

# ESSENTIAL POSTULATES OF SIKHISM

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*edited by*

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**PUBLICATION BUREAU  
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA**

## **CONTENTS**

Foreword	(vii)
Introduction	(ix)
I A Brief History and Basic Doctrines	1
II God And Reality	14
III The World And The Man	30
IV Sikhism And Society	50
V The Khalsa Order	70
VI Sikhism, Modernity And Post-Modernity	91
VII Sikhism And Inter-Religious Spirituality	120
Bibliography	



## FOREWORD

Sikhism, the youngest of major religions the world over, was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and the nine succeeding Gurus during the late medieval India as a positive and synthetic response to the pluralistic religious situation prevailing then. The wide variety of religious denominations popular in the region during those days is astounding. At the macro level, Hinduism and Islam represented themselves as the varying religions of the time. At the micro level, many socio-religious movements such as *saguna* and *nirguna* Vaisnava *bhakti*, Nath tradition, siddhas of Tantric Buddhism, *bhakti* of Siva and of Sakti in Hinduism, and the different orders of Sufi tradition in Islam formed the religio-cultural multiplicity of late medieval India. Sikhism is a positive response to this situation and herein the Spiritual gets socialized and the social and the secular get spiritualized, thus putting an end to the dichotomy of body and mind, matter and spirit, material and ideal on the one hand, and providing a model of a casteless and classless social order wherein asceticism is rejected in favour of ethical and righteous social involvement on the other. It aims at the betterment of man as well as the material world he lives in, and accepts and appreciates the fact of religious plurality though not in a passive manner.

The present-day world situation has of late become complicated, especially in terms of inter-religious relations. The leaders of the world have started talking about civilizational conflicts, *jihads* and crusades. Beyond the pale of war, there are hate crimes and curtailing of civil liberties and human rights. Religious feelings of the common people are massively manipulated for political purposes and selfish motives. The people of the world are terror-stricken and wish to end this situation at the earliest -- certainly before the predictions of Samuel Huntington come out to be true. Religions of the world have a special responsibility towards this end, and Sikhism with its emphasis to keep close to each other both the esoteric and exoteric streams of life can play a very vital and meaningful role in such a situation. The Sikh belief that this mundane world is not an obstacle

in the realization of the spiritual ideal of man rather is the abode of God exhorts man to endeavour replace mutual distrust and disharmony with trust and harmony, inequality and exploitation with equality and philanthropy, mutual jealousy and hatred with love and compassion.

It becomes, thus, pertinent that this message of the Gurus be taken to as many people as possible through publication of good literature on the subject. Guru Nanak took out four preaching odysseys to spread his message as far in India and abroad as his physical frame could carry. In the south, he went almost to the tip of India in Rameshwaram from where he went on to Sri Lanka. There are also suggestive references that he also visited Madurai in Tamil Nadu. It was at this latter place in the Madurai Kamraj University that a Guru Nanak Chair was set up in 1969 to carry out studies and research in Guru Nanak's teaching which are universal in nature and relevant to the present context. It gives me immense pleasure that the Punjabi University is publishing this book of Dr N. Muthumohan, who holds Guru Nanak Chair at Madurai, which has been doing a commendable job teaching Sikh religion at Madurai. The book, which has been edited by Dr Dharam Singh of our University, formulates almost all the essential postulates of Sikhism from a philosophical perspective and discusses them in relation to some contemporary contexts such as postmodernism, inter-religious dialogue and pluralism. I hope the book will prove valuable and helpful to scholars and students in the field of Sikh studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is one of the religions of latest origin - only a little more than five hundred years old. It was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), and his nine successors contributed towards the evolution of certain social and religious institutions which not only form the basis of Sikh faith but also provide an inner mechanism for continued progression without the help and guidance of a person - Guru. Sikhism believes in the ten Gurus or spiritual preceptors and does not accept or acknowledge anybody else, however pious and enlightened, equal to the Guru. In fact, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, put an end to the institution of person-Guru and bestowed guruship for all times to come on the scripture (the Guru Granth Sahib) or more precisely the Word as contained in it, and the Panth or Khalsa-Panth. In Sikhism, says Dr N.Muthumohan at one place in the book, Khalsa as created by Guru Gobind Singh in fulfilment of Guru Nanak's mission "is the *agency* to which the task of social transformation has been endowed ... whereas the Guru Granth Sahib, the living Guru of the Sikhs, renders the general framework of *structure* in which the task is to be accomplished. It is to be noted that both the structure and agency are to function coherently to assure successful socio-cultural transformation."

No doubt, Sikhism originated at a time which is called "medieval age" in Indian history. However, the author's study of Sikhism reveals that it is in many respects critical of the medieval spirit and is highly responsive to many of the modern problems and issues. For instance, it transcends the classical definition of God as only the supreme metaphysical reality rejecting mundane life as sinful or mayic or just a place for suffering. It has for the first time successfully integrated the spiritual and the temporal realms of human life, thus making it a religion not only of metaphysical ultimate but also of active earthly life. A natural correlate of this ideology is the idea of the reality, relative reality of this world, with the implication that man must strive for the betterment of this world. Sikhism condemns all sorts of inequalities between man and man and is also against injustice and oppression and exploitation. On the other hand, it accepts spiritual

unity and ethnic equality of mankind and thus stands for equality, love, justice and philanthropy in human affairs.

Sikhism originated as a distinct religion in an era marked by religious plurality. Hinduism, the most ancient of Indian religions, and Islam, a religion of semitic origin but at that a time a religion followed and patronised by the ruling class in India, were the two major religions traditions prevalent there. Two other religions of Indian origin, Jainism and Buddhism, also existed, though they happened to be numerically very small. Apart from these, there were numerous sects and sub-sects such as *saguna* and *nirguna* Vaisnava *bhakti*, the Naths, Yogis, Siddhas of tantrik Buddhism, Saivites and Saktas, different schools of the Sufi tradition and so on. These and many more sects, sub-sects and traditions formed the religio-cultural multiplicity of late medieval India, and the book holds that the birth of Sikhism was a positive response to this pluralistic situation.

The present world situation has of late become very complicated because of the strained inter-religious relations. The leaders of the world talk of civilizational conflicts and jihads. In such a situation Sikhism can play a very positive and constructive role because of its attitude of tolerance and appreciation towards other faiths. The Sikh scripture is one concrete example : it contains hymns of six of ten Sikh Gurus apart from several holy men coming from both Hindu and Muslim traditions. Since Word is equated with Guru in Sikhism, all hymns - may they be, for example, of Guru Nanak or Kabir or Ravidas or Farid - are held in equal reverence by the Sikhs. Thus, the Holy Book of the Sikhs provides a unique example of respect for religious pluralism and of bringing together the essential message of religion as communicated by holy men from various different traditions. The Sikh Gurus did not propose anybody to quit his religion, but suggested only deeper penetration of one's own religion in thought, devotion and action. Dr Muthumohan is well aware of this, but he also acknowledges that the Sikh acceptance of plurality is not passive : it is 'categorically critical towards religions serving political dominance and social dominance'.

The Sikh faith, no doubt, accepts plurality but this acceptance is not passive, rather it is critical. This critical spirit is quite explicit on at least two very vital points. One, the Sikh Gurus are highly critical of any religion which sanctions and safeguards hierarchical structure of mankind. The idea of inequality by birth among people is not acceptable to them. There are many hymns in the Sikh scripture which criticize the spirit and philosophy of the Vedic tradition which classifies humans into different

*varnas* or castes. In Sikh theology, all humans are equal notwithstanding all the differences in their exterior : all humans are, in essence, one with God and equal among themselves as well as in His eye.

Two, the Sikh faith condemns the religion that mobilizes mass support in the name of religion to serve the interests of the contemporary ruling political class. The Sikh Gurus are against religion becoming an instrument of political dominance. Therefore, they criticize any religion that serves an oppressive purpose, especially at the hands of political classes. Thus, religion no more remains an asylum for the voiceless and the helpless, rather it is made a weapon in the hands of the suffering people against the unjust oppressor.

As I said earlier, Khalsa (the constituents of the Khalsa Panth) is the agency to carry out the work of social transformation, and the Khalsa-Panth (as a collective social entity) as created by Guru Gobind Singh on the Vaisakhi day (30 March) of AD 1699 represents in micro-cosmic form the Sikh ideal of social structure. It is a classless and casteless social structure wherein love is the abiding value which gets "reflected in the altruistic tendencies of the Khalsa. Everybody here suffers in the suffering of everybody else. This suffering is not in the sense of pain from evil as evil but it is in bearing the pain of others to relieve them of pain as also of evil. This altruistic tendency finds expression in the deeds of *seva* (service) to others, contributing in cash and kind for philanthropic purposes, striving for and even suffering martyrdom for a righteous cause, etc. As S. Radhakrishnan says the creation of Khalsa was to 'defy religious intolerance, religious persecution and political inequality.' Cultivation of the values of the Khalsa by all humans is an answer to many maladies of modern life.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, exhorted man to listen to the other's point of view and then express his own : maintaining dialogue is said to be the only way to reach the truth. His *Siddha Gosti* is a sort of spiritual dialogue on the Sikh philosophy of life vis-a-vis the philosophy of yoga. The dialogue is held without hurting the either side, ever retaining serenity and sobriety and aiming at the realization of truth. Dr Muthumohan also holds that according to Guru Nanak, "religious dialogue and unity of religions could not be achieved at the level of rituals and rites. And instead ethics can serve such a purpose." He holds that Guru Nank raises ethical conduct to a higher and more independent, absolute status and makes it as the true expression of the harmony of human personality with the will of God.'

On the whole, Dr N. Muthumohan has made a commendable effort in articulating many of the major concepts and doctrines of Sikh faith and then discusses them in the context of modern problems and issues. He observes that Sikhism provides a conscientious model, more a methodology and a non-essentialist paradigm of a social order (where prevails equality and justice, love and philanthropy and where there is a genuine respect and appreciation for each faith) which can withstand the needs of the third millennium.

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20 March 2003.*

## CHAPTER I

### A BRIEF HISTORY AND BASIC DOCTRINES

#### **Introduction**

Sikhism is one of the religions of latest origin. It was founded by the genius of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and other Sikh Gurus. Poet Iqbal once mentioned that Gautama Buddha and Guru Nanak were the two greatest personalities India had ever produced. Sikhism was a positive and synthetic response to the pluralistic religious situation existing in late medieval India. It preaches monotheism and a casteless egalitarian society. It resists aggression, despotism and any form of exploitation of man by man, rather it deeply respects human dignity and human labour. The followers of the Sikh faith are generally very pious and industrious people.

The Sikhs originally belong to the beautiful land of five rivers, Punjab, the north-west frontier area of Indian sub-continent. However, they are found labouring and living all over India. During the last two centuries or so many Sikhs have migrated to United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and to many other countries of the world.

The Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth is the holy scripture of the Sikhs. Sikhs consider the Holy volume as their living Guru. The Harimandar Sahib or Golden Temple of Amritsar is the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sikhs. The mother tongue of the Sikhs is Punjabi language and its script is called Gurmukhi—the language spoken by the Gurus.

#### **Socio-Cultural Background**

As it has been mentioned earlier, Sikhism is of latest origin and it expressed its distinct origin in the 15th century. Hinduism and Islam form the background of the origination of Sikh faith. At the micro level, many socio-religious movements such as Vaisnava Bhakti, Nath Sampradaya, Islam, Sufism and the Sant tradition become the pluri-religious background of Sikhism. Let us have a short review of the above said religious trends in the background.

It is said that the Bhakti movement had its beginnings in South India. The Alvars and Nayanmars of Tamilnadu through their melodious songs

founded the Bhakti movement in this part of the country. In North India, Pancaratra, Vasudeva-Narayana and similar Vaisnava worships culminated in the Bhagavata movement. Ramanuja of the 12th century became the greatest theoretician of Vaisnava Bhakti. Bhakti movement brought the abstract and transcendent idea of God nearer to earthly life and common people. Many folk cults and worships mingled in Bhakti culture. Personal God and emotional attachment to Him became the central moments of Bhakti. Bhakti movement can be characterized as the synthesis of pre-Vedic, *Tantric* and Vedic cultures of India. At its earlier stage, Vedic tradition condemned the Bhakti movement but later accommodated and Sanscritised the movement. Bhakti movement gave impetus to a new wave of mythology production in Indian culture. The *Bhagavata Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Siva Purana*, *Devi Purana*, etc. were the popular *puranas* of early medieval period. Temple culture with its complex forms of worship and rituals too got well established during this period. Early Bhakti had well pronounced democratic content expressing the regional aspirations; however towards midmedieval period it experienced feudalizing and centralising tendencies. Consequently, new *bhaktas* with radical and reformist zeal appeared to mark the beginning of late medieval period. The late-medieval religious situation is closer to the present-day Indian multireligious and multicultural condition.

Nath Sampradaya founded by Gorakhnath is one of the powerful sects which had the remarkable impact of the revival of Tantric tradition. Gorakhnath talked about the oneness or unity of Siva and Sakti. He rejected the classical Indian characterization of Sakti and *maya* and named it Nijasakti. Siva is immanent in Sakti and Sakti is immanent in Siva. The evolution or unfoldment of temporal world is described as the result of the dialectics of Siva and Sakti principles. The Gorakhanath yogis advocated the yogic path to realize enlightenment and called it by the name Samarasya. The latter concept stresses the unity or equality of Siva and Sakti. Although the philosophy of Gorakhnath had many progressive ideas in comparison to classical Indian thought, in practice the Nath Sampradaya ended as another sect of secluded, renunciant yogis. The Nath yogis were unable to expand their philosophy into the socio-ethical and practical realms and individual liberation was their goal. This Sampradaya inspired the Tamil Siddhas too.

Islam entered into India first through the Sufi saints and then through the invasions from outside India. The socio-religious and political implications of the entry of Islam into India is a very complex phenomenon.

Islamic presence in India peacefully and sometimes violently broke some of the classical socio-religious structures of Hindu India. Many urban commercial and industrial patterns were introduced by the Islamic rulers in India. This resulted in the speedy upward and horizontal social mobilization. Many erstwhile lower castes were given a space in the social production system and soon they claimed their share in the spiritual life, too. Many saints-thinkers appeared from among the so-called low castes. Their philosophy and religion looked different from the traditional religions of India. However, Islamic culture intensified the process of individuation and this created tension in the traditional community living. Some of the Islamic rulers, in defiance to their own religious identity, were despotic.

Sufism, a mystic trend within Islam, originated in Arabia during the post-Prophet period. It emerged as a reaction to the feudalisation of Islam. The Sufi saints advocated going back to the hard spiritual way of life of Prophet Nabi. They criticized the religious mediators who supported the despotism of the rulers. The rulers looked at the Sufis as rebels. There arose controversies regarding the mystic statements made by the Sufi saints. Some of the Sufi saints were sent out of the lands of the Arabic rulers. A few of them were even killed. The Sufis were nevertheless liked by the common people. However, Sufism too has its difficult spiritual path which cannot be followed by a common man. Indian Sufism had the impact of Buddhism, yoga and Tantrist Siddhas of North India and Himalayas. Punjab is one of the first lands into which the Sufis stepped into. Sheikh Farid was a famous Sufi saint of Punjab and his songs find a revered place in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The most radical representatives of the Bhakti movement and who appeared in its late period after the advent of Islam are called by the name of the *sants*. The prominent names among the Sants are Ravidas, Kabir, Namdev, Tukaram, Ramdas, Pipa, Sain and Dhanna. However, the *sants* as such do not represent a united movement. They celebrated the idea of one God, did not believe in *avatarhood* of God. Most of the *sants* did not accept the ideal of asceticism and had left sharp criticisms addressed to Brahmanism and casteism. The *sants* were mostly drawn from the lower classes of the society. They were against religious sectarianism and represented the revival of ethical concern in Indian thought. Kabir was an outspoken *sant* and he became the founder of Kabir Panthi sect which is still alive in north India. Kabir criticized the religious orthodoxy of both Hindu and Islamic denominations and he himself is a radical humanist.

The scripture of the Sikhs contains around 700 hymns of Kabir and the Sikhs very much revere him. Other than those of Kabir, the hymns of Ravidas, Namdev, Pipa, Sain, Dhanna and others too are included in this scripture.

### **The Sikh Gurus**

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), first of the ten spiritual preceptors, lived during the later part of 15th century and the early part of 16th century. During the first part of this time-span, the Lodhis were ruling the north India and in its later part Babar, the founder of the Mughal ruling dynasty, invaded the country several times from 1519 till 1526 when he finally defeated the Delhi Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi in the battle of Panipat. Guru Nanak was a witness to the bloodshed and carnage caused by wars and devastations of the period. In the hymns of Guru Nanak one can find a vivid portrayal of the turbulent age in which Guru Nanak lived and thought. His feelings were for the suffering of all the children of this land, both Hindus and Muslims, but he condemned the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who instead of defending their own folk, blessed the oppressive rulers. Guru Nanak says :

The Quadi speaks falsehood and eats filth;  
The Brahmin, guilty of much cruelty,  
makes a show of ritual bathings;  
The yogi, blind and misguided,  
knows not the true practice;  
All three are at one in bringing harm to the people.

