Ahimsa. The first responsibility in a whole-life'system is to live in the world as a householder or otherwise; but one has fully to participate in all walks of life. Second is the acceptance of equality between man and woman. In that respect Guru Nanak is the first man of God to emphasize this aspect of his spiritual system. The third responsibility is of equality between man and man⁸, thereby rejecting the Varan Ashram Dharma or the caste ideology of his times. Fourth, he places on man the responsibility of work and production⁹. He deprecates the life of an ascetic, who is not willing to work and resorts to begging at the door of householders, expecting them to sustain him. Fifth, he stresses the responsibility of sharing one's earnings with others.¹⁰ For, God's bounty belongs to all, and it is men who try to grab it for themselves.¹¹ Sixth, Guru Nanak lays down, and this is an important responsibility which he prescribes for the spiritual man, that injustice and oppression should be resisted. Since large scale injustice, oppression and aggression are a socio-political phenomenon, he took two steps to combat it. First, he organised a society or a Panth, and second, he discarded the inviolate character of Ahimsa.¹² He even complains to God for allowing the weak to be trampled upon by the strong.¹³ This hymn of his, means two things. First, that aggression and injustice are violative of the Order of God, and,

for that reason, it is the duty of the Godman, the religious seeker or the religious society to resist and confront injustice in life.

Guru Nanak's system has been called the *Naam Marga*, and rightly so. But his concept of *Naam* is creative, dynamic and full of values. It is God or *Naam* which is working the world. *Naam Marag* is essentially an effort to tune our wavering egoist psyche to His Will or Flow of *Naam*. The net result of that effort, with the grace of *Naam*, is to work actively and truthfully in harmony with die Will of God or *Naam*, which permeates and guides the world. The Guru at many places states that the role of the gurmukh in life is not to be a pacifidst or an ascetic, but to 'live truthfully'. Hence the *Summum Bonum* of spiritual life in Sikhism is to 'live truthfully'¹⁴ or 'to work in tune with *Naam*'. For, the man imbued with *Naam* (*Naam Ratte*) lives truthfully, and this has amply and perfectly been demonstrated by the Ten Masters in their own lives.

2. Categories of Religions

'Broadly, there are four categories of religious systems. The first category is of dichotomous systems in which the spiritual path is distinct and separate from the empirical path. All Pre-Sikh Indian systems belong to this category, in which asceticism, monasticism, withdrawal from life, celibacy, downgrading of women, unreality of the empirical life and Ahimsa are normal features. In these systems, normally, the spiritual path is just an individual endeavour for personal salvation, without much of societal implications.' In contrast, is the whole-life system of Sikhism, which we have described above. To the third category belongs Christianity, in which pacificism and non-resistance to evil are essential ingredients. It started as a societal religion with the direction 'to love one's neighbour as oneself'¹⁵ but during the course of time it became dichotomous by, on the one hand, accepting the institutions of monasticism, nunneries and celibate priests, and by, on the other hand, giving full and complete role to Secularism in the empirical life of man. To the fourth category belong the whole-life systems of Judaism and Islam. These started as complete *Miri-Piri* systems, since both prophets Moses and Prophet Mohammad were, simultaneously, spiritual and empirical leaders. In the earlier centuries of their lives, there was no place for monasticism, pacificism or withdrawal in these religions. But, in later centuries in both of them monastic and ascetic sects arose. For example, Essenes, Kabbalists and others,

in the case of Judaism, and Sufis, in the case of Islam. Actually, Christianity branched off from Judaism at a time when pacifist sects, with non-resistance to evil as originally recommended by Jeremiah, had arisen therein. Although these religions, as such, were originally whole-life, monastic and pacifist sects, have, in both of them, an established religious sanction. These are the four principal categories of religious systems. It would appear to us that historically, pacifism and withdrawal from life appeared in these whole-life religions, when their elan was on the decline. The net result is that for the last over two centuries, as Toynbee declares,¹⁶ in the Christian Societies religion has virtually been discarded from the socio-political culture of the West. The above is the position of the religious life and the empirical life in the present age.

3. Approach of other Religions towards Pluralism

So far as wholly dichotomous or salvation religions are concerned, their approach to empirical or societal problems has always been lukewarm, because withdrawal from life is incongruous with any attempt at solving socio-political problems of man. In fact, for the religious man such an involvement would be a contradiction or an unwanted entanglement. This is also the reason that the inequity of the caste system could survive without check in the empirical life of India for thousands of years. In Hinduism while there is tolerance for any kind of personal belief a man might hold, the outsider has been looked upon as a *Malechha*, polluted or impious and a journey across the seas is virtually taboo. Hence, in these systems spiritual path being only an individual endeavour, inter-religious cooperation has a very limited scope, since the religious problem is reduced" to man's individual attempt at salvation or *Moksha*.