—GGS, 662

Guru Nanak was sensitive to the socio-political situation of his age. His heart bled for the poor and the oppressed. In one of his hymns, he says :

Avarice is the king,  
Evil-doing his minister;  
Falsehood is his revenue-factor.  
Lust is the councillor always consulted.  
The subjects are purblind and thoughtless wretches  
who foolishly obey these evil rulers.

—GGS, 468-69

The wretched situation of slavery creates a rebel and a revolutionary in Guru Nanak and he religiously undergoes the torment. The religious suffering of Guru Nanak is the actual suffering of the age and also an

expression of the search into the ultimate questions of existence.

The people wailed in their agony of suffering ;  
 Didst 'Thou feel no compassion for them  
 Thou who art the Creator of all?  
 If a powerful foe molest one equally powerful,  
 Little would be there to complain.  
 But if a ferocious tiger falls upon a herd of kine.  
 Then must the Master be called to account.

—GGS, 360

Possibly, this was the moment of truth, moment of a new revelation, birth of a new religion, of a new world order.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born in a small village named Talwandi in the family of a small state official of Khatri caste. The village Talwandi, also known as Nanakana Sahib now, is situated now in Pakistan. From his early days, Nanak disliked the caste-customs, the order of priesthood, ritualism, and social passivity of Hindus. As well he became critical to the formalism, and priesthood of Islam. Nanak developed himself as a highly pious believer of one God who is nameless and formless. He was very sensitive to the social evils during his life-time. After receiving revelation, Nanak declared that 'there is No Hindu and no Musalman' Implying that is only one humanity which is united spiritually. Nanak was an intensive seeker of Truth. He travelled many holy places of India, such as Benaras, Gaya, Puri, etc. and conducted many discussions with religious personalities. He came to the south, to Rameshwaram and then visited Ceylon. He went as well to Arabian countries, visited Baghdad, Mecca and Medina. He conversed with the Nath yogis, Siddhas, Vaisnava Bhaktas, Sufi saints, Sants of Bhakti movement and others. Guru Nanak was always accompanied by Mardana, a Muslim with a musical instrument. rebeck. Nanak's teachings are in the form of melodious songs and they are found in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak, apart from elucidating the basic principles of Sikhism, also established the *sangat* (the congregation of his followers), *langar* (group-dining), *kirtan* (group-singing of religious songs) and such other institutions.

Guru Nanak was followed by nine succeeding Gurus until Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, put an end to the office of person-Guru and instead bestowed Guruship on the scripture, or the Word as contained therein, for all time to come.

All the Gurus are religiously and ideologically one with Guru Nanak : they are also said in the Sikh tradition to be one in spirit though different in body. However, everyone has his own contribution to the making of Sikh ideology, religion and way of life. Most of the Gurus were gifted poets and their compositions are now found compiled in Guru Granth Sahib.

The period from Guru Angad the immediate successor of Guru Nanak, to Guru Arjan, fifth in the line of succession, forms the first phase in the development of Sikhism (1539-1606). Continuing the tradition of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad is the one who standardised Gurmukhi, as a script for Punjabi language in which the Gurus composed their hymns. The institution of *sangat* also gained more importance during the period of the second Guru.

The Third Master, Guru Amar Das constructed a well with a staircase reaching down to the water surface, which was called the *baoli*. This well replaced the necessity for going to the *tirthas* held sacred by the Hindus. Guru Amar Das founded a town where the Sikhs would gather for their *sangat*. This town later got its name as Amritsar. Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru, started constructing a big tank in the town of Amritsar. He also established an order of missionary *masands* to look after the affairs of *sangats* which were spreading far and wide by then.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, completed the work of the tank and at the centre of the tank built a *Gurdwara* calling it Harimandar, the house of God. Guru Arjan also founded various other religious centres for the Sikhs. The Sikhs gathered regularly in these centres and worshipped God. By this time the free community mess (*Guru-Ka-Langar*) had become a regular feature in Sikh life. During the period of Guru Arjan, Sikhism had already become a mass religious movement and it started inheriting the heroic and martial traditions of Punjab. This radical spread of Sikhism was looked by the post-Akbar rulers of Delhi as a threat to their political hegemony. The Islamic revivalism among the ruling circles of Delhi after the death of King Akbar evoked intolerance towards the Sikhs. Guru Arjan organized to collect the hymns of Guru Nanak and other Gurus and their contemporary Bhaktas and Sufis into a single compilation. This too invited resentment from the Delhi rulers. A clash of interests broke out between them and the Delhi court. In 1606 Guru Arjan was taken captive and was put to death. This became a turning point in the history of Sikhism.

Guru Hargobind was the sixth Guru of the Sikhs. He stressed the self-respect and defence of Sikhs. He wore two swords representing the *miri* (temporal) and *piri* (spiritual) aspects of Sikhism. He trained the Sikhs in the art of fighting against injustice and despotism. The Sikh Gurus mobilized large number of peasants. The period of the seventh Guru, Har Rai, was relatively peaceful. Sikhism continued spreading its influence in Punjab and nearby regions. Guru Har Kishan followed him as the eighth Guru.

Emperor Aurangzeb ascended the throne of Delhi in A.D. 1658 and he was a strong bigot and fanatic, much antagonistic towards Sikhs. Guru Tegh Bahadur became the ninth Guru in 1664, and he stood for defending the religious rights of the people. He became a martyr defending the right to religious freedom of the Hindus.

The Tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) was a great organizer and a leader. In his poetic compositions, he inherited the heroic adventures of the mythology of Chandi (Kali). The volume containing his compositions goes with the name *Dasam Granth*. However, there are differences of opinion among Sikh scholars whether the entire work was authored by the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh abolished the institution of *massands* which by that time had gone corrupt. In its place he established the Khalsa (1699). Khalsa is the organization of *sant-sipahi* or saint-soldiers. It is a combination of the values of Bhakti and Sakti. Khalsa is also a model social organization which stands for a casteless and classless society of brotherhood. It was Guru Gobind Singh who abolished the caste titles of the Sikhs and gave them a common surname 'Singh'. A Tamil poet, Subramanya Bharati, has written a beautiful poem titled "Guru Gobinder" and narrates in it the history of the formation of Khalsa. V.V.S. Iyer and Sudhananda Bharati too celebrated Guru Gobind Singh and his Khalsa Order.

With Guru Gobind Singh the line of personal Gurus came to an end. Guru Gobind Singh established that the Guru Granth Sahib would be the Guru for the Sikhs in the future. The Sikhs revere the Guru Granth Sahib as their living Guru.

### **The Scripture**

The Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth is the Sikh scripture of beautiful hymns of 1430 standard printed pages. Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, organized the compilation of the hymns of the previous Gurus, including his own and also of saints and Bhagats who held ideological affinity with the Gurus. Hymns of the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur were also added to the final

edition by Guru Gobind Singh. Apart from the hymns of the Gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib contains the songs of Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Jaydev, Sheikh Farid, Sai, Pipa, Trilochan and several other holy men coming from both Hindu and Muslim traditions. They are holy men coming from various parts of India, speaking different languages. Among them many were from oppressed castes. The composition of Guru Granth Sahib is an expression of broad religious understanding and tolerance. Its social commitment is with the oppressed people. The Sikh scripture is unique among the world's scriptures in its inclusion of hymns of non-Sikh authors.

The Guru Granth Sahib can broadly be divided into three parts : the first and the last parts are quite brief and contain compositions in verse but not set to any musical measure whereas the middle section, comprising the bulk of the scripture, is set to thirty-one different musical measures, such as Sri, Majh, Gauri, Asa, etc. The organization of each section among the thirty-one *ragas* is uniform; first come the hymns of Guru Nanak followed by those of Third, Fourth, Fifth and Ninth Gurus. After these come the verses of Kabir, Farid, Namdev, Ravidas, etc. in that order.

## II

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. Monotheism is the belief-system in one God and deriving the entire existence from the one God. Sikhism preaches a God who is nameless and formless and the entire human existence is explained as the creation of that one God.

The Sikh *mulmantra* which appears at the very beginning of the Guru Granth Sahib starts with the numeral pronounced as *Ik*, meaning one. This denotes two important principles which are fundamental to Sikhism. *Ik* stands for the oneness of God and also for the oneness of the entire existence. God is one and the entire existence is united by the all-pervasive principle of God. God is the uniting thread of all that exist. Sikhism differs from other schools of monotheism in so far as it does not satisfy itself with the assertion of oneness of God only. God as a single principle unites the entire universe which is full of varieties and diverseness. The principle of *Ik* does not exclude the world of diversity.

Some of the monotheistic religions establish the oneness of God as different from and against the existing world. For such schools, God is transcendental to the existing world. God is understood as a metaphysical being completely beyond the world. Such an approach discriminates the world to get the idea of God. Even when their idea of God is one, they inculcate a negative attitude to the world and consequently, they land on

two realities, the reality of God and the discriminated reality of world. This paves the way to dichotomy, a dualism of God and world. This happens despite their claim that they preach oneness of God and so they are monotheistic. On the basis of the idea of oneness of God and the discrimination upheld towards the world, the monotheism of such religions can be named as discriminative monotheism. Contrary to this, Sikhism proposes an integrative monotheism. It does not accept the classical oppositions found in the history of religions such as God and world. Transcendence and Immanence, *nirguna* and *saguna*, one and many, creator and created. Tranquility and activity, etc. The genius of Sikhism consists in uniting these opposites and propounding a positive, non-discriminative thought which is at the same time spiritual and empirical, transcendental and temporal, logocentric and somatic. Guru Arjun says :

Wherever I look, His sole presence I behold;  
Himself in each being immanent,  
Himself the Sun with rays outspread,  
Himself the hidden reality,  
Himself the visible forms,  
Attributed and unattributed are two terms devised;  
Both in unison one Reality formulate.

—GGS, 387

Stressing the unitary aspect of Sikhism, Sikh scholars name it a religion with a whole-life philosophy. By whole-life-philosophy is meant the non-discriminatory approach to earthly life and non-acceptance of the oppositions of classical religions. It is not a philosophy of ascetics because asceticism means the way of life of discriminative monotheism. Sikhism is not a religion of God without man or without the nature. It is a united religion of God, man and nature. In Punjabi, the whole life aspect of Sikhism is expressed by the words, *miri* meaning earthliness and *piri* meaning spirituality. In the new formulation of Sikhism, *miri-piri* is a single principle uniting both the aspects of spirituality and phenomenality. In Sikhism, spirituality penetrates the entire earthly life of man, making it precious, meaningful and demands it to be ethical. God, the creator, is real and holy, as well as the creation is real and holy. Guru Nanak calls the life as a beautiful garden, an alive tree, a *dharmshala* where righteous acts are to be performed. Sikhism finds no reason to declare the world as unholy and sinful because it is the wonderful creation of God. The Sikh Gurus use a unique word *wahiguru* to express this wonderful aspect of unity of God

and world. *wahiguru* is not a name of God, neither of the world but it stands to express the feeling of wonder man gets from the aesthetic experience of nature and world which is the brilliant workmanship of Lord. In the above sense the Gurus often say that God is beauty and wonder.

In philosophical language the integrated monetheism is absolute idealism comparable to the system founded by Hegel, the German philosopher of the 19th century. Absolute idealism differs from the discriminative idealism of classical philosophical schools that it sees the presence of idea or spirit in the entire existence. The world is not alien to the spirit. It is another being of Spirit. The world is spirit-bound. The gross material world is another existence of the subtle idea, i.e. Spirit. The spirit is all-pervasive and immanent in everything. Nothing is beyond spirit "My True Lord has made such an interesting world in which everything is different from the other. "He created light and darkness and still there is one element in all and that is He Himself", says the Sikh scripture.

In the above description of Sikh monotheism we have seen in detail the central idea of the relation between God and world. And now let us turn over to a few more concepts of Sikhism.

### **Hukam**

The word *hukam* is translated as the Divine Will or ordinance of God. It is at the command of God that the world is created and sustained :

God by His Will made the world,  
God at His Will controls it;  
He beholds all things set under His Will.

– GGS, 1293

*Hukam* is the unifying link between the creator and creation and it makes them inseparable. *Hukam* is also indicated as the word and wisdom of God.

Natural elements such as air, water, fire and earth act according to the ordinance of God. Divine ordinance here means the regularity of Nature, its law-boundedness and cosmic order. It is maintained by the Gurus that the Divine Court is just. Thus, *hukam* means not only natural order but also divine justice in human social affairs. The divine social ordinance is that man must live with love, awareness of justice and devotion to God. The Sikh Gurus maintain that a man must live according to *hukam*.

The concept of *hukam* is comparable to the western concept of logos which too stands for regularity, rationality and universal order.

### ***Haumai***

*Haumai*, a key concept of Sikhism, means the self-centredness of individual being. It can also be translated as the I-ness, individualism, selfishness and egoism of man. Individuality as such is not negated in Sikhism. However, socio-historically and ethically, individualism has become the greatest malady of humanity. *Haumai* is the attachment of man with property, status and power. The concept of *haumai* is rich with its socio-ethical content. Despotism is the expression of *haumai* of power. Casteism and ritualism are other forms of *haumai*.

Sikhism proposes fundamental eradication and deconstruction of *haumai*. Liquidation of *haumai* is liberation in this life itself. It is called *jivan mukti*. How to eradicate the *haumai*? It seems Sikhism proposes at least three patterns of eradicating the *haumai* (1) Devotion to God: by filling the mind always with the Name of God, the *haumai* is eradicated. (2) Associating oneself with holy men, dissolving oneself in collectivity, the *sangat*. The societal nature of man is stressed here. With the eradication of *haumai* man regains his premortal collective being. (3) Social Action: Social Action can be service to society, in its milder form. Its radical form is struggle for God ordained justice. A man committed to social action looses his *haumai*.

### **Name**

Sikhism is often mentioned as a religion of *nam marga*. Literally, the term 'Nam' means Name. However, as a concept, it is the comprehensible form of incomprehensible God. The created empirical world of names and forms is the Nam. It is through this world that we comprehend the greatness of God. From the devotees, point of view, *Nam* is the Name of God who is Nameless. Sikhism proposes *Nam simran* or remembering the Name of God. Once God is nameless, by *Nam simran* is meant here a pure form of devotion, a devotion directed to God, but not to any particular god or god form.

### **Miri-Piri**

Sikhism is a *miri-piri* system. *Miri* means earthly; *piri* means saintly, '*miri*' means the temporal, physical, gross, earthly material life. '*Piri*' means spiritual, metaphysical, transcendental, saintly, divine. Sikhism very consciously poses itself as a religion which unifies the above two realms of life. It criticizes the dichotomy and dualism encouraged by the traditional religions and philosophies. Sikhism condemns the metaphysical exclusivism in doctrine and asceticism in practice of traditional thought-

systems. They had removed man away from discussing the actual problems of life. Sikhism proposes a *miri-piri* in man. The *sant-sipahi* idea is *miri piri* in practice. This ideal man of Sikhism comes closer to Plato's ideal of philosopher-king. However, the ideal of *sant-sipahi* is less elitistic and less aristocratic than the Platonian philosopher-king. The philosopher-king of Plato is the ideal wise ruler. This ideal evolves from the above. But the Sikh ideal is the one coming up from below. Speaking of the Sikh concern for the sabalten classes, the scripture says:

How may a weak man be saved?  
 How to swim cross the ocean of world lioness?  
 Beloved Lord! in Thee I seek shelter;  
 Save me! Save me!"

—GGS, Kabir, 855

*Sant-sipahi* seems to be a reply to the twin questions raised by Kabir. At another time Guru Nanak formulated the basic problems of human existence in the following manner:

The greatest of all sufferings is separation from God;  
 Another is the suffering of hunger and poverty;  
 Next is the suffering from the tyrant aggressor.

—G.G.S., 1256

The *sant-sipahi* is an ideal responding to the three basic problems of human existence as they are identified by Guru Nanak.

### **Critique of Externalism and Ritualism**

Ritualism is a sensitive problem in the history of culture, particularly in the history of religions. Rituals are symbols in action. Symbols, no doubt, stand for certain ideas, beliefs and historical experiences. However, when the symbols lose their original relation with the ideas, they themselves become the objects that matter. It is at this phase that the rituals become pure externalities. Pure symbolism cannot save culture, rather it would represent the stagnation and decay of a culture.

In Indian history, one can identify a long history of struggle between spiritualism and ritualism. As we know, during the ancient period of India, the Vedas developed a very complicated system of rituals and a priestly caste as the performer and carrier of rituals. Even the Upanishads of the same Vedic line criticized the emphasis on externalities. The Upanishads declared that the ritual knowledge is the knowledge of mere name and form. This paves the way for some other inner knowledge or spiritual experience. Buddhism has earned the historical reputation that it is a

powerful voice against ritualism in Indian history. It is in this relentless struggle against ritualism that the Buddhist spirituality emerged. Spirituality as mental purity and ethical living is proposed by Buddhism as an alternative to ritualism and externalities. It is not just a coincidence that Buddhism in its crusade against ritualism was able to produce the finest ethical teachings: the same can be said about Sikhism, too. It is due to the stress on spirituality, poet Iqbal maintained that Gautama Buddha and Guru Nanak were the tallest personalities India had ever produced. Sikhism fought against not only Vedic rituals but also the ritualism of the medieval Bhakti traditions. Despite the democratic content of the early Bhakti movements, soon they got rigidified into the feudalized temple culture. This compelled Guru Nanak once again to raise the banner of spiritualism against ritualism. Guru Nanak declares.

I practice no ritual of the creeds,  
My only devotion is meditation on Thee.

—G.G.S., 878

In the hymns of Guru Nanak, one can find a consistent pattern of replacing the externalities with ethical purity, movement from outside to inwardness. Regarding wearing of a sacred thread, Guru Nanak demands:

Make compassion the cotton, contentment the yarn;  
Give it the chastity's twist and knot,  
Such is the true thread of the self'

—G.G.S., 471

Similarly, regarding a true Muslim, Guru Nanak says :

Make thy Mosque of love of humanity;  
Thy prayer-carpet of sincerity;  
Thy Koran of honest and approved endeavour;  
Thy circumcision of modesty;  
Thy Ramadhan fast of noble conduct;  
Thus shalt thou be a True Muslim."

—G.G.S., 479

## CHAPTER II GOD AND REALITY

### I

#### 1. The Oneness of God

As it has been already mentioned in the preceding chapter, Sikhism believes in one God and this belief in the oneness of God is called monotheism. The Sikh *mulmantra* starts with the numeral expression '1' pronounced as *ik* in Punjabi. This number denotes the basic concept of Sikhism that God is one and the reality is united. The oneness of God has been stressed by Guru Nanak as a response to the existing beliefs in Hinduism and Islam with varying names and forms of God. Like Guru Nanak's utterance "There is no Hindu and there is no Mussalman", he proclaimed also the oneness of God that there cannot be a Hindu God and a Muslim God. To conceive separate gods to various creeds, according to Guru Nanak, is a superstition:

Saith Nanak, when the Guru hath removed superstition.  
Allah and Parabrahmam are seen the same.

—G.G.S., 826

Guru Nanak reiterates this idea of the unity of God in several of his hymns:

Know the Lord to be One,  
Even though the paths be twain.

—G.G.S., 1349

He who knows the two paths to be One,  
will alone find fulfilment.

—G.G.S., 192

Guru Nanak uses both the Hindu names and Muslim names to call the one God. The following Hindu names of God occur often in his hymns Bhagwan, Vishnu, Brahm, Gobind, Gopal, Hari, Ishwar, Kesav, Krishna, Madhusudan, Murari, Narayan, Parbrahm, Parmeshwar, Rahu, Ram, Vasdev, et. al. Similarly, he calls his God with Islamic names as well : Allah, Kabir, Karim, Khuda, Malik, Rabb, Rahim, Rahman, Sahib, etc. But Guru Nanak is sure that God is one despite and beyond all these names.

Guru Nanak also utters some other names for God which essentially shows his nonsectarian and universal approach to God. He calls his God with the name of Anam, i.e. nameless. Similarly, God has been indicated as Adharam and Amazab, religionless or beyond any particular religion.

The oneness of God is not a totalitarian concept. God is one and also many 1—1 *ik* and *anek*. The one becomes many. In a sense, oneness and manyness together show that God is the becoming life itself. One without many and without becoming into many always has the danger of ending as single static abstraction. But Sikh conception of God is that God is dynamic. He is the *kartapurakh*, the creator, and the creative moment is immanent in every being. Therefore, God has been called as the "Life of the Universal!" (*jaggiwan*). Bhai Vir Singh, a Sikh exegete and poet of the 20th century Punjab, in one of his poems identifies the meaning of life as a pond full of lotus flowers ever blooming and becoming. This is the Sikh message.

The idea of God has been compared to water, the life-giving force of universe. Water is a formless but alive being, also the basis for all life-forms. God has also been compared to a tree, which is always in the process of becoming ever fresh and blooming, growing from a single seed into multifarious branches, leaves, flowers and fruits. Every part of the tree is related not only with other parts but also with the whole. A tree is inter-related not only in itself but also with the whole. A tree is inter-related not only in itself but also with the space above and below, with the earth, with the entire environment through lively bonds. A tree is always transcending its previous limitations, rises against the gravitation of the earth although deeply rooted in it. It is ever colourful, green, fresh and leading to new heights.

The reality of God has been compared also to ocean and waves. The simile is a classical one used in the Upanishads, but unfortunately the Vedantins for a long while missed this unity and preferred the ill-spoken metaphor of rope and serpent. Guru Nanak revives the old Upanishadic metaphor of one and many united organically. The relation between them is the one between the whole and the part. The reality is a great and beautiful structure in which every moment is related with the whole in an organic way. The scripture says :

Thou art the Tree;  
 All that is, is Thy flourishing branches;  
 Thou art the ocean, foam and bubbles;

All that is visible is Thyself;  
 Thou the string and jewels,  
 Thou the knot, the principle beed;  
 In the beginning, middle and end is the Lord  
 Nothing else exists.

—G.G.S., 102

It is this *relatedness* which is the most important in Sikhism. It represents the unity of Being. The scripture explains the unity in the following verse :

The Creator is in the creation,  
 In creation is He;  
 From one clay, in various forms,  
 Has He made all creation;  
 Neither is any pot of clay faulty.

Like the principle of ik, *hukam* or the ordinance of God is another principle which stands to represent the oneness of reality. *Hukam* is the unitary, single principle which underlies all the existence.

He himself has fashioned all,  
 By His Will He created everything;  
 Himself alone He turned into innumerable forms,  
 Into Him shall all these be merged.

—G.G.S., 131

The Sikh Gurus portray the one God as the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all existence. Generally speaking, such an idea is already available in the Bhakti religions of India, although there it was mingled with a lot of mythological stories. The Hindu Puranas composed during the medieval period described in all fantastic imagination the stories of gods creating, sustaining and destroying the world many times. Despite the wild fantasies contained in those stories, the idea of creation, etc. had a positive role to play in the history of religions. It is this idea of creation by God which helped the human mind to justify the reality and meaningfulness of earthly living. Introduction of the idea of creation appeared to counter the worst negativistic ideas of intellectual philosophies which declares the utter falseness of the temporal life. Skepticism paved the way to work out transcendental and ascetic ideals. The religious idea of creation at such a juncture is a positive turning, giving at least relative reality to earthly life.

In Sikhism, too, such a role to the idea of creation continues to exist. However, Sikhism in a very fundamental way asserts the reality as God Himself. The idea of God and the world are true and real, though the latter is only relatively true. This is a radical departure from the Bhakti tradition which somehow still had the residue of skepticism in its characterisation of the world.

In Sikhism the idea of creation, sustaining and destruction is devoid of any mythological description. The idea of creation, etc. in Sikhism emerges as a generalized philosophical concept. Consequently, it acquires a new meaning, too. Through the idea of creation, sustaining and destruction Sikhism organically unites the idea of God with historical time. In other words, it is through the idea of creation that Sikhism unites the idea of Time with its conception of Reality. We get a conception of Reality which is not purely non-temporal. No doubt, non-temporality as one of the attributes occupies a certain place in the Sikh conception of Reality. However, with the generalized philosophical idea of creation, sustenance and the destruction, the ideas of Time, history, change, human work, etc. massively enter into the Sikh conception of Reality. Philosophy as pure metaphysics ends here and a fresh definition of philosophy appears. Religion no more is pure spirituality having a hatred towards the phenomenal life. Sikhism keys up the dialectics of spirituality and earthliness and it is redefining the idea of religion itself. The radical departure made by Sikhism is comparable to the same type of departure made by Hegelianism in the European philosophy.

The idea of creation, sustenance and destruction in Sikhism is not cyclical as it is found in Indian mythological tradition (*yuga, pralaya*, etc). The metaphor of tree in Sikhism may explain this. In this metaphor, the change is not purely cyclical, neither it is purely linear. The model of progress conceived is spiral, some old moments of which recur but fresh moments too occur to take the change forward. To confirm this idea, the Guru Granth Sahib affirms that God keeps creating permanently and always.

The idea of God Transcendent and/or Immanent is a problem widely spoken in the history of religions. God Transcendent is beyond the world. He is far away from the world and He is superior and loftier than the creation. The idea of transcendence nature of God expresses the difference of God from the world and even the opposition of God to the world. In Indian religions, the transcendent idea has got the evaluation that it is

*nirguna* and *nirprapanca*, that it is without any attribute of the world and it is without the world. The Vedantins rigorously worked out such a formulation. A one-sided idea of Transcendentality of God usually stands on a negative or discriminative attitude to the world. It is even a fear towards the hardships of earthly living. As a Sikh scholar points out, in any system where God is only Transcendent, all moral and spiritual life and yearning would become pointless, irrelevant and superfluous. All earthly life is meaningless in such a system and asceticism as a style of living is the only way out.

Pure immanence too is one-sided. It gives priority to the moment of unity of God and world and has the danger of becoming pantheistic. It takes one closer to the Spinoza's saying that God is Nature and Nature is God. Pure immanence leads to the mystic declarations such as 'I am God'. Immanence cannot suggest an adequate external standard to measure the good and bad of worldly acts.

Sikhism solves this problem by declaring that God is transcendent as well as immanent. It is a conception of unity and difference between the idea of God and the world. Meaning the transcendent and immanent nature of God, the Sikh Gurus defined that God is far and near, within and without, attributed and unattributed.

Immanence has been stressed through the expression that God is all-pervasive. Creation is another argument for immanence because the world is created by God's will and maintained by His ordinance.

The Lord pervades all creation,  
In ocean and land His reality operates hidden.

—G.G.S., 597

And :

God, who created all creatures, but has Himself into each;  
Yet He is apart from all.

—G.G.S., 937

The transcendent and immanent nature of God is well expressed in the metaphor of lotus in water. The lotus grows in water, resides in water, and gets sustenance from it, however keeps itself untouched by it.

## II

### One and Many :

The problem of one and many is one of the basic problems of philosophy, both eastern and western. It can be ascertained that the problem is as old as philosophy itself. Philosophy came into existence through

formulating and discussing this particular problem of one and many. The most ancient minds had the fine intuition that there lies a unitary law hidden behind the perceived reality, which appeared to them chaotic and pluralistic. The Indian Vedas talked about the *rta*, an order, regularity and rationality of the otherwise unconnected flow of events and existence of things (*anrta*). The Vedic search for '*tad ekam*' was another attempt to unite the multiplicity of being into one. The early philosophers of Greece desired to discover the unity of objects and events in the form of an initial arche. Heraclitus called it the Logos. The Upanishadic concept of Brahman at its early stage tried to become the singular substratum of the multiplicity of existence. However, many among the ancient philosophers ended in finding out more than one substance as the first and foremost foundation of the multifarious objects and things. The five natural elements and then, innumerable particles named atoms were apprehended as the *locus standi* units of the entire existence. This trend in philosophical discourses came to be known as pluralism. These two opposing philosophical traditions, namely, the philosophy of oneness and that of manyness, in alliance with various other philosophical problems, keyed the entire course of history of philosophy.

The problem assumed various historical forms in various ages and in different schools of philosophy and religion. The schools which emphasised the holistic approach and unitary vision of reality came to be called as monism and their theistic version as monotheism. In contrast to this, the schools of thought stressing the diversity and multiplicity of reality acquired the name of pluralism and polytheism. In Indian context, Advaita Vedanta is believed to be the most radical form of monism. And the Vaisesika and Jaina atomism represent the best examples of pluralistic perception.

The medieval and modern European thought too recited the binary of one and many in the form of realism and nominalism, and then, in sensualism and rationalism. The problem has its contemporary modes, too, in the controversies between analytical philosophy and structuralism.

The problem of one and many, it must be mentioned, intersects with many more philosophical problems which are in no way less important in philosophy. The problems of reality and appearance, the whole and parts, substance and modes, cause and effect, identity and differences, synthesis and analysis are a few of them which are inseparably linked with the problem of one and many.

Here we attempt to elucidate the problem of one and many as it has been apprehended in Sikh philosophy. In this attempt, we shall undertake to situate the Sikh version of the problem in the context of Indian philosophy.

Let us start from the other side to discuss first the philosophy of many. Indian philosophical systems advocating the substantial status of many are often denoted as realistic systems. This is due to their apparent nearness to the commonsense viewpoint about reality and their acceptance of the empirical reality as the ultimate. Jadunath Sinha enumerates the schools of pluralism under the strike us. They are, one and all, pluralistic, and this is so not by any accident...Their objective ultimates are plural, many."

The classical representative of pluralism in Indian philosophy is the Nyaya-Vaisesika. It conceives the reality through various independent categories such as *dravya*, *guna*, *karma*, *samanya*, *visesa* and *samavaya*. The *dravyas* themselves are again many in number, namely, earth, water, fire, air, ether, time, space, soul and mind. Although some of the categories among these are intended to represent the commonalities and generalities (*samanya*) existing among things, the category of *visesa* makes Vaisesika into an inevitable philosophy of manyness. *Visesas* represent the specific nature of a thing distinguishable from any other object. The specific nature (*visesa*) of a thing is conditioned by the infinitesimal atoms out of which that particular thing is made up. Thus, *visesas* constitute the ultimate differences of atoms existing independently. Nyaya Vaisesika expounds the diversity of things through its category of *visesa*. And this diversity is again due to the specific differences amongst the atoms themselves. The differences existing in atoms are regarded eternal and ultimate.

Nyaya Vaisesika handles the problem of cause and effect, too, in its pluralistic spirit. This principle gets the name *asatkaryavada*, meaning absence of any internal relationship between the cause and effect. According to this viewpoint, the effect, as contrasted with the cause, is something altogether new. Every effect is a fresh beginning (*arambha*), it does not have any relation with the cause.

Vaisesika regards the souls as many. It constructs consciousness as an aggregate of physical elements. As such, the problem of cause is the weakest point in the philosophy of many. According to it, "The whole cannot be perceived apart from its parts. The whole exists in its parts. Therefore, there is no difference between the whole and its parts. The

whole is nothing but an aggregate of parts...Further, the perception of unity is a mere fiction of imagination...The whole is a mere collection of atoms (*anusansayamatra*). It is not a composite whole.

The atomistic perception of reality is characteristic not only of Nyaya Vaisesika, but also of Jainism and Samkhya. T.R.V. Murti identifies the Jaina doctrine of *anekantavada* as another major version of Indian pluralism. He asserts "the pluralistic tendency is nowhere more thoroughgoing or consistent than in the *anekantavada* of the Jainas.

The limitations of the philosophy of many are crystal clear. It is aimed at explaining the reality from the empirically perceived physical elements and their mechanical collections. Such an interpretation inevitably reduces the human life into physical elements, and the physical world into lifeless matter (*jada*). Even a materialist philosopher of our time feels dissatisfied that "for them, the matter is intrinsically static." No interrelationship, not to speak of unity, is identifiable among the manifold objects or among the manifold souls. The Nyaya Vaisesika perception of the whole as mere collection or summation of parts is a philosophical failure. It shows only the inability of the philosophy of many to explain the phenomenon of the whole. Sociologically, the philosophy of many occupies the individualistic position. Not to speak of ideational unity of being, even material unity of being is not assumed by the philosophy of many. It prefers an absolutist methodology. Identity with itself, and so, differences with the other are the aspects which have been absolutised in this type of philosophy. To conclude this discussion, it has to be stated that the philosophy of many, due to its pre-occupation with the physical world and positivistic approach, badly accommodates the social, ethical and spiritual values and ideals.

In contrast to the pluralistic schools of thought, one finds the Advaita Vedanta at the other end in the spectrum of Indian philosophical thought. "The absolutistic systems -Vedanta, Madhyamika and Vijanavada - conceive reality as approached only through negation or the cancellation of the world-illusion...One thing they all have in common. They deny multiplicity. (The multiple) phenomena are illusion. (and) reality is apprehended through negation or cancellation."

Advaita asserts that Brahman is the only reality without the second. It rejects every kind of multiplicity as illusion. "Unity alone is the highest truth and multiplicity is conjured up by false ignorance. Brahman is not something which is immanent in the multiple existence, but it is beyond multiplicity, "complete transcendence", "in contrast and opposition to the

many". Rudolf Otto rightly calls it "aloneness". "The realm of the many is now wholly evil in contrast to the realm of the one—it is *mithyajnana*."

The Advaitin finds it impossible to combine one and many, because such a combination is seen by him as contradictory and illogical. T.M.P. Mahadevan summarises this position, "How could one and the same thing possess contradictory attributes"? Sankara calls the knowledge which combines together one and many as "indefinite", "doubtful" and "indeterminate". Thus, we find Sankara desiring to reach a doubtless, determinate and definite knowledge as it was sought by Descartes a few centuries later. Sankara wants a type of knowledge which rigorously satisfies the laws of formal logic.

There are some striking similarities between the philosophies of one and many. Both these philosophies rigorously follow methodological absolutism. That is, the moment of identity is overstressed in the one, and the moment of difference is overstressed in the other. Secondly, both the schools reject the idea of immanence and thus, refuse themselves to relate with the other. Thirdly, both Advaita and Vaisesika are reluctant to discuss moral and religious problems. To quote P.N. Srinivasachari, a scholar of Bhedabheda philosophy: "Absolute identity as well as absolute difference is a mere abstraction devoid of meaning, and both are subversive of moral and religious needs." Fourthly, both Vaisesika and Advaita repudiate the relation between cause and effect. Vaisesika openly advocates Asatkaryavada, whereas Sankara's Advaita distorts Satkaryavada with its conception of Vivarta. If we conceive Satkaryavada as a doctrine relating positively one phenomenon with the other, then both the philosophies of one and many work against the conception of relatedness. And finally, both these philosophies are metaphysical in the sense of one-sidedness and anti-dialectical. Both the philosophies are trapped by the limitations of formal logic, each in its own way. Vaisesika ends as a pure empiricism, while Advaita ends as pure transcendentalism. They do not explore the possibility for a dialogue with the other.