Difficulties of inter-religious dialogue are present in Judaism too. It believes that the Jews are the Chosen Community of God, with whom they have a living covenant.¹⁷ This being their fundamental faith naturally problems of inter-religious dialogue, on terms of equality, arise. But apart from its exclusivism, Judaism's long history of persecution in Europe, including the latest holocausts in Hitler's Germany, hardly helps it to maintain a healthy approach to pluralism. The position in Islam is less conservative, since it accepts the prophethood of earlier Western religious leaders. But its exclusivism is there, Prophet Mohammad being the seal of prophets¹⁸, it would not be

easy for its theology to recognize the validity of later or other revelations. The position in Christianity is also plainly exclusive. For, the Roman Catholic Maxim is "Outside the Church no salvation". Similarly, according to the conservative Evangelical Protestant viewpoint salvation is denied to anyone without faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁹ The stand is clearly absolutist.

Broadly, this is the theological position in the case of the four religions mentioned above. However, this is not to say that attempts at inter-faith dialogues have not been made. In fact, Christian scholars have made considerable effort and studied its problems, although their moves have sometimes been looked upon with suspicion by others. We shall discuss the issue further while dealing with the problems of inter-religious dialogue.

4. Approach of Sikhism to pluralism

The Sikh position on pluralism and inter-religious dialogue is extremely explicit and stands defined by the Gurus themselves. Not only is Sikhism universal in its approach, but the Guru in his *Bani* clearly accepts the possibility of other revelations. For the Fourth Guru prays: "Save by Thy Grace the world in flame. Save it at whatever portal it may be saved"²⁰ The couplet clearly denies any exclusiveness, and accepts that God in His Grace" could resort to more ways of redemption than one. The second statement is by Guru Nanak who in his reply to the Naths, says that his mission, with the help of other Godmen, is to ferry men across the turbulence of life.²¹ This clearly envisages not only inter-religious dialogue, but inter-religious cooperation in the mission of God which the Gurus were carrying out. Third is the specific demonstration of their thesis of universalism in the two historical steps the Guru took. The first is presence of the *Bani* of twenty two Hindu and Muslim saints in the *Guru Granth Sahib* which is the Guru of the Sikhs. This is something extremely uncommon and new in the history of religious scriptures. Second is the laying down of the foundation stones of Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar (Golden Temple), by Sain Mian Mir, a Muslim Sufi, who was invited by the Guru to do so. It is, therefore, clear that the Sikh Gurus not only have laid down a religious system which is universal in its character, but they have also taken clear steps both in their *Bani* and in their lives to demonstrate that universalism and inter-religious cooperation should be an essential component of the spiritual life of man.

5. Problems of Pluralism and Inter- religious Dialogue

We have stated that, because of its universalism, Sikhism presents no problem, nor has it any reservations regarding pluralism and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. But in some other religions, theological problems of exclusivism are there. Judaism, because of its political history, past and current, naturally raises some hurdles. For, in West Asia it is still locked in a political struggle with the Islamic countries. This bitter strife has also religious complexion and overtones that militate against any healthy or uninhibited inter-religious dialogue. For somewhat similar reasons the position in Islam is no different. Culturally it finds itself on the defensive both in the West-East and South-East. Another snag is that in the West Asia it has a feeling that the dominant Christian West is unreasonably siding with Judaism. Thus, Islam is itself trying to re frame its approach to the Western culture, which, by and large, has become secular in the socio-political field. That is why a Muslim theologian, Sayyad Mohammad Naquib-al-Attas, proclaims that 'Islam still resists secularisation in a way that Christianity has not', and that, he feels, is the reason for 'Islam having a future and a final meaning for humankind.'²²

In Christianity there is a serious debate as between protagonists of its exclusivism and these that suggest pluralism and serious inter-religious dialogue. It is the irony of man that whereas in all the three religions, viz. Judaism, Islam and Christianity, the brotherhood of man is their first fundamental, their churches have become quite exclusive. The learned Hillel when asked to explain the 613 Commandments of Torah, stated "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary; go and learn it."²³ Similarly, the *Bible*, while it commands the Christian to love God with all one's heart, simultaneously prescribes to treat one's neighbour as oneself. In Islam, too, the story of Abu Ben Adam emphasizes that the love of man is synonymous with the love of God. This being the ideological position in the three religions, the problem of inter-religious dialogue has seriously concerned thinking persons of these religions. The Western culture being, by and large, Christian, the greatest debate is naturally taking place among the churches. Adolf Von Harnack therefore, tried to emphasize that the essence of Christianity lay in only three Truths, namely, the Fatherhood of God, the