### **Sikhism and the Problem of One and Many**

In a sense, the philosophical context of Sikhism is the absolutised philosophy of one, on the one hand, and that of many, on the other. It is the reality dichotomised by pluralism and monism from which Sikhism assumes its beginning. Sikhism intends to unite them.

The Sikh *mulmantra* starts with the numeral one - *ik* - indicating and uncompromisingly stressing the oneness of reality. But the reality now

comprises both one and many. "Wonderful Thy creatures, wonderful their species. Wonderful their forms, wonderful their colours", asserts Guru Nanak. The many is seen as the plural manifestation of the one. Not only the one, but also the many has been declared holy. "Holy is the Lord, ever holy, holy all created forms", says Guru Amar Das. Guru Ram Das utters. "Himself is the Lord unattached, Himself also of varied manifestations." In "Sukhmani", Guru Arjun affirms, "Varied are His forms, varied His hues with varied disguises, yet is His state one and sole. With varied ways has He created the expanse of existence." The Sikh Gurus do not recognise two realities - the reality of one and of many. The dualism has been transcended. "In the earth and sky, see I not duality manifest. In all humanity is manifest the same Divine Light....In all worlds is operative God's sole Ordinance: From the One has arisen all creation" declares Guru Nanak.

The synthetic spirit of Sikhism is astounding. The one becomes the principle of ideational unity of the multiple existence. "Should brass, gold or iron be broken, the smith in fire fuses it together." Guru Arjan says, "Wherever I look, His sole presence I behold; Himself in each being immanent. Himself the sun, with rays outspread; Himself the hidden reality: Himself the visible forms. Attributed and unattributed are two terms devised. Both in unison one Reality formulate.

The Sikh Gurus were able to do what Sankara could not. What looked impossible, illogical and contradictory to Sankara in terms of formal logic, becomes possible to Guru Nanak, that is uniting in singular whole the one and the many. This has been done by transcending the limits of logic. To quote Rudolf Otto, "The unity, being one, is a fact in the sense of mystical synthesis of multiplicity, which though not reproducible by any of our rational categories is nevertheless a synthesis." It is "mystical and not reproducible by any of our rational categories" of formal logic, on which, as we have shown, the one as "aloneness" of Sankarite thought was founded. The one here does not fall into the "complete transcendence", but establishes itself "the immanence of the unity in and of things and the immanence of things in one."

The Sikh Gurus outrightly repudiate the *Advaitic* conception of *maya* attributed to the manifold nature of existence. Guru Ram Das exclaims: "Air, water, earth and sky - all are the Lord's abode: Himself in all these He operates - What may I call unreal" (GGS, 143). Guru Arjan warns: "Re'vile not the world for anything, by the Lord is it created" (GGS, 611). Sant Ravidas asserts that we have already transcended the Sankarite dichotomy

of rope and snake: "Of the episode of the rope and the serpent: now the mystery have we realised somewhat. As by sight of innumerable bangles, one forgets the gold: Now I express not that illusion. In all innumerable forms is the sole Lord pervasive; Disporting in all (GGS, 658).

The Sikh Gurus shift themselves to various metaphors to demonstrate the unity of one and many, leaving behind the ill-fated Sankarite metaphor of rope and serpent. They are the metaphors of gold and bangles, clay and pots, *sabda* and millions of musical notes, ocean and its waves, thread and beads, root and branches of a tree, sun and its rays, etc. All these metaphors are designed to express adequately the unity of one and many. For example, the Sikh scripture says :

All existence is Thy blossoming branches,

Thou the tree;

Thou the subtle essence hast turned:

Thou the ocean, foam, bubble -

Nothing besides Thee is visible;

Thou the string and the beads;

The knot and the principal bead art Thou.

In the beginning, end and middle

is solely the Lord-

Nothing else is visible

-G.G.S., 102

It is noteworthy that the Sikh Gurus consciously avoided the metaphor of rope and serpent.

Sikhism also denounces the absolutist philosophy of many. This can be understood by its outright condemnation of individualism or *haumai*. Individualism is the ground on which, as it has been shown earlier, the philosophical pluralism is founded. Engulfed by the feeling of *haumai*, the individual being, in reality associated with other beings and with the whole, declares its non-relatedness. *Haumai* has been identified by the Sikh Gurus as the greatest malady of mankind. Using the metaphor of Tree, Guru Nanak says, "Those that are forgetful of the Name, into illusion of duality are strayed: Discarding the root, to the branch are attached" (GGS, 420).

At this level of our deliberations, we can delve into the various but interrelated meanings of the Sikh concept of one, and enumerate the outcomes of the dialectics of one and many.

Above all, the Sikh conception excludes the formally polarized ends of raw manifoldness and the aloneness. The one becomes the law of many (*hukam*), the substratum of various modes the one immanently and

all-pervasively living in many, causing them to unite into a system. It presents us a concrete picture of reality with all its complexities, richness, variety and diversity, and also with their underlying ruptures and unity. In this concrete and structural conception of reality, it has ably succeeded to include historical time, human action, social changes as its inseparable moments. The Sikh approach here is synthetic and holistic. Every individual moment is situated in the whole as an inalienable part of it. No individual moment occupies a privileged position, and thus, a sense of equality and justice permeates the system. Positively expressing, the relationship of love is the uniting principle of the system. Non-aggressive and non-destructive inter-relationship among the particular moments is presupposed for the successful functioning of the system. One creating the many and the many becoming one also guarantee dynamism to the whole system. Is not the Khalsa designed by the Tenth Master the embodiment of these principles of love, justice, dynamism and unity?

### **Truth in Sikhism**

*Sach* or truth is the most prominent concept in Sikhism. The term occurs in various contexts in the hymns of the Sikh Gurus. An attempt has been made here to focus on the significance of the concept of *sach* in the Guru Granth Sahib, particularly in the "Japuji", "Asa-Di-Var" and "Sukhmani". It is in these texts of the Guru Granth Sahib that the concept has found its adequate and elaborate exposition.

*Sach* is the Punjabi version of the term *sat* which too occurs in the Guru Granth Sahib along with the former to mean truth and reality. Gurbachan Singh Talib while rendering the scripture into English often translates the term *sach* as holy. The term *sat* too appears in the same form in such combinations as *Sat Guru* and *satnam*, meaning true Guru and True Name. *Sat Guru* in the terminology of the Guru Granth Sahib means God Himself, as well as the True Gurus, the Gurus in human forms, the Sikh Gurus and the concept of ideal Guru.

More complex is the term *satnam*, the meaning of the prefix *sat* depending upon the concept of *nam* itself. *Nam* in Sikhism is not just the Name of any particular god (Hindu or Muslim), but the *nam* is the word of God, the first manifestation of the otherwise formless and nameless God. *Nam* also means in general all manifested forms of God, thus meaning the manifested world in which God is immanent. *Nam* is the creative act of God, the creation and the creatures.

The other prominent presence of the term *sach* in the Guru Granth Sahib is *sach aachar* and *sachiar*. These terms occupy key position in Sikh philosophy. The term *sach* as figures in the first stanza of the "Japuji" itself is the basic problem of the entire Sikh philosophy and religion. In the "Japuji", the Guru poses the question: How to become a *sachiar*? or how to live a truthful living? The term is a wonderful making of Guru Nanak, in Punjabi, to represent the basic problematic of religion. In some places the term *sachiar* occurs to mean the God Absolute Himself. However, the dominant meaning of *sachiar* in Sikhism is the man who lives a truthful living or a man in tune with truth.

Now, we pass over to the term *sacha achar*, unanimously translated as truthful living : it occurs in the often quoted lines of *gurbani* "Truth is the highest; however, truthful living is still higher". The praxis aspect as well as the concrete aspect of truth are reached in this passage.

The Sanskritic tradition informs us that the usage of the term *sat* is very old, as ancient as the Vedas. It is true that the term has travelled through the Vedic and Vedantic thinking, and afterwards it entered into the Bhakti and Puranic traditions. The Hindu tradition with its historical variations thus makes the broader context of the Sikh usage of the term *sach*. In the Vedantic schools of philosophy the concept of *sat* emerged as a conspicuous aspect of the Brahman concept, as a moment of the *swarupa* of the Brahman namely *satchitanand*. Here the term *sat* is meant to represent the reality-aspect of Brahman as an unchanging, eternal one. In this context, it is interesting to probe into the oppositional categories of the concept of *sat* in the Upanishad and Vedantic thinking. The basic opposition of *sat* in the Vedantic line of thought is the *sat*, meaning the transient world, the world of "lifeless" natural elements and the earthly life. They are often identified in the Vedantic versions as *maya* or *mithia*, meaning illusory or transience.

Now if we look at the Bhakti tradition, the term *sat*, no doubt, enters into it as an aspect of the definition - *satchitanand*. However, the most interesting thing here is that in the Bhakti thought, while the term and concept of *sat* acquire a prominence, its opposite *asat* does not get adequate representation. Bhakti tradition, as we see, is not aimed at the distinction between *sat* and *asat* as it was the case with the Vedanta. On the other hand, it is directed to provide certain amount of justification to the created world, the creatures and humans living on earth. In other words, the trend in Bhakti is not discrimination of the world but it is now to reach the

unity of God and the world, that is already discriminated one against the other. Thus, the objective of Bhakti is not thoroughly metaphysical that the world as relatively real forms one of the ends of Bhakti.

Consequently, the term *asat* is retraced backwards. Elaboration and even stating the theme of *asat* has now become antithetical to the general trend of the Bhakti tradition. To us it is important here to note that once the concept of *asat* is pushed backward, its opposite *sat* too starts losing its categorical meaning. Thus in the medieval Bhakti thought, the term *sat* is not found as significant and prominent as in the Vedantic tradition.

The usage of the concept of *sach* by the Sikh Gurus should be seen appropriately in this context, and one has to probe into the necessity of the revival of the concept and the meaning filled up into the concept in the renewed circumstances. So, we raise the following questions : why does the concept of *sach* reappear in Sikhism ? What are its opposites ? What is the new meaning of the term *sach* in Sikh usage ? How and why does the concept broaden or develop itself into *sacha achar*, *sachiar*, etc.

As it has been already mentioned, the concept of *sach* has been elevated to the highest place in Sikhism. It is the first and foremost, and the most inspiring concept in the Guru Granth Sahib. However, the counterpart of the term *sach*, that is *asat* does not occur prominently in the Sikh conceptual frame. Otherwise said, there is an absence of the *sat/asat* dichotomy in the Sikh thinking. The concept of *sat* becomes in Sikh thought the fundamental and all-pervasive. It stands to mean the all-reality of God, His Holy Name (*sat-nam*) as well as the entire created world in all its multiplicity. The hymn in "Asa di Var" starting with the words "*sach tere khand, sache barhmand*" clearly demonstrates this. "True and holy are Thy continents and universes : True and holy are Thy worlds and forms created by Thee" (GGs, 463).

It many unambiguous words, it has been shown that the manifested and visible world is part of the reality, that is *sat*. Many other hymns of the "Japuji" too would confirm this view point. Again, Guru Arjan says : "Do not revile the world, it is the God's creation."

Thus there is a conscious attempt in Sikhism to pass through the opposition of *sat/asat* and overcome the latter, and finally to make *sat* (*sach*) an all-embracing category. *Sach* becomes the monistic principles of Sikhism. The doctrine of the immanence of God in all beings too makes it impossible to dichotomise the being into *sat* and *asat*. Thus, we find in

*gurbani* a different conception of *sach* which is not necessarily oppositional to *asat*.

At the content level, there are things which are vehemently criticised and evaluated as falseness in the hymns of the Gurus.

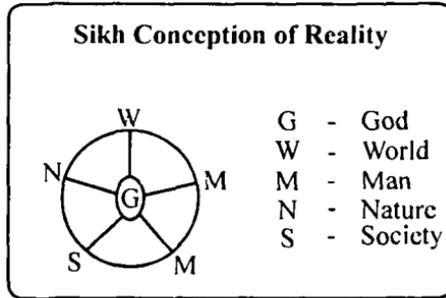
For example, ritualism and all externalities of religions are condemned in *gurbani* as false. The caste system with its inbuilt structures of oppression has been uncompromisingly criticised by the Sikh Gurus as false. Naming the God in various Hindu sects in particularistic forms, the *avatars* and *Purnas* are repudiated by the Sikh Gurus as false. All forms of alienating attitude to others on the basis of property, status and power are evaluated by the Gurus as false. And finally, all perceptions on life emerging out of *haumai* or individualism are considered by Sikhism as false. Thus, the concept of *sach* seems to appropriate its oppositional category, all that is conditioned by *haumai*.

This can be confirmed by another means, that is by equating *sachiar* with *gurmukh* : we find *manmukh* as a false person who is *haumai*-oriented. At this level, one finds that the concept of falseness or evil does not have an ontological status. On the other hand, it is valuational (axiological) and ethical. The concept of *sach* broadens its meaning that it is not only truth and reality, but also the wonder (beauty) (*wismad*) and virtue.

These discussions take us to the stagial unfoldment of various hermeneutical possibilities of the concept of *sach*. With these unfurling of the possibilities of the concept of *sach*, the concept ceases to be an abstraction of metaphysics but becomes a concrete concept. It is this concreteness that makes the concept of *sach* a growing and developing one. *Sach*, thus, is not an unchanging reality but a dynamic whole, a tree which is ever creative and ever fresh. The terms *sachiar* and *sacha achar* too would confirm this. They show that the Guru was not interested just in founding yet another contemplative system of philosophy but his objective was to establish a social order of truthful living, a realistic, wonderful, ethical and dynamic living.

The above discussion of the Sikh concept of *sach* leads us to note the futuristic perspectives of the concept. The Sikh concept of *sach* as truth and reality differs fundamentally from the existing Indian - dominantly Vedantic- concept of reality. The Vedantic *sat* is absolutistic, unchanging and the only reality. The Vedantic oneness becomes equivalent to aloneness, negating everything except the Brahman or evaluating them as *maya*. The oneness of Sikh reality is different. Here, as it has been

mentioned above, the reality is all-inclusive. It includes itself the idea of God world, nature, man and earthly living. It is, in modern terms, a federal unity of various aspects of the Being. The Absolution of Vedanta leads to a totalitarian unity whereas in Sikhism the totality is a structure in which all the moments of existence are vitally related. That makes the structure a dynamic one, ever fresh and ever creative.



The concept of *sach* in the Guru's words also contains an universal and ecumenic dimension. *Sach* as Truth, Reality and God stands above any particular religion. It is universal in scope and content. The Guru has preferred the term *sach* as the supreme category of his thought more than any other term, for example, than the term *dharam*. It is the term *dharmā*, during the medieval and late-medieval days which stood for religion, *sanatan dharmā*, *varna ashram dharmā* or *vaishnva dharmā*, etc. The Guru has, it seems, consciously avoided this term and has preferred the term *sach* to give a universal meaning to his search.

In the concluding stanzas of the "Japuji", we find a wonderful comparison or ordering of spiritual realms (*khand*s) where *sach kahnd* stands above *dharmā khand*. The realm of truth is seen by the Guru as higher than the realm of religion. The Guru witnessed in his life the then existing religions ritualized, bureaucratized and socially indifferent. Consequently, the Guru perceived the path of his Sikhs as the path of Truth, Universal and ecumenic. It is this direction that the Guru has left in his conception of *sach*.

## CHAPTER III THE WORLD AND THE MAN

### I

The dichotomy of body and mind, matter and spirit, material and ideal has been a very old and core problem of philosophy throughout its history. In different historical periods the problem assumes different theoretical formulations. In religious systems, the basic problem of philosophy acquires the formulation of interaction between the idea of God and the world.

Indian history knows many philosophical schools-religious and non-religious, ancient and medieval which were involved, as we see, in formulating the above-said dichotomy, reciting them and sometimes trying to find appropriate mediators between the opposing categories, in various ways attempting to transcend the dichotomy of matter and spirit. The early Samkhya thought although postulated that the entire world evolved (*pranam*) out of Prakrti - the primal nature—yet afterwards it ended in the dualism of Prakrti and Purusha. Jainism too did not escape the binariness of *jiva* and *ajiva*. The Vedantic philosophy proposed a threefold hierarchical set-up—Brahman, *atman* and *maya* concepts. The great Vedantic thinker Sankara made up a non-dualistic Advaitic identity between the first two concepts of Vedanta, that is, unity of Brahman and *Atman*. This Advaitic unity was achieved only after discriminating the world as a *mayic* entity. The status of world in Advait Vedanta is one of complete defamation that it named the world as illusion (*maya, mithia*) and the knowledge of world as illusory knowledge (*avida*). With the evolution of Vedantic thought and with the formulation of the Advaitic thesis of *maya*, one can say that the first circle of history of Indian philosophy reaches its end that an absolute dichotomy between spirit and matter is well established.

It is at this juncture that Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya identifies the basic problem of Indian thought in the following manner : “A broad survey of Indian philosophical literature shows that among the philosophically significant questions discussed in it, there is clearly enough one such

problem. It is the problem of the reality of the material world or nature and consequently of the relevance of the philosopher's attempt at a better understanding of it. All the major philosophers of India are directly involved in the controversy over this problem."

The question of reality or non-reality of world has many implications. The implications are of epistemological, axiological and ultimately of sociological character. Let us enumerate the galaxy of problems involved here.

- (i) Problem of reality of world or ontological status of world ;
- (ii) Worthwhileness of inquiry into its nature and structure ;
- (iii) Epistemological status of human sensations and forms of knowledge ;
- (iv) Human relation or attitude toward the world ;
- (v) Way of individual life or behaviour-pattern (ethics) ; and
- (vi) Way of social living.

The Advaitic school by way of asserting the non-reality of world epistemologically stood for disbelief in sensory data. Human senses were excluded from the Advaitic list of authentic *pramanas*. Human reason acquires only a subservient role or no role and even disturbing role. Practice has no part in cognition. Ultimately, the authority of Vades only triumphs.

In terms of human relation or attitude towards the world, the thesis of *mayic* nature of world has very odd implications. It allows any amount of manipulative and exploitative relations with the external world. This includes unethical and irresponsible attitude towards the ecological and environmental systems.

The Vedantic thesis implies worthlessness of living the earthly life. An ascetic way of living and an intuitive realisation of the unity of *atman* and Brahman are the goals proposed to an individual by the Advaitic school. The social implication of the thesis of the non-reality of world is even more horrible. It condemns human body and together with it an entire race of people who engage in manual labour and worldly toilings as of lower stock. The pure spirit without any earthly characteristics or *gunas* receives full appreciation in Advaita Vedanta. Consequently a pure intuitive elitism becomes one of the central implications of that type of philosophy.

Now, it is in this above-said philosophical context that the contribution and originality of Sikhism is to be understood and appreciated. Chronologically, Sikhism is post-Vedantic. It is an alternative to the Vedantic thought and represents another trend in Indian philosophical thinking.

Guru Nanak and the Sikh Gurus have brought forth a theosophical system in which the problem of spirit and matter transcends its classical dichotomy. The idea of God and world acquires equal status in a specific way in the thought of the Sikh Gurus. God and the created world are found united in Sikhism. No discrimination towards the world but a lovely bond rather an active association with the world is found in-built in Sikhism.

As the most important step towards the unity of God and world, Guru Nanak declares the reality of the world when he utters :

True are Thy regions, and  
 True Thy Universe ;  
 True are Thy World, and  
 True Thy creation.

In the context of Indian philosophy, this Sikh thesis of reality of world is a revolutionary one with all its implications. The Sikh Gurus further postulate the familial relation or attitude of man to nature. Natural elements are portrayed as kith and kin of humanity. The scripture says :

The air is the Guru, water our Father,  
 and the great earth our mother ;  
 Days and nights are our two nurses  
 male and female  
 Who set the whole world aplaying.

—GGS, 5

This attitude is even more intensified by aesthetic perception of world in the hymns of Guru Nanak. The world has been portrayed as a creation which is embodiment of beauty and wonder. The world with all its forms and colours, varieties of experiences men have in earthy life, the pleasures to which morals are attached all these are declared as beautiful and wonderful in Guru Nanak's hymns.

A Sikh scholar, Kharak Singh, observes that all along in the Guru Granth Sahib the world has been referred to as 'colourful earth' and 'garden of flowers'. According to the Sikh Gurus, the aesthetically perceived wonderful varieties of world as the handiwork of God prove the greatness of God. "True is the work of the True one". Another famous Sikh scholar, Gopal Singh, concludes that in the Sikh philosophy "the material is the expression of the spiritual, as the spiritual is the justification for the material." This is a philosophical standpoint very much closer to the Hegelian position. Such a close dialectical relation between man and nature, familial

and aesthetic perception of nature excludes any exploitative relation towards nature. Even when there is difference between the human and natural realms, their interrelationship is one of non-antagonism and familial.

Sikhism holds the view that there is order and regularity in the world and the world is cognisable. The Gurus declare that our sensations are true and they give, although limited, knowledge about the world. Recently a Sikh scholar Gurnam Kaur has written to identify that the Sikh Gurus have accepted three kinds of knowledge : perception, reflection and contemplation. Through perception one gets sensory knowledge, through reflection rational knowledge and contemplation provides the intuitive knowledge. According to the Sikh conception, each kind is complimentary to the other. The author makes another interesting remark that in the Sikh epistemology, practice occupies a specific place. This is a very rare position in theory of knowledge which equates the Sikh epistemology with that of the 20th century theories. Neither in reflection nor in contemplation truth of world is given to man. Knowledge starts with practice and practice is the final criterion of truth. Sikhism holds the view that truthful living is better than having the truth in contemplation.

Sikh thought overcomes the hatred Indian philosophy inculcated in its Vedantic version towards human body. Guru Nanak declares that not only the soul is the creation of God but the body too. "By His orders bodies are produced". "The soul and body are all thine". There is a long hymn composed by Sant Pipa which is included in the Guru Granth Sahib, and which says :

In the body is God,  
The body is the temple of God,  
In the body are pilgrims and travellers;  
In the body incense, lamps, sacrificial food,  
In the body are offerings of leaves and flowers;  
I have searched many regions, and  
It is only in the body I find nine treasures.  
What is in the universe is found in the body;  
Whoever searches for it shall find it there.

Although many narrative moments here are traditional, yet one may also find the message that the sacredness has wholly penetrated the otherwise profane realm of body. It is a way of overcoming the medieval hatred over human body.

The Sikh Gurus are not votaries of naked renunciation of the old Hindu type. They did not put liberation, *mukti* or *moksha* as the ultimate human objectives to be achieved after death. In contrast to the old ideal of *videh-mukti*, the Sikh Gurus stood for *jivan-mukti*—liberation in one's own life—time. There are a large number of verses found in Guru Granth Sahib condemning and even ridiculing the ideal of renunciation. Sikhism considers the otherwise highly appreciated ascetic way of life as a source of social passivity :

Through the pain of hunger,  
the *tapa* wanders from house to house;  
In the next world he shall obtain two-fold punishment.  
His appetite is not satisfied, and  
He never eats in comfort what he obtains.  
He ever begs with persistency and annoys the giver.  
Leading the life of a house-holder is better than putting on such  
a sectarian dress.

It is important to note here that Sikhism fought against asceticism which in a way sprang from within its own fold—the Udasi movement founded by the elder son of Guru Nanak himself.

Rejection of asceticism by Sikh Gurus does not mean acceptance of a consumerist or hedonistic way of living. The Sikh Gurus have left sharp criticisms addressed to the hedonistic way of living. The modern sociologist Max Weber's views can be quoted here. Anti-asceticism and anti-hedonism become the two boundaries in between of which the Sikh idea of social action is displayed. Asceticism and Hedonism as two extremes are to be negated so as to build the boundaries of morality dyed with the Sikh concept of social action.

The Sikh idea of social activity is closely interwoven with, even conditioned by its sensitivity to social evils. The Sikh Gurus have composed many songs criticising the atrocities of the rulers, the destruction brought to common people by wars, etc. Atrocities and harshness by State officials, by religious elites, by *zamindars* and by traders and money-lenders are criticised by Sikh Gurus mainly from the point of view of poor peasants, *artisans* and village folks. This includes condemnation of institutions of power, status and wealth which exploited the poor and the hapless.

Guru Nanak, in one of his hymns, even complains to God for atrocities committed over the poor and the weak :

Should a powerful foe molest one equally powerful,  
 Little would the mind be grieved,  
 But when a ferocious tiger falls upon a herd of kine,  
 Then the Master must be called to account.

—G.G.S., 360

Sikhism proposes strong forms of protest, even armed protests to defend the social rights of the oppressed. Really the Sikhs conducted various wars against the oppressions of the rulers of the day. In Sikh history, there are many episodes of peasants rising against the oppressions and Sikh Gurus leading and inspiring such uprisals. Kharak Singh says "The Guru's message of socio-political responsibility is clear. His Sikh has thus to accept full social responsibility, and is enjoined upon to resist oppression and to protect the weak and downtrodden. That is the only way to express and test his love for the Lord and His creation."

Summarising the discussion, it can be said that with the conceptions of reality of world, practice and social action, one really identifies the religion of Sikh Gurus as a monotheism, not discriminating the world and earthly life but integrating them with the idea of divinity. In the earlier part of this chapter it was mentioned that Sikhism was chronologically post-Vedantic and was an alternative to Vedantic philosophy. Let us add to it now a remark of Gopal Singh that the Sikh way of thinking is indigenous and pre-Aryan.

### III

Sikhism perceives the manifest reality as a coherent and united system in which every part is related positively with the whole and with other parts. No doubt, the idea of God occupies the supreme position in such a system, however, man is related with God as an inseparable entity. Consequently, man is approached in Sikhism not as an individual being but as a societal being as well as the highest being in divine creation.

Traditionally, the philosophies of the world dichotomized the man into soul and body and liberation was conceived as liberation of soul from the body. But in Sikhism, man is an integral being in which both the body and soul are created by God. Both body and mind are moments of one great reality, that is, the spirit. The spirit-produced body and mind are considered as expression of Divine beauty. Guru Nanak says :

Attach thyself to Him  
 Who created thy body and mind  
 And gave it such an aspect of beauty.

—G.G.S., I., 62

We have indicated on various other occasions that Sikhism is philosophically comparable to the system of Hegel. In it, the spirit pervades the entire existence of man and no part of him is excluded or discriminated. The spirit pervades not only human soul but also the body. Therefore, Sikhism is not just a soul-liberating thought. It consciously wages a war against the soul-liberating attempts of the ascetic sects. On the other hand, its ideal is liberation of man, the social and earthly being.

The soul-liberating philosophies of earlier times inculcated contempt towards human body. Thinkers of such philosophies, despite their sincerity and mental capability, were living a life alienated from human labour and collective social living. Their general frame of thought was individual contemplation and they evolved out a concept of human liberation in the same realm of individual contemplation. Sikhism does not share the contempt towards human body. On the other hand, it condemns a way of life based on contemplation only. The Sikh Gurus themselves lived the life of hard labour and Sikhism as a faith is based on the value-system of hard working peasants, artisans and workers. Consequently, Sikhism does not despise human body. It does not evaluate human body as of *maya*. Guru Amar Das says :

Vast is this citadel of the human body ;  
 By a chain of fortunate happenings obtained.  
 The Lord Himself abides in this body  
 Himself tasting all delectation

—G.G.S., 514

At another place in the scripture, Guru Nanak says :

The mind's life is breath, lord of the body.  
 In the body is the Divine essence pervasive.

—G.G.S., 598

Thus, Sikhism perceives the unity of God, soul, mind and body. As such, the methodology of Sikhism is not analytic in the sense that it does not tear away the various moments of man—body, soul, mind, senses, etc. into compartmentalized parts. The Sikh approach is synthetic and it looks at man as a united being in himself, with other fellow beings and with the idea of God.

The Sikh conception of integrated human existence can be demonstrated by another argument also. That is, the concept of soul does not receive a specialised treatment in Sikhism. This fact must be compared with the case of previous schools of philosophy and religions in which exclusive attention was paid to the concepts such as *atman*, *jiva*, *purusha*, etc. Only Buddhism exempted itself from the general trend with its conceptions of *anatmavada* and universal inter-relationships. The Buddhist concept of *anatmavada* supposed that there is no separate and static entity as *atman* or *jiva*. The concept of universal inter-relationships too supports the above thesis. Of course, Sikhism does not support the concept of *anatmavada*. Its criticism of *anatmavada* would be that the thesis might lead to an extreme relativism. However, one finds a striking resemblance between the two in their silence about the concept of pure and independent soul. Sikhism would also support the concept of universal inter-relationships. Even when Sikhism does not advocate the ontological conception of *anatmavada*, however it considers the feeling of ego (*haumai*) in man as the basic source of evil suffering and alienation. In any case, Sikhism does not dedicate itself to work out one more theory of soul or a concept of soul-liberation.

*Haumai*, usually translated as egoism, is one of the basic concepts of Sikhism. The Sikh Gurus have devoted thousands of lines to explore the phenomenon of *haumai* and to the ways of eradicating it. The concept is so important that without proper understanding of it the Sikh thought cannot be perceived, understood and interpreted in its wholeness. Many more terms such as *maya*, five evil passions, etc. stand subservient and explanatory to the concept of *haumai* in Sikh thought.

The Punjabi word '*haumai*' is translated as ego, egoism, individualism, self-centredness, I-am-ness, self-conceit, etc. As the Sikh scholars define it, *haumai* is the sense of individuality or of one's consciousness of separateness from the whole and also from the other beings. In the total structure of Sikh metaphysics, the term can be translated as 'separateness' or 'non-relatedness'. The question arises 'separateness from what' ? This takes us to the Sikh conception of Reality. Sikh conception of Reality is that it is a systematic, coherent, dynamic and hierarchical unity. In the religio-philosophic language of the Sikh Gurus, Reality is the relatedness of God, Nature, society and man as a spiritual continuum. It is in the background of such a reality, that the term *haumai* acquires the meaning of separateness. When any one moment in the systematic, coherent,

dynamic unity proclaims that it is not related with the system, that it is self-sufficient and self-content, then it is called as separatedness or non-relatedness. And it is *haumai*. *Haumai* is above all non-recognition of system and its unity.

Man immersed in the feeling of I-ness or *haumai* perceives the world as his possession. The self-centred man loses his societal nature and his primordial familial relation with nature. Nature becomes an object to him and he feels that he is the master of it. His relation with his fellowmen too is permeated by the dichotomy of subject and object and consequently, every next man is an object or an instrument to him. A *haumai*-oriented (*mannukh*) man attaches himself with the privileges he gains from his caste or with the power at his hands as supreme.

*Haumai* of individual as non-relatedness also means human alienation. "Fish out of water" is the metaphor often used in the Sikh scripture to indicate the desperate position of the alienated man. The relation between a fish and water is vital. "The bride without the love of the spouse" is another metaphor used by the Sikh Gurus for human alienation. *Haumai* as human alienation is loneliness, rootlessness, suffering, violent, irresponsible and is also an unidentified longing for love, affection and solidarity.

Sikhism considers *haumai* or individualism as the greatest malady of mankind. This aspect of Sikhism can be well understood comparing it with the modern European life. The modern western culture went with the ideal of individual, his so-called natural rights, his freedom, his property, career and success and at last it has found that its individual is completely estranged from everything human and social in him. For more than three centuries, the west has celebrated the ideals of individual and the same historical period has been the most violent and repressive. The late 19th and 20th centuries thought of Europe as realising the failures of the individualistic ideal. The western individual is not united, that he is torn into at least three pieces—the sub-consciousness, consciousness and social consciousness. A whole set of philosophers who go with the name of existentialists has found that the western individual is inevitably split and perverted. Again, the post-modernist philosophers declare the 'death' of the individual. These philosophers inform us that the western axis of individual is no more than an ideological construct of modernism. They call for fresh, post-modern societal and communitarian models to emancipate the western man. This has been realised by the western scholars

only as the aftermath of the failure of the ideals of individualism. But the danger of individualism was brilliantly realised by the Sikh Gurus some five hundred years ago, possibly at the wake of a fresh wave of Individualism in Indian history. The Sikh Gurus identified the emerging individualism- *haumai*-as the greatest malady of Indian society. Guru Arjun means us in one of his hymns :

Those that live caught in egoism are verily dead;  
Those whose egoism is dead are truly alive.

—G.G.S., 374

Every positive concept of Sikhism such as God, devotion, *nam* and liberation is opposed to *haumai* and it is directed against individualism. A hymn in the Sikh scripture by Bhagat Ravidas says :

While my ego lasts, art thou not seen,  
Now Thou alone art, have I ceased to be"

—G.G.S., 657

In the same view, Guru Amar Das says :

Egoism and devotion are to each opposed,  
Abiding not together.

—G.G.S., 560

Guru Ram Das says that he who eradicates ego can become liberated while still living in this world :

Such a one is *jivan-mukta*  
finding life after destroying the ego.

—G.G.S., 449

Guru Nanak also says the same when he says :  
Liberated are those who subdue egoism.

—G.G.S., 413

As it has been already mentioned, Sikhism does not follow the traditional religious paradigm of body-mind dualism and so it does not advocate the liberation of soul as its ultimate aim. The Sikh concept of liberation operates on the basis of the newly carved paradigm of *haumai* and its eradication. Not the liberation of soul from the body but the enlightenment of integral man in unity with the other moments of the total reality is the conception of liberation in Sikhism.

*Haumai* has been sometimes defined in Sikhism in the traditional way as comprising the five evil passions. They are *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moh* (attachment) and *ahamkar* (self-pride). They are compared to the five thieves who steal away the spiritual wealth of man. However,

the genius of Sikh Gurus lies in contextualising the meaning of *haumai* and the five evil passions in their contemporary life situations. The Sikh Gurus identify *haumai* as casetism, ritualism, asceticism, the power of the despot-tyrant, exploitation of man by man, etc. It is also interesting to note here how Guru Nanak formulates the basic problem of human existence :

The greatest of all sufferings is separation from God ;  
 Another is the suffering of hunger and poverty ;  
 Next is the suffering from the tyrant-aggressor.