Brotherhood of man, and the Infinite value of the individual human soul.²⁴ Similarly, men like David Lockhead, Paul Knitter, John Hick, Schuon and many others strongly suggest the shedding of exclusivism, and accepting a theology of Pluralism. Lockhead suggests that the Christians have in the course of history developed four ideologies, namely the ideology of isolation, the ideology of hostility, the ideology of competition, and the ideology of partnership.²⁵ He recommends the last which, he feels, is essential for any ideology of universalism which Christianity prescribes. But the view is criticised because "To be a Christian is to be committed to Jesus Christ. To regard God's activity in Jesus Christ as simply equivalent to ways God may have chosen to act in other religions, seems to destroy the point of our commitment."²⁶ Similarly, Paul Knitter's edited book *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, and John Hick's thesis of Pluralism of various religions being just human responses to the Transcendent, have both had very strong opposition and criticism, including publications like *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, from the faithful. Pluralists have been accused of undermining the Truth claims of each religion and recommending just a kind of 'religious agnosticism', which in a way destroys the very basis of religious faith, based on a living tradition. Similarly, F Schuon in his classic work, *The Transcendent unity of Religions*, classifies human religious responses into the Esoteric and the Exoteric. He makes a strong case for inter-religious understanding, while suggesting that "exoteric differences, are just due to influences of culture, time and space and should not deter us from appreciating the underlying esoteric' unity. For, "there is unity at the heart of religions."

We need not go further into this internal debate in Christianity, except record two facts. The first is the sceptic reaction of other religions towards Christian inter-faith dialogues, especially because of the colonial background of the Christian world. For, many a time, it is felt, that inter-faith dialogues have been just instruments of conversion. Because the Christian Churches, as a whole, are still far from accepting the ideology of pluralism and partnership. The second point is the problem of Secularism as also of injustice and oppression in the political field. This problem has been a major issue with sensitive Christian thinkers, so much so, that it has been argued "that the

common interest of the religions in resisting secularism is more important than the differences that exist between them."²⁷ In some sections of the Christian world, Secularism, Communism and Individualism have been considered allied problems that are a serious danger to all religions. A corollary of Secularism is the injustice and oppression that are present both in the Christian world and outside it. Jurgen Moltmann, a theologian of liberation, emphasizes that 'inter-religious dialogue is only fruitful, when religions are committed to the task of eliminating common threats such as injustice and oppression.'²⁸ This feeling is more so in Latin American and African countries, where Poverty is a major problem, and seeds of Liberation Theology have sprouted. In the same strain Father Camilo Torres declared, "The Catholic who is not a revolutionary, is living in mortal sin."²⁹ Similarly, Catholic Archbishop, Helder Camara states, "that the force of Truth, Justice and love is greater than that of wars, murder and hatred. But he has claimed that the violence of the rich against the poor, and the violence of the developed countries against the under-developed, is more worthy of condemnation than the revolutionary violence that they create. "³⁰ It has however, to be stressed that so far these voices in the Christian world are in a small minority. And for the reason, while serious problems of secularism, injustice and oppression are facing all religions and societies, in the Christian world ideas of pluralism have not been able to gain sufficient momentum so as to organise inter-religious cooperation with a view to solving them. This is very clearly evidenced by the statements of Metropolitan Dr. Paules Mar Gregories who has been the President of the World Council of Churches for seven years. Following the multiplying and mounting problems of Secularism, the North American Christian Churches raised a strong voice asserting that Secularism was a common danger and needed to be eliminated as a social force, and that Christianity should seek the cooperation of other religions to combat it. But this voice was throttled in the World Council, because the European Churches felt that "Secularisation, not secularism is the primary process. It is a process in which some of the values of Christian faith have been put in a secular framework, bringing about a powerful force, which is destroying all old ideas. Hence, secularisation is an ally, because it will destroy Hinduism, Islam and other forms of what they consider to be superstition. We should ally ourselves with secularisation and see it as the work