—G.G.S., 1256

In this verse, the issue of *haumai* has been defined as 'separation from God' and it has been identified as one of the basic problems in unison with human poverty and oppression on common man. This passage of the hymn of Guru Nanak also shows how far the great Guru has travelled from the traditional problematic of religions. Like in the famous formulation of Buddha, human suffering has become the central focus of Guru Nanak's religion. The principle of *miri-piri*, the unity of spirituality and earthliness, finds a spectacular confirmation here. The Sikh concept of liberation is also to be worked out in the same spirit.

History of religions, particularly of Indian religions, is evidence that liberation of two types was in vogue, namely *videh-mukti* and *jivan-mukti*. Most of the religions stress the concept of *videh-mukti*, that is, the liberation of soul after death or after completely discarding the bodily and worldly existence. Such a conception presupposes the dichotomy of body and soul, and independent existence of soul after death. *Videh-mukti* is also based on a negative attitude to earthly living and in its extreme form it characterises the world as *mithia* (illusion). The ideal of *sanyasin* was worked out on this basis. The *sanyasin's* ideal of *videh-mukti* considers that every human action—good or bad—is a cause of bondage and proposes absolute passivity or non-activity. Ultimately, the *videh-mukti* ideal is, in principle, incapable to deal with ethical problems of man because ethics is an earthly discipline whereas the philosophies of *videh-mukti* consider earthly life as meaningless.

Contrary to the ideal of *videh-mukti* has been formulated the ideal of *jivan-mukti*. This concept asserts that liberation is possible in one's own life. In other words, this latter concept tries to accommodate somehow the living of man on earth in its concept of liberation. Followingly, it tries to formulate the various ways of achieving liberation in one's own life. Sikhism, in a sense, would support this latter conception of liberation that

it has to be sought by one's own efforts during his life-time itself. However, Sikhism differs from the concept of *jivan-mukti* too in certain aspects. The Sikh position is not just to 'accomodate' the mundane living of man with the spiritual goal. Earthly living is not just an instrument or a carrier to achieve the ultimate spiritual goal. Sikhism gives full reality to earthly life and pays utmost importance to earthly strivings of man. An ethical and social living of man dyed with supreme spirituality is the ultimate goal of Sikhism. Consequently, even when Sikhism agrees with the concept of *jivan-mukti*, it gives deeper and broader meaning to the concept.

Sikhism would object the individualistic frame of the concept of *jivan-mukti*, too. As it stands for the liquidation of *haumai* or individualism, it would not prefer to seek the liberation of individual soul. Sikhism advocates the ideal of universal liberation. This is closer to the Mahayana concept of *sarva mukti*—liberation of all, a third type of liberation differing from the earlier two. The Sikh concept of liberation is also comparable to the Mahayana concept of *Bodhisattava*, a monk returning to earth after rejecting his own individual *nirvana*.

To conclude this discussion, a little more is to be added that the Sikh conception of universal liberation is essentially social. It needs to be mentioned that the earlier traditions, even when they subscribed to universal liberation, did not include social participation and struggle for social justice as their essential aspects. But Sikhism includes these and it is the distinguishing mark of Sikhism. A Sikh is pious in his religiosity, active in social life, aware of justice and he is responsive to any injustice done to any one. It is this supreme and difficult ideal that the Sikh Gurus in all their humanist zeal have proposed to their Sikhs.

### III

Sikhism as a socio-religious movement in its historical context, was a powerful liberating force. It freed millions of people from the clutches of orthodoxy and dogmatism, caste order and ritualism, inaction and fear, political oppression and social slavery. Sikhism implanted a feeling of self-respect and fearlessness in the minds of millions of erstwhile oppressed people. It inspired them to social action. It is imperative that any discussion of the Sikh concept of freedom is to be conducted in this context of emergence and historical mission of Sikhism. However, as the Sikh Scripture is not a philosophical treatise of modern type, one cannot find in it a chapterised exposition or a conceptual study of the notion of freedom. Consequently, we present here a perspective view of the concept of

freedom correlating and collocating various ideas found expressed in the Guru Granth Sahib.

At the outset it is necessary to have a purview of the conceptual frameworks in which the idea of freedom has got discussed in the history of human thought. The implied idea here is that the concept of freedom enjoys or suffers the privileges or the limitations of the paradigm in which it emerges. The first is the transcendental paradigm of traditional religions and philosophy which dichotomises the being into transcendental and phenomenal. In the dichotomic systems the transcendental and phenomenal realms of being are characterised by oppositional features such as sacred and profane, eternal and temporal, real and illusory. A rigid evaluative criterion is involved in this type of classification and hierarchy is built between the opposites. Thus, for example, the temporal realm is considered as the lower (illusory) one and the transcendental is apprehended as the higher (only reality) one. Consequently, the idea of freedom, as the supreme ideal in these systems, is defined as negation of the temporal realm of life. Discussing the Hegalian critique of transcendental philosophical and religious systems, Robert C. Solomon points out that the human freedom is impossible in these systems and man is given no moral autonomy in such a system. The disharmony of God and man is involved in any religious doctrine which teaches a transcendental God, a God whose existence is somehow independent of man. A view of God as transcendent moral judge takes moral autonomy and responsibility out of the hands of man and places it beyond him. A transcendent God makes human moral autonomy impossible and consequently Hegel sees a contradiction between the transcendent God and freedom.

All transcendental systems of thought speak of freedom in a negative sense as freedom from something or the other. This means the construction of reality and the Other, thus a dichotomic model of being. Classically, the Other is the body, the world, the temporal existence. In ancient Greek philosophy, Parmenides, followed by Plato, dichotomised the life into the world of truth and the world of opinions, the latter meaning the empirical world characterised as changing, chaotic, relative and so non-being; Christianity continued this tradition naming the earthly life originally sinful and chaotic. In India, we have the Vedic-Vedantic line of thought which declares that Brahman alone is the reality (at the *paramartha* level as they say) while the earthly life is *maya* or illusion. However, Vedanta maintains that at the *vyavaharika* level the caste order, rituals and the

*karma* theory totally determine the earthly existence. Thus, one finds that the transcendental or dichotomic paradigm leaves the earthly life either totally chaotic or totally deterministic.

The second paradigm which is in vogue in our times is the modern anthropocentric one. It seeks, above all, to define freedom as the freedom of individual man. In a sense, the modern paradigm, at its best, only debates the existence of the transcendental realm but not the argument of the classical systems that the empirical world is chaotic, relative and individualistic. Consequently, it defines the concept of freedom in the same vein. As such, the relativistic concept of freedom and also of man is available in the Greek thought, pronounced by the Sophists. Protagoras, the representative philosopher of Sophist school, declares each individual as the measure of all things. Modern European philosophy too proclaims that man is free; this is certainly the substantial nature of man. Man's unity with himself is set forth as the fundamental so that man in himself acquires the infinite strength. The German philosopher Hegel indicates the limitations of this conception of freedom that "the arbitrary caprice of an individual or volition, as the impulse to abrogate one's subjectivity has been made the fundamental of such a conception. Hegel proposes to replace the voluntaristic definition of freedom by the rational one. "It is only as having the power of thinking that the will is free". In "thinking", Hegel tries to achieve the concrete unity, of freedom and necessity, particular and universal. No doubt, the Hegelian attempt is a contentful one. However, it has its sad end when Hegel sees in states the realisation of freedom. He maintains that the state is the first realisation of freedom. Taking away from the historical context of French Revolution, the Hegelian conception leads to celebrate bureaucracy and power as the realisation of freedom. Hegelian rationalism is inadequately committed to questions of morality and social justice in its understanding of the concept of freedom.

Thus, the two paradigms in which the question of freedom has got discussed, have their own shortcomings that they are equally one-sided, either transcendental or empirical. As we see, the history of philosophy despite the earnest attempts by many philosophers has failed to synthesise the two ends. It is at this juncture that one encounters the Sikh perspective of freedom.

We start discussing the Sikh idea of freedom from the conception of reality which forms the basis of any philosophy and religion. Sikhism perceives the reality as one, unified and dynamic.

The Sikh *mulmantra* names it as *ikoankar*. The reality as understood by the Sikh Gurus is the concrete unity of transcendence and immanence, spiritual and mundane, Divine and the world, eternal and temporal, transcendental and socio-historical. Guru Nanak says :

Wherever I look, His sole presence I behold.  
 Himself in each being immanent.  
 Himself the Sun with rays out-spread.  
 Himself the hidden reality.  
 Himself the visible forms.  
 Attributed and unattributed are two terms devised.  
 But in unison, One Reality formulate.

–G.G.S., 387

During the period of sixth Guru this has been formulated as the principle of *miri-piri*. This is a new conceptual frame in which the notion of freedom is to be pondered over. It repudiates the raw and crude extremes of determinism and relativism. While excluding the abstract ends, the spirit of Sikhism is inclusive and reconciliative. The reality is conceived by the Sikh Gurus as a whole structure, no one component is antagonistic or inimical to the other. Guru Arjun says :

All beings by the air of breath has He bound together :  
 Fire to wood is joined;  
 Water and earth in one spot has He placed.  
 Neither is inimical to the other

–G.G.S., 1235

Guru Nanak confirms the idea of reconciliation when he says in one of his hymns :

In love, through sweet speech comes reunion.  
 Denial of religious scriptures with truthfulness is healed.  
 The deed to the world  
 by righteousness is tied.  
 These in the world be the means of reconciliation.  
 Should brass, gold or iron be broken,  
 The smith in fire fuses it together.

–G.G.S., 143

This intense spirit of oneness, unity and inclusivism suggests that the idea of freedom cannot be conceived in Sikhism in a negative manner as freedom from something other. Sikhism would agree with the view of Masao Abe, a Zen Buddhist scholar, that "If you are free from something,

there is still duality". Thus, Sikhism overcomes any dichotomic understanding of reality and consequently, its conception of freedom also is to be understood and realised in a holistic paradigm.

*Hukam*, the Divine Will, Word or ordinance is the one concept which often is indicated as carrying into the notion of determinism in Sikhism. It is true that *hukam* is a structuring principle of Sikh ideology. It is also true that traditionally the concept of divine ordinance stands for God's determination of worldly affairs. In Hindu tradition, for example, it is held that besides the natural order, the hierarchical social system was created by divine ordinance. The Vedic tradition calls it *santana dharma* or *apaurushya*, meaning the timelessness and irrevocability of the *varna* system. This gives a fatal rigidity to the system and any change in it is seen as apostasy. Following these ideas, the Sikh conception of *hukam*, too, is often understood as a principle of divine determination which acts as if against the reason of freedom. However, a closer look at the same reveals the difference. *Hukam* in Sikhism though a divine ordinance is also a dynamic concept. Dynamism means change, development, growth, evolution, appearance of new formulation of fresh relations in the structure, one becoming many and the many uniting into one, etc.

*Hukam* in Sikhism stands to indicate the divine ordinance by which reality of dynamic whole or a reality of creative whole has been created, and is ever being newly created which includes oneness and multiplicity, eternity, renewal and change. The Sikh scripture says :

All the endless expanse of creation arose out of one Note;  
 Giving rise to millions of streams,  
 In innumerable aspects, categories and species  
 has He made the creation.

—G.G.S., 3

"Union and separation ordain the universal system" continues the "Japuji" in the Sikh scripture. It is this moment of one becoming many and the spirit of change that guarantee freedom in Sikhism. Union and separation are the two moments which spearhead the process of creation and eternal becoming. Creation by divine ordinance, it should be underscored, is an expression of freedom. As Berdyaev maintains, "Creation means transition from non-being to being through a free act. Creation presupposes freedom and arises out of freedom." And as it becomes clear from the *gurbani*, the Creator has bestowed the faculty of creativity to his creation too, above all to man. *Hukam*, the divine ordinance, assures this.

“All beings by Divine Ordinance arise. By the Ordinance in actions engage”, says Guru Nanak in one of his hymns (G.G.S., I, 55). The moment of freedom is implanted in man. Man is rooted in God. The tree of creation is rooted in God. Consequently, there exists a similarity between God and man.

What difference between Thee and me,  
And me and Thee ?  
No more than between gold and bangle,  
And water and the wave.

–G.G.S.,

“The Creator takes no bonds,  
So are we not bound;  
He takes no impurity,  
Nor are we made impure.  
As is He pure,  
So are we like Him”

–G.G.S., 39

By truthful living, through the creative acts, man participates in God’s continuing act of universal and social renewal and recreation. A creative act is therefore a continuation of world-creation and means participation in the work of God. And this presupposes freedom.

It has been already discussed in the preceding pages that the concept of transcendent God is inadequate to render justice to the idea of human freedom and consequently philosophers such as Spinoza and Hegel resort to the notion of immanent God to make possible the realisation of freedom and moral autonomy. Immanence of God in the world and in man is a consistent theme which Sikhism also pursues. In all creation is the Lord pervasive”, says Guru Arjan (G.G.S., 375) Still elaborately, the Guru continues :

The Lord that has bestowed on you  
Mind, body and substance  
And in perfect order cherished your being,  
Who of all faculties had made you Master,  
and placed within you His endless effulgence  
Contemplate on Him ever

–G.G.S., 47

It is this “endless effulgence of God in man” which becomes the perpetual source of human freedom. If God is immanent in all beings, there

is divinity in all created beings, above all in man. It is due to this fact, that the Sikh Gurus repeatedly claim that God is holy and all His creation, including this world, is holy. The idea of immanence of God infuses meaning to time, society and history. The temporal, social and historical acts of man inspired by ethical concern and social justice are evaluated by the Sikh Gurus as real and holy. According to the Sikh scripture, "He Himself prompts the creation to act" (G.G.S., 114)

"Himself" He inspires actions. Himself the Doer" affirms Guru Nanak also. The Gurus declare that it is these deeds of man which are really counted. "Man receives retribution as are his deeds; Himself man sows and himself consumes the produce". (GGS, 662).

Here and elsewhere, man and his deeds are placed on an autonomous ethical plane. The immanence of God in man and that immanence inspiring man to ethically good and socially just activities define the ideal man (*sachiar*) in Sikhism. It is in this sense that human life is celebrated as a gift and rare opportunity in Sikhism.

"The human incarnation is a rare gift. Only by earning it does one find it", maintains Guru Amar Das (GGS, 565). Human freedom contains in realising this opportunity. The simple but wonderful words of Avtar Singh can be quoted here. "The Absolute in Sikhism is conceived as activity (*karta*). The self-realisation is patterned on the nature of the Absolute. The Self, through its cognitive, affective and conative functions, is to proceed to its ideal realisation." "Here the Sikh ideal is indicated as "to proceed" and not as to return. In the traditional religious systems the ideal is regressive that the self (the *atman*, for example in Advaita) returns to be reabsorbed to its earthly, temporal relations. In such a case, it is difficult to attribute any amount of positive freedom to self as it is expected to lose itself in the process of discrimination to achieve (non-differential unity with Brahman). The Sikh ideal is progressive in the sense that man comes out of his individual shell (*haumai*) and spreads out to the whole, the *satsang*, the world, the total existence. The immanence of whole in man and its dynamism lead him to the reconstruction of the whole. Man acts, and he acts freely, transforms the whole to its betterment. Man acts very much similar to the *karta purakh* and his progressive spirituality is projected towards the future. At this moment, man is free, fearless, pure, true and his sense of justice is intensely acute. Is it not that the Great Guru pronounced the following words at such a moment :

Listen, Thou art Creator of all-  
 Should a powerful foe molest one equally powerful,  
 Little would the mind be grieved;  
 But when a ferocious tiger falls upon a heard of kine  
 Then must the Master be called to account.

—G.G.S., 360

The above discussion on the Sikh concept of freedom reminds us of a controversy in modern sociological and philosophical theories. Scholars identify two modes of thought prevalent among the modern theories. The first one gives priority to the structure, the whole, or the rule, paying little care to the agency of change, freedom and action. This mode of thought is usually called as a conformist one. The second kind of theories make fundamental the moment of action and change, thus relinquishing the structure and rule. Anthony Giddens, a modern sociologist, reporting this situation in recent thought considers them both as onesided and abstract. indicates that the main reason for such a dichotomy is that structure (rule) in such systems is understood as static and as a system of constrains. Consequently, the reaction is that theories one sidedly celebrating freedom and action are postulated. Anthony Giddens advances a concept of unity of structure and agency in which neither the structure is static and constrained, nor the agency is voluntaristic reaction to the former. Both structure and agency are proposed to be seen as dynamic and forming a coherent unity.

Anthony Giddens' sociological discussion has something important to suggest to the understanding of the Sikh concepts of *hukam* and freedom, divine order and human action, the whole and free action. The concepts mentioned above form a type of unity, and not a conflict in Sikh mode of thinking. They are inter-dependent and they form a type of continuity. *Hukam* expresses not only the created structure but also the dynamism of that structure. The idea of immanence of God in world and man is the expression of continuity of *hukam* as a principle of dynamism in world and in man. Consequently, there is no need to counterpoise *hukam* and freedom. *Hukam* is not a barrier to action but it essentially involves in the production of the latter. *Hukam* enables man to act, makes him free to act. As such even the Sikh model of human action and freedom cannot be properly worked out separately from the understanding of the dynamic nature of *hukam*, the divine ordinance.

We conclude by saying that the unity of structure and agency, *hukam* and freedom has become possible due to the enormous liberative force put into the thought by the Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh.

## CHAPTER IV SIKHISM AND SOCIETY

### I

The concept of justice is a late-comer to philosophy and religion. A modern sociologist wonders ‘how recent and belated is the development of the idea of equality’ in human thought (Louis Dumont, 1980 : 11). For centuries, humanity has believed that inequality is the law of life. The greatest philosophers of ancient Greece, for example, did not even suspect that a philosophy could be produced keeping in mind the interests of the slaves. Greek philosophy basically was the philosophy of the slave owners and the other elite. We also know the history of Christianity, which once emerged as the religion of slaves, soon transformed itself to serve as the ideology of medieval feudalism and, later, of colonialism. The Indian scene was not the least better than their European counterparts. It was even worse. From the most ancient recorded history of India, one finds that social inequality has been given religious sanction. India is considered as a classical society of *homo hierarchicus*. Indian society is animated by the spirit of hierarchy and hierarchy permeates every sphere of life from family to state and from religion to metaphysics. Andre Beteille maintains, “Caste has not only been a very durable feature of Indian society, but its influence has reached into every sphere of its composite structure’ (1987 : 58. He continues, “Indian society has come to signify not just inequality, but inequality of the most rigid and uncompromising kind” (1987 : 34).

Scholars have already mentioned that injustice has been maintained in Hindu ideology with the help of certain strategies of exclusion and oppression such as *Varnasramadharm*, theories of *karma*, pollution, *guna*, etc. However, it is often conceived that the metaphysics and theology of Hinduism are innocent of the caste hierarchy existing at the social level. It is perceived that metaphysics as a discipline of transcendental reality is unaware of social injustice. The present chapter is intended to explore the opposite. It tries to assert the intimate and necessary relations between metaphysics and justice or injustice. Sikhism in this context appears to be

a major indigenous attempt to propose an alternative metaphysics to the existing metaphysics of injustice. This section identifies Sikhism as an integrated system of metaphysics and social philosophy together permeated by the idea of justice.

Mention must be made at the outset to the Vedic line of thinking, starting from the Upanishads to Sankara's Advaita, which gradually moves towards a dichotomised perception of reality into Brahman and *atman*, at the one end, and *maya* at the other end, distinctly defined and counterposed, in parallel to and in tune with the historical process of formation and consolidation of *varnas* and castes in India. We do not propose a one-to-one deterministic relationship between the conceptual apparatus of Vedantic philosophy and the social structure prevalent in India. The interrelationship is very complex, and subtle arguments are available to substantiate the Vedantic thinking without relating it directly to the social system. However, the pattern of thought and the logic of exclusion are strikingly similar between the making of metaphysics and that of the caste system. Vedanta seeks to locate the supreme idea of Brahman beyond and outside the pale of actual life which it characterises as *maya* or illusion. Brahman is reached only after discriminating the empirical and social life (*neti, neti, nirprapanca, nirguna, nirankar*, etc.). The relationship between the reality of Brahman and earthly life is binary, hierarchical and discriminative. Even when *maya* does not mean absolute nothingness according to the subtle arguments of Advaita philosophers, it is the lower reality, less real like a dream which is to be overpowered, dominated and controlled. The latter understanding is more meaningful in the context of our present discussion, as it means a relationship of power, domination and exclusion between the concepts of *Brahman* and the world. It is the same relationship of power, domination and exclusion that characterizes the caste hierarchy. One cannot avoid the conclusion that "Vedanta was the philosophical-cum-religious binding force of *chaturvarnya*, and consequently, in the course of time, of ramification into innumerable castes. This interrelation is the key to a sober objective assessment of Vedanta' (Sardesai, 1976 : 120). This quoted author rightly points out that broadly speaking, the development of the concept of Brahman and *atman*, the central theme of Vedanta and the development of *chaturvarnya* go hand in hand." (*Ibid* : 122).

The Vedanta characterisation of external world as *maya* also inculcates a negative attitude to nature, makes nature into raw material, an unanimated

'*phusis*', a mere object, the other, with which man is allowed to have any amount of explorative relation. In this sense, it is an anti-environmental eco-destructive system of thought. The attitude to nature is further extrapolated to people involved in physical labour and they are treated as raw material or instruments in relation to the supreme reality of Brahman. It is no wonder that in corroboration to this type of philosophy, the *varna* ethics evaluates the people of physical labour as low, impure and polluted. It must be remembered here that the Vedantic idea of Brahman does not include in itself any moment of activity or dynamism. Its characterisation of *nirguna* attributes change and activity only to the *mayic*, material world. the *swarup* of *Brahman - Satchitananda*, i.e., pure reality, pure consciousness and pure bliss—too, excludes any activity from the realm of Brahman. *Karma*, even in its best sense of activity, belongs to the *maya* world. Not only material activity but also intellectual activity or logical thought does not deserve any support in Vedantic philosophy. "Since, even thought and reason are human and hence a material faculty, *ipso facto*, Brahman is beyond cognizance by reason or thought as well. It is *acintya*, *ajneya*, etc. (Sardesai, 1976 : 122) However, this is not only an epistemological issue. Ontologically, this means that the Brahman reality cannot be changed by any means, material or intellectual, this shuts down all the possibilities to transform the reality by human efforts. Brahman is allowed to rule over the world in peace, completely insured from any attack from below. Louis Dumont confirms this, "What is characteristic of the Indian order, with a division of labour based upon the fundamental religious values (i.e., caste system), is a complete differentiation between the spiritual and the temporal" (1980 : 278). Vedanta postulates two absolutely disconnected levels of being *paramarthiks* and *vyavaharika*.

The above discussion clearly shows the intimate relation between Vedanta metaphysics and the caste ordering of society. We come to the conclusion that the dichotomy of Brahman and *maya* is the philosophical expression of the social hierarchy of *varnas* or castes. The conceptually made hierarchy between *Brahman* and *maya* is a model to the social classificatory system of castes, and vice versa.

In a similar vein, we want to assert the inseparable link between the Sikh metaphysics and the Sikh ideal of social justice. However, by way of preparing the ground for it, let us digress a little to register the sensitivity of the Sikh Gurus to social injustice.

The Sikh Gurus were very sensitive to the social evils of their days. Sikhism is a grand response to the social inequalities and oppression, found expressed in and caused by the prevailing caste system, despotism of political rulers, hypocrisy of religious leaders and ascetics, and rigidity of rituals and penances, preached and practised in place of true religion.

Guru Amar Das indicates that a myriad errors flow out of caste pride (Harbans Singh 1968 : 100) Guru Nanak simply identifies himself with the lowest of the low castes and asks "What have I got to do with high castes" ? (*Ibid* : 100). Kabir addresses the Brahmin, the leader of the caste system.

Say, O *Pandit*, when were the Brahmins created ?  
Do not waste thy life by proclaiming thy Braminhood.  
If thou art a Brahmin, born of a Brahmin woman,  
Why hast thou not come through another way ?  
How art thou a Brahmin ? How am I a Sudra ?  
How am I blood ? How art thou milk ?

—GGS, 324

Guru Nanak's religious mind encaptures the basic problems of human existence in the following manner :

The greatest of all sufferings is separation from God  
Another is suffering of hunger and poverty  
Next is the suffering from the tyrant - aggressor".

—G.G.S., 1256

The religious suffering of Guru Nanak is the actual suffering of the people whom he passionately loved, and it is also an expression of search into the ultimate questions of existence. The compassionate heart of the great Guru cries out loudly and even dares to question its own master when he says :

The people wailed in their agony of suffering,  
Didst Thou feel no compassion for them ?  
If a powerful foe molest one equally powerful,  
Little would be there to compalin.  
But if a ferocious tiger falls upon a herd of kine  
Then the Master be called to account.

—G.G.S., 360

Possibly, this was the moment of Truth, moment of need for a revelation, birth of a new religion, religion of a new type. Guru Nanak's

compassion for the weak, yearning for justice and his commitment to God, all these fuse together at this moment. This comes to explain the fact of an alternative metaphysics of justice and equality which goes with the name of Sikhism.

Obviously, Sikhism necessarily makes a radical departure from the classical Indian metaphysics. Besides the revelatory and mystic roots of origination of the Sikh thought, it was also conditioned by, as we have seen, the sensitivity of the Sikh Gurus to the contemporaneous social situations. The Sikh metaphysics has a direct and immediate bearing on the Sikh commitment to social justice. Dharam Singh points out, "The metaphysical doctrine of Sikh theology, in fact, forms the basis of the Sikh social thought from where it gets its emergence as well as sustenance. The stress on moral and ethical value in social and political life has been so intimately intertwined with the religious thought, that any endeavour to isolate them would lead to the disintegration of the whole fabric" (1994 : 326).

Sikhism very fundamentally repudiates the dichotomised perception of reality which now, in Sikhism, is considered as an uninterrupted continuum of God, man and the world. The Sikh *mulmantra* begins with the numeral one- *ik-* which means the oneness and unity of reality and equality of all its moments. Guru Amar Das says of the spiritual oneness of all the creation :

Holy is the Lord, ever holy all created forms.

—G.G.S., 113

And no discrimination can be attributed to any part of the reality because none is alien and all are only His own manifestation :

He who fashioned our self, life and body,  
And created us, feels for us too.

—G.G.S., 1137

Nirbhai Singh maintains, "In Sikhism, the reality is a non-dual systematic unity which manifests itself as hierarchical and coherent dimensions of the reality" (1990 : 61). Here, the term hierarchy does not mean the social hierarchy of castes. Guru Nanak leaves no doubt regarding the equality of human beings among themselves as well as in the eyes of the creator Lord :

God looks upon all mortals with the same eye,  
And deems them as equal.

—G.G.S., 730

Therefore, the term 'hierarchical' here means "all grades of creation - eggborn, mammals, perspiration-born, earth-born". (GGS, 1109) without any discriminative attitude to any one of them. Sikhism forwards a holistic, integrative monotheism which forms the basic for its perception of cosmological and social order. In this order of things, the body is not discriminated, the world is not despised and matter is not condemned. Everything is permeated by the idea of God. "All existence is interpenetrating" says Guru Nanak (GGS, 596). Guru Arjun also reiterates the same idea when he says in one of his hymns that the Creator's holy name and His Truth are pervasive everywhere, and that no spot of Him is emptied; He fills each vessel (GGS, 523)

The Sikh Gurus repeatedly emphasize that the world is true, real, wonderful, holy and united with the idea of God. The discriminative, dichotomised perception of reality is completely overcome here, giving way to an egalitarian and just order of things. We call it the metaphysics of justice.

Sikh metaphysics is not logocentric as it is found in Vedantic thought. Sikhism is a grand dialogue and dialectics of God and world, spirituality and earthliness, where the world and earthliness themselves are not distinctly cut away from God and spirituality. It is not the dialectics of opposites as it is found in Hegelian philosophy. It is the dialectics of the differing entities, however, originally and essentially united. The dialectics of opposites cannot avoid giving equal importance to destruction, whereas in Sikh dialectics the creative movement is predominant. "Sikhism does not accept the ultimate dichotomy of matter and spirit" says Kapur Singh (1993 : 138) and further quotes that "the subtle and the gross are, in fact, identical" (*ibid*: 95)

Sikh ontology, in this regard, has the support of Sikh epistemology. The dichotomy of Brahman and *maya* is conditioned by the preference of Vedanta to analytical episteme that it seeks to perceive entities in a distinctly clear, unconnected and categorical form. Vedanta also follows a regressive method to reach the *swarupa* of Brahman, gradually discriminating and bracketing out everything earthly. Sikh epistemology contrarily is synthetic, integrative and holistic. From the central idea of God, it spreads out to encompass man, world, and the entire existence.

The Sikh conception of Reality is expressed on the analogy of the structure of a family. Consequently, all the moments of reality are related with one another by familial bonds. Guru Nanak calls air the Guru, water

the Father, the great earth the mother and the days and nights our female and male nurses who set the world playing. Obviously, we find nature in familial relationship with man. This excludes any unjust and eco-destructive relation to nature.

The relation between God and man is metaphorised to the love and separation between the bride and her spouse. It is interesting to notice that the bride's maternal household which she leaves to unite with her husband is compared to the world :

*In the parent's home, the world, by the word has the self-female acquired respect ;*

*Thus in the husband's home, the hereafter, has she found favour ;  
As the Holy Preceptor union to her has granted.*

*Eliminated is abject dependence on the world.*

—GGS, 1111

There are several such other references in the scripture comparing the bride's maternal home with this world and her husband's home with the Divine Court which happens to be a human's ultimate objective.

The holistic view of reality is consistently saved here. The world is not despised but only the abject dependence on the world. Metaphorically, the world is not alien to man but it is only the 'parental home' of 'bride'. It is within the limits of familial structure that the dialectics of God, world and man is played. It must be mentioned here that, within a family, love binds every member of the family. No member is discriminated, and no one is the instrument at the hands of the other. In the Sikh conception of reality, family has been taken as the model for equality, love and justice.

The metaphor of family preferred in Sikhism highlights into our discussion its place in comparison to other forms of living available in Indian tradition. The pre-Sikh period of Indian history has evolved out predominantly two patterns of living— the caste pattern and the way of living of a renouncer. The caste pattern of living, as we have seen, is permeated by the principles of hierarchy, fragmentation and discrimination. Every member of society is born and accommodated in a caste, is taught to have a particular attitude towards other castes. This is rigorously guarded by rituals, rites, *dharmas* and by religion. The quality is inborn in this pattern of living. It is these principles of hierarchy, inequality, etc. that were found confirmed by the Hindu metaphysics also.

On the other hand, Indian tradition has also offered another pattern of living - renunciation, the way of life of an ascetic. The ascetic ideal as

such was worked out mostly by the heterodox traditions like *Ajivika*, *Jainism*, *Buddhism*, etc. However, it was imported into and Sanscritised by the Brahmanic tradition as one of the four *ashramas*. Some of the modern sociologists are inclined to see in the institution of renunciation a counter pattern of living in preference to and in opposition to the caste-hierarchical pattern, as the ascetic is the one who renounces his 'social' role of being the member of a caste and prefers to go out of the given system. Thus, renunciation has come to be seen as the opposite of caste pattern of living.

The already-quoted sociologist Louis Dumont describes the history of formation of the opposition between caste and renunciation in the following manner. "The historical transition can be represented schematically as a two-fold movement. On the one hand, society, under the aegis of the Brahmin, was to become more and more settled into categories of strict interdependence, having the pure and impure as their axis (i.e. the caste system). On the other hand, the individualistic philosopher of the previous age was to become a renouncer, Hindu or heterodox" (1980 : 186). Romila Thapar too identifies counter-caste initiative in renunciation (1984 ; 63-104).

Coming back to the discussion on Sikhism, one finds that the Sikh ideal of society excludes both the above-said ways of living—caste and renunciation. The Sikh critique of casteism has been enunciated above in the article. And its criticism of renunciation, too, is well known. However, objectively, the renunciative model of opposition is highly abstract, theoretical and idealistic. As Louis Dumont himself indicates, the renunciative ideal hides its subtle individualism behind its universalism. Besides, renunciation pathetically fails to make any material of intellectual initiative against the caste system as by its own definition, renunciation is also renunciation of discursive thought and praxis. Ultimately, renunciation's opposition to caste system is illusory and it ends in no more than a passive escape from the social reality of caste. In the sense, the idea of justice. If any, of a renouncer, too, is illusory, and abstract. It is on these valid grounds that the Sikhism repudiates the institution of renunciation.

Negating the historical models based either on hierarchy and fragmentation or on individualism and inaction, Sikhism proposes the alternative that is constructed by the principles of holism (critique of *hāumai*), equality (critique of caste) and dynamism (critique of renunciation).

At one level, the Sikh Gurus land on family as a metaphor of their social ideal. However, the ideals of the Sikh Gurus find their completion and fulfilment in the *sangat* and the *Khalsa*.

## II

The creation of the Khalsa order by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, on the Vaisakhi day of the year 1699 meant the consolidation of the Sikh conception of man, that is the *sant-sipahi*. The ideal of *sant-sipahi*, as such, was worked out by all the Sikh Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. In the first hymn of *Japji* the Guru raised the fundamental question of all Sikh thought, namely : How to become a *sachiar* ? Guru Nanak stressed this point all along in his search, that truthful living is nobler than the Truth itself. It becomes clear that the Guru was not in pursuit of yet another truth-claiming system of abstract philosophy, but he was in the process of making a new man, a concrete socio-historical being who would live and struggle for Truth. It is this ideal of *sant-sipahi* that figures in the hymns of Sikh Gurus as *sachiar*, *gurmukh* and finally as *sant-sipahi* :

Shouldst thou seek to engage in the game of love.

Step into my street with thy head placed on thy palm.

While on to this stepping, ungrudgingly sacrifice your head.

– GGS, 1412

It is with these glorious words of Guru Nanak that the life of *sant-sipahi* starts in Indian history and it reaches its monumental culmination when the first Khalsa - *Panj Pyare* - were selected by the test of the sword. As Professor Puran Singh (1995 : 121 and 114) says :

The creation of the Khalsa in India is the culmination of Guru Nanak's genius, and the written character of his Word.... Gobind Singh is Guru Nanak; but he rides a splendid steed, arms himself with a quiver full of arrows and a mighty bow, has a sword hanging in his belt and a hawk perched on his hand and eyes that sparkle with joy and valour of the soul.