of God". Later it was again repeated, "We do not feel that we have any thing-lacking. And so we are opposed to dialogue, unless it is for the sake of testifying to Jesus Christ". "That was it. Then they passed a resolution saying that 'under no circumstances should multi-religious dialogues put Christianity on the same level as other religions, and this is unacceptable'. So because the European Christians had that point of view, the World Council has not been able to engage in multi-religious dialogue for quite some time."³¹ Lest it should be considered that the situation has since then changed in any manner, we quote the statement of Metropolitan P.M. Gregories made in April 1991 at the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace: "I have been associated with the World Council of Churches and its work in dialogue with people of other faiths since 1954. But I find,

particularly on the part of European Christians, that there is still an inhibition about entering into full dialogue with other religions. In the minds of people there is a fear that having conversation with other religions may imply some compromise in one's own conviction. And in the World Council of Churches I can assure you that this view has been a major inhibiting factor. We could have gone much further in dialogue, if European Christianity was less inhibited."³²

Thus, at the present stage Christianity partly because of the theological reasons, and Judaism and Islam, partly because of their socio-political struggles have natural limitations in entering into meaningful inter-religious dialogues. In the Indian sub-continent, too, increasing tensions between Islam and Hinduism are hardly conducive to healthy inter-religious cooperation.

Although Sikhism, because of its universalism, has been traditionally cooperative in the inter-religious field, the present political developments in the Punjab are affecting the recognition of its identity. In 1987, the Council for World Religions arranged a seminar on Hindu-Sikh dialogue. It is somewhat amusing that majority of the Hindu Scholars virtually questioned the very identity of Sikhism. One scholar observed, "Sikh Scholars see the *Miri-Piri* concept as an inseparable whole in the religious order. Non-Sikhs have come to see a religion politics linkage in Sikhism, and deduce the root cause of the current crisis in the Punjab to this. "³³ Ignorance about Sikhism is so great that another scholar felt that as Sikhism had arisen only as a social protest against caste ideology, its relevance as a

separate religion was now hardly there. He wrote "Untouchability has been abolished by political legislation. Government steps are persistently being taken to uplift the castes considered backward so far. As such, the very point against which original Sikhism had reacted, no longer remains a point of contention. Moreover, the problem of social inequality and the consequent demand for justice no longer remains a province of religious organisation. It is the Government agencies who have to look into the problems in order to eradicate social inequality and provide social justice. As such, the problem has shifted its locale from the religious to the political"³⁴ Another scholar was more forthright in his attack. He stated, "To the extent Hinduism has been influenced by Vedanta either traditionally or in modern version of Ram Krishna and Vivekananda, it has a tendency to subsume all religions as different aspects of one large religion-of which Hinduism is a subconscious, if not an overt model. And, of course, in this religion, the closer a person or a doctrine is to the Advaita Vedanta, the closer to Truth is that person or is assumed to be. It is not entirely possible to include Christianity and Islam, in spite of this philosophical proclivity of the Hindu mind, as branches of the great tree of Hinduism. This is so for obvious reasons of history, language, foreign origins of these religions, and the fact that Hindus have been for centuries ruled by followers of these religions. But when it comes to Indians belonging to religions which originated within India, such as Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, many Hindus regard them as downright unpatriotic or unspiritual, or both, if they wish to maintain their identity distinct from the Hindus. Distinctions are just not considered a mark of high enough vision, and are mere appearances."³⁵ This gives a glimpse of the self-image and the conditioned approach of Hindu theologians and scholars towards the identity of other religions, especially of Buddhism and Sikhism. Hence, the difficulties and the problem of inter-religious dialogues in South-East Asia.

6. Conclusion

We have attempted to give a bird's eye-view of the position and scope of inter-religious dialogue among major religions of the world. The problems appear to us serious enough for anyone to be under any illusion in this regard. However, it is our view that the solution of man's moral problems lies only in

the domain of religion. There is hardly a trace of inter-species or intra-species morality in the animal world. For, without accepting the Fatherhood of God or the Transcendent Reality, the Brotherhood of man remains only an empty slogan. Sikhism emphasizes that spirituality alone can be the source and elan of the moral life of man. It is for this reason that many thinking scholars in the Christian and the Islamic worlds consider Secularism to be the greatest danger to the modern culture. It has been clearly apprehended that it is Secularism that has led to the demeaning of politics and the social life of man.³⁶ Individualism, Nationalism, Communism, Imperialism, Militarism, Racism, and the break-up of the family are the natural consequences. Marxism and rationalism raised the hope that a secular culture could bring about greater justice between man and man. The crash of the Russian Empire has demonstrated that rational means, howsoever well intentioned, are incapable of creating a moral cohesion to sustain a people, or a society : Uninhibited or unchecked egoist proclivities of man invariably lend to injustice and oppression. The results are the same, whether it is Secular Marxism or Secular Capitalism. The consequences of Secular Capitalism are evident in Latin America and Africa, where Christian priests are fighting it under the banner of liberation Theology so as to close the widening gap between the affluent rich and the miserable poor. It was too much both for the priests and the poor to accept the ugly anomaly that those who for six days of the week practised cruelty and aggression against the weak, on Sunday sat in the Church on the front benches, with the suffering poor on the hind ones. Hence the voices of men of religion like Archbishop Helder Camara, Father Camilo Torres and Jurgen Moltmann quoted earlier. The talk and preachings of the brother-hood of man have no meaning, if the Church of a religion is unable to translate it into deeds in the socio-political life of man. Just as the Christian priests of South America and Africa, in order to make the *Bible* meaningful for the poor, seek to draw on the essence of Christianity that fundamentally prescribes the brotherhood of man, similarly, Islam too, is trying to fall back on its religious roots to sustain its culture. It is no fundamentalism to turn to the essence or elan of a religion to enrich its moral fibre in time of difficulty or crisis. Fundamentalism is essentially a Christian word for those who literally accept the truth of all statements about history and life in the *Bible*. There is nothing

parochial or obscurantist to derive one's moral strength from the spiritual base.

We have indicated above both the secular attack against religion and the difficulties of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation that face the truly religious man. In this context, we should like to stress that in a whole-life religion like Sikhism, the empirical life is essentially informed by the spiritual component, which alone can supply it with moral content and cohesion. Without a spiritual base, Secularism, as we have seen, remains ethically barren. It is this divorce between Secularism and Religion and its attendant dangers which the North American Churches, the Liberation Theologians and Muslim thinkers are lamenting. God being the Source of all virtues, the Gurus have clearly defined many of the attributes of God which are not only relevant in the empirical field but which form the very basis of Sikh ethics. It is they who call God the Shelter of the shelterless, Help of the helpless and Destroyer of the evil-doers.³⁷ He showers His Grace where the lowly are helped.³⁸ The whole-life Sikh ethics that prescribes the responsibility of the Sikh in all field of life, is based on the Gurus' perception of the attributes of God. Schuon suggests the same thing, "If the virtues act as modes of knowledge, it is because they retrace by analogy Divine attitudes; there is in fact no virtue that does not derive from a Divine prototype, and therein lies their deepest meaning: "to be" is "to know."³⁹ For, "Love of one's neighbour, is so far as it is a necessary expression of the Love of God, is an indispensable complement to Faith."⁴⁰ In Sikhism the highest stage is of the gurmukh who does not merely preach but who "Lives truthfully", for God is not only to be loved, but love has also to be lived. In Sikhism there is nothing like knowing God, but knowledge of Him comes both from loving and living. The Transcendent, is also the only Fount of spirituality and love, "The fact that it is thus transcendent, however, means that it can be univocally described by none and concretely apprehended by few. For these few the problem of the relation between the religions is, by it, solved; for the many the problem is unsolvable, because for the many the generic is abstract and the concrete is not generic, and only what is concrete can be loved and worshipped."⁴¹ It is in this context, that Sikhism calls Him to be the only Source of moral life that can sustain the empirical life of man. It, thus, unambiguously believes in inter-religious dialogue and cooperation in this world of God, but that

cooperation can be fruitful only if it is firmly based on the stand-point laid down and lived by the Gurus, namely of Love, which has multiple facets and responsibilities.

In sum, Sikhism prescribes inter-religious cooperation, but that cooperation has to be on the basis of the Fatherhood of God or : The Transcendent and for the goal of establishing the brotherhood of man; and for that end confronting the forces of injustice and oppression, as did the Gurus for a period of over 200 years. They lay down that human salvation lies in accepting His Fatherhood and seeking His Grace to struggle against the so-called evil or the imperfect forces of life. The eternal problem, as also stated by the minority voice in Christianity, is of Secularism (or lack of Faith in Him as the Source of all Morality) and the struggle against injustice and inequality. This struggle for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth has gone on since the dawn of civilisation and may go on for many a millennium more. Therefore, from the stand-point of Sikhism inter-religion dialogue has a meaning, as also observed by Moltmann, if there is a commitment to struggle with faith against 'injustice and oppression'.



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