This is a study of the Khalsa and its conception of *sant-sipahi* comparing the latter with some other personality patterns suggested, and often glorified in Indian history. Special emphasis has been laid to trace the concept in relation to the ideals of *sanyasin* and *grahastra*.

Three personality patterns are taken for the present study. They are the patterns of *sanyasin* or the renouncer, the *grahastra* or the

householder and the *sant-sipahi* or the saint-soldier.

Chronologically, among the three above-mentioned, the *sanyasin* is the oldest one in Indian history. Possibly, the concept emerged out of the so-called non-Vedic schools, Jainism and Buddhism, but soon to be assimilated by the Brahminic tradition, particularly by the Advaita-Vedantic and *Yogic* lines of thought. Often the renouncer ideal is said to be the peak of Indian spirituality. The four *asramas* prescribed by the Brahminic philosophies culminate with the ideal of *sanyasin*, who reaches the transcendental stage of *moksa*. *Sanyasin* is said to be the inspiration of the other earlier three stages of life. A modern sociologist, T.N. Madan (1987: 1), maintains :

Renunciation is the best-known cultural ideal of the Hindu society... Renunciation is undoubtedly a remarkable value-orientation which permeates the world-view of even the worldly householder.

Indian civilization gained a precarious popularity during the modern period due to its *sanyasin* ideal. The Westerners who got fed up with the modernist industrial culture skipped across and contributed a lot to the popularity of the *sanyasin* ideal.

Another popular and comparatively stable model which lived through the entire medieval period is the pattern of *grahastra*. *Grahasta* meant the patriarchal family life, a family of husband and wife, their children and parents, the male member being the leader of the family. *Grahasta* which also figures as one of the four stages of life, however, remains the widespread pattern of living in actual life. The above-quoted sociologist tends to reiterate :

*Grahasta* bestows its distinctive character upon the everyday life of Hindus.

In the concrete conditions of Indian history, this is the most important. The idea of *grahasta* cannot be separated from its religious parallel - the *Hindu Bhakti* tradition - on the one hand and the Hindu caste system on the other.

The third type of personality pattern one finds is in that of the *sant-sipahi* as the Sikh conception of the reality of man. Historically, the ideal of *sant-sipahi* belongs to the post-medieval period, leaving behind the ancient and mediæval perceptions of man, and aims at a fresh look into the concept of man, his reality and his environment. The prefix '*sant*' as such came from the late mediæval popular inter-religious tradition of the

wandering saints who attempted at their best variations a non-sectarian or a least-sectarian universalism and brotherhood. The world *sipahi* added up to the term *sant* and consequently changing the total meaning of the combined term is completely of Sikh making which emerges out of the genius of the Sikh Gurus, their ideology and Sikh history.

It is imperative to a study of this type to have a clear idea about the philosophical or theological backgrounds in which the respective personality patterns got worked out.

The ideal of *sanyasin* had the theoretical background of world negation and transcendentalism (going beyond), and more specifically, a dualistic picture of reality. Dualism is the fundamental feature of Jainism, Samkhya (which forms the metaphysics of yoga) as well as the Advaita Vedanta. In Jainism, it is the duality of *jiva* and *ajiva*, in Samkhya it is the duality of *purusha* and *prakriti* and in Advaita it is that of Brahman and *maya*. This is how some reputed authors of Indian Philosophy characterise the theoretical basis of the idea of renouncing :

The distinguishing feature of Jainism, on the theoretical side, is its belief in the eternal and independent existence of spirit and matter respectively called *jiva* and *ajiva*... The ultimate aim of life is conceived as casting off the limitations caused by the *ajiva* completely so that the soul may regain and reveal its true nature of omniscience (*kevala jnana*).

(Hiriyanna, 1973 : 60-61)

The same author explains the position of Samkhya as : “Samkhya-Yoga regards both matter and spirit as ultimately real..... *Purusha* and *Prakriti* or spirit and nature are thus the two basic conceptions of the doctrine... The ideal of life in this system is conceived as escape or aloofness (*kaivalya*) from *prakriti*” (Hiriyanna, 1973 : 107). The worst form of dualism was proposed by Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta, one of the dominant ideologies of Brahmanic Hinduism. “Truth, knowledge and infinitude is Brahman, mutable, non-intelligent, finite and perishing is the world. Brahman is pure, attributeless, impartite and immutable. The world is a manifold of changing phenomena fleeting events and finite things. Brahman is bliss. The universe is a vale of tears.” (T.M.P. Mahadevan, 1976 : 227). According to this perception and evaluation, Brahman is the only truth and the world is *maya*. By realizing this, one reaches the *brahma-jnana*.

Thus discrimination and renunciation of the world become the only way to Brahman.

The theoretical background of the *grahasta* personality type is the *Bhakti* thought. The entire *Bhakti* thought is based upon the *grahasta* model in a religo-cosmic sense. God in Hindu *Bhakti* is perceived as the one bride-groom, the male patriarchal head of the cosmic family, and the world which was negated as *ajiva*, *prakriti* and *maya* in the previous schools is taken as the bride, the female multiplicity. The union of male and female, God and the world, spirit and matter etc., figures as the ideal situation whereas their separation is suffering or alienation, particularly to the female part. The *Bhakti* hymns of both *Saivite* and *Vaisnavite* denominations dedicate themselves primarily to the portrayal of the state of separation and seek to unite the opposites by means of bridal mysticism, *prema bhakti*, *madhura bhakti* or *virah bhakti*. At this stage, it is true, one can find a lot of reciting of the theme of love in *Bhakti* literature. But one can also note that the love portrayed here is narrowed down by the patriarchal family values that existed during the very long medieval period of Indian history. The restricted love of the patriarchal family consistently resists to become universal and it precipitates into a limited and stable pattern. The stigma of *mayic* nature of the created world still continues to be prevalent in the under-structures of Hindu *Bhakti* and consequently, love towards God refuses to be extended to God's creation. the love of *Bhakti* is not expansive, neither it is dynamic, nor it is socialised. It is shut down within the domestic walls of the *grahasta*. The *avtar* and *lila puranas* of Radha-Krishna and Siva-Sakti only helped to ritualize the already narrow love of *Bhakti*. The factor of Hindu caste-system still rigorously cut down the potentialities of love in *grahasta* and Hindu *Bhakti*. We dare say that the caste factor transformed the potential of love into its opposite. Instead of love one finds hatred, instead of universalism one finds compartmentalization, divisions and caste sectarianism. The cosmic model of love of God and world miserably fails in the Hindu *Bhakti* traditions.

And thus we pass over to the theoretical basis of the personality-pattern of *sant-sipahi*. The theoretical basis of the ideal of *sant-sipahi* is the religion and philosophy of the Sikh Gurus. Here the oneness of the holistic and dynamic reality and the principle of the unity of spirituality and earthly living (*miri-piri*) mark the beginning. Approximately, the term spirituality (*piri* aspect) one finds registered in the *sant* while earthliness

(*miri* aspect) is represented by the term *sipahi*. However, as the dialectics of spiritual and earthliness together give an integrated and mutually implying meaning to the term *miri-piri*, the singular term *sant-sipahi* too acquires a fresh and fluid meaning. The *sant* is sensitized to the social environment and the *sipahi's* actions are spiritualized. Dr. Kharak Singh, in his exposition of the *miri-piri* system, identifies the values of the *sant-sipahi* Sikh, namely, the earth-awareness, socialization, equalitarianism, resistance against injustice and oppression, and many other. (Kharak Singh, 1997 : 138-139). These are the basic points of departure the Sikh anthropology makes from the earlier ones of *sanyasin* and *grahastra*. The noted author says, "The Sikh Gurus by their ideology and personal example and leadership created the work and sustenance habit in the Sikh society which since then becomes its established feature." Similarly, "Guru Nanak is the first man of God in India who introduced the concept of resistance against injustice as a moral value for a man of religion" (*ibid*). Thus the reality of the social massively enters into the core territory of Sikh metaphysics, as well as Sikh theory of man.

It is interesting to bring forth how Rudolf Otto, a German philosopher, evaluates Sankara's concept of aloneness of Brahman and indicates the point of departure of a dynamic mysticism from the former." Sankara's Brahman is Being and Spirit through and through, utterly opposed to all 'deafness' (*jada*) and all matter. But the question is asked : Is this Brahman a living God !" (Rudolf Otto 1962 : 187). For Sankara, the coming forth of God and the world from the primeval oneness of Brahman is the Great 'mistake' of *vidya*. Otto forwards another conception of God who becomes the root of a dynamic reality. Here, "God is, in Himself, a tremendous life movement out of undifferentiated unity. He enters into the multiplicity of personal life and persons, in whom the world and therewith the multiplicity of the world is contained... This God is in Himself a living process, not a static Being. He is activity, mighty self-posting, a procreation not under the compulsion of laws or blind impulse but in the creative of Sublime wonder". Rudolf Otto calls this God as a "God boiling within with life". "The profound unity reminds one of the paradoxical Mahayana doctrine 'Nirvana is Samsara'. It is neither mystical quietism nor secular activity, but an identity of the deepest unity and the most vivid multiplicity and therefore of the most profound quiet and the most vital motion". (Rudolf Otto, 1962 : 188, 189, 191). We brought to quoting these famous words of Rudolf Otto because they befittingly portray the concept of God and

unity of sublimity and vitality characteristic of a dynamic mysticism of the Sikh type. This also marks the ideological basis of the *sant-sipahi*.

*Sant-sipahi* differs fundamentally from its counter-parts *sanyasin* and *grahasta* in terms of ethical content, human concern and social activism.

Love did not figure as a major category of thought when the ideal of *sanyasin* emerged on the Indian scene. In a sense, love as attachment (*bhandhan*) and as an earthly value was discarded by the *sanyasin*. It was through detachment and discrimination that the *mukti* of the soul was advocated. The ideal of *grahasta* along with the *Bhakti* tradition brought to the forefront the theme of love. However, as we have discussed earlier, it demonstrated and narrowed down the theme of love. In *sant-sipahi*, the theme of love liberates itself and becomes an expansive force. It becomes equivalent to the will to grow, to produce and reproduce and to give life. All virtues spring from it and it is increasingly inclusive and shall not stop until it loves the entire being. God is portrayed by the Sikh Gurus as the *din dayal, kirpal* (the merciful and compassionate). The Tenth Guru declared, "I have no enmity with anyone". As a Chinese philosopher says, "The principle of love is comparable to the root of a tree and the spring of water... Wherever love is in operation, the idea of righteousness become the reality... It is the will to grow like the seeds of peaches and apricots." (Wing-Tsit Chan, 1966 : 202). The same metaphors of tree, roots or spring and seeds are employed by the Gurus to describe the nature of reality as love.

Love leads to the socialization of man. In Guru Nanak's system, all the major moments of Being - God, world, man, time, society and nature - are internally related as if they all emerge from one seed and grow themselves into multiplicity. There is no one moment alienated. Such an alienation is human or a result of individualism. A *sanyasin*, in that sense, is an alienated being. He is detached and loveless. He is a non-relational being. A *sanyasin's* transcendentalism makes him asocial. The *grahasta's* relation to society too is highly controversial. A *grahasta* in a Hindu society is related with his society through caste rules and many other values of auspiciousness, pollution, purity, *dharma, karma, purushartha, prarabdha*, etc. prescribed by the *varnadharma* (T.N. Madan, 1987). The *grahasta* as a man-in-the-world is a man-in-the-caste-world.

Whereas the socialization of man in Sikhism reaches its utmost height in the ideal of *sant-sipahi*, the themes of social concern and social change

pervade the entire Sikh thought. The themes of plough and sword remain fundamental structures of Sikh thought and living. This is how Dr. Balbir Singh characterizes the social concern of the Gurus in his Madras lectures : "The Guru's thoughts were like seeds that burst forth from the soil in which they were buried. His environment was the soil. His intense wish to better the lot of people was the seed.... There was a social urgency in his thought". (Dr. Balbir Singh, 1971 : 418). Again he says, "In Guru Nanak's Bhakti, the component of social reform was an integral part and that is why Sikhism ultimately emerged as a new dispensation with all vigour of a new faith" (*ibid*).

Similar discussions can be conducted regarding the ethical concerns, social activism, etc. of the personality types of *sanyasin*, *grahasta* and the *sant-sipahi*. And such discussions will invariably show the profoundness of the concept of *sant-sipahi*. The discussion will also show that the personality patterns of *sanyasin* or *grahasta* could not produce or they are highly inadequate to produce a successful culture or a shared system of communication and the worst of all, such ideals even immanently lay the hurdles in the path of the formation of a shared system of culture.

Finally, one may say that the making of the concept of *sant-sipahi* contains a creative rupture in its structure. Stepping out of the traditional philosophy and theology, it rather aims at the grand synthesis of the otherwise incompatible opposites. The synthesis negates the absolute separate existences of the *sant* and the *sipahi*. It is interesting to take note of the mechanism of the integration of the moments of *sant* and *sipahi* in the Sikh thought. It is not a mechanical adding up of the two but the integration is achieved by transferring the two to a higher and deeper level. Both the spiritual and the earthly ends are intensified in the process of integrating the two. As a way of comparison, we can say that a *sant* is more universalistic than a *sanyasin* and a *sipahi* is more socialized and atavistic than a *sanyasin* and a *sipahi* is more socialized and activist than a *grahasta*. Thus the synthesis is achieved at a deeper level by intensifying both the sides of the binary. Ultimately, we get the ideal of *sant-sipahi* with intense religiosity, universalism, praxis-orientedness and sociality. *Sant-sipahi* is a personality pattern of universalistic-achievement type, as a modern sociologist names it. (Talcott Parsons, 1972 : 182). The objectives, goals and the vision of the *sant-sipahi* are universalistic and he knows how to realise them. The *sant-sipahi* aims at

realizing them. He considers that the achievement part of it is more valuable than the goals, because his Guru has taught him that "truthful living is nobler than Truth".

This is an article about the Sikh social ideal. The Sikh conception of society emanated in the Indian historical context which was predominated by caste system on the one hand, and the way of living of a renouncer on the other. The present paper pursues the analysis of the essential characteristics of these prevalent social models and indicates the points of departure of Sikhism from them. By the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries A.D., Sikhism had its encounters with the Islamic understanding of society too. Although Islam and Sikhism shared certain values, they had their points of divergence too. The Sikh social ideal, consequently, had to work out its response to the Islamic way of acting in society. This has been dealt in the next part of the paper.

The later part of the section looks at the modern Western liberal democracy as a social model from the Sikh point of view. Some of the recent studies in the West have resurrected the Hegelian concept of 'end of history' meaning the modern Western societies as the best, final and ultimate pattern of social government in the history of mankind. This has been taken for scrutiny from the Sikh viewpoint and the possible points of criticism of Western system are notified. Thus, the section is dedicated to the Sikh social ideal in comparative perspective and aimed at bringing to the forefront the search for alternatives to the existing models.

The Sikh principle of *miri-piri* is the starting point of the discussion. It makes Sikhism differ fundamentally from various traditional belief systems which were dichotomic and one-sidedly transcendental. Sikhism, on the other hand, aims at the unity of spirituality and earthliness. It proclaims the authenticity of the world, societies and life on earth. The world is declared holy and named as a place of righteous deeds. Sikhism obligates "an enlightened, loving and creative interest in the world and in its development." The principle of *miri-piri* renders theoretical justification to the Sikh interest in working out a social ideal.

An obvious victim of the Sikh social theory is the Hindu caste system. One can quote any number of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib to show that the Gurus outrightly denounced the caste system. The Sikh thought, in order to make coherent and systematic its rejection of caste system, repudiated the entire corpus of appending theories and customs associated with the caste system. The theory of pollution, the theories of *karma* and

transmigration, origin myths justifying the hierarchical social structure, ritual status attributed to scriptures recommending the *varna* system, etc., were rejected by the Sikh Gurus. The metaphysics advocated by the orthodox schools was exempted by the Sikh Gurus as the metaphysics of injustice and cultural oppression. The Sikh practice of *pangat* and *langar* were clearly aimed to break the food taboos which formed the anthropological basis for untouchability and casteism. Finally, the Khalsa was envisaged as a necessary form of empowerment of the common mass of people with no discrimination against the poor and oppressed.

The Sikh critique of caste system exposes the essential features of the caste system such as hierarchy, fragmentation and inequality, and the Sikh social ideal replaces them with holism and equality. The rigidity of caste compartmentalisation makes the society stagnated and morbid in terms of social mobility and economic productivity. Sikhism proposes a dynamic whole in place of the former. Every moment of the Reality is perpetually in movement and motion that life is ever freshly created. The Sikh Gurus compared Reality to an ever-growing tree. The aspect of change is an inalienable moment of Reality, according to the Sikh Gurus.

Sometimes it is held that caste system had a cosmological appeal that it is a model not only of society, but also of the entire universe. Thus, holism is argued as one of the basic components of caste perception of the world. However, it must be stated that in the caste universe, holism is secondary while hierarchy remains its primary and all-pervasive aspect. Whereas in Sikhism, hierarchy has been eliminated to make the spirit of wholeness uncompromising and fundamental. Reality is conceived in the latter as a unified and related whole, every moment of which is equal to the other. As hierarchy is identified as a factor of fragmentation, inequality and stagnation, wholeness comes to be emphasised and re-established.

The Indian religious systems indeed have another model of living which goes with the name of renunciation. Jainism, Buddhism and later a many unorthodox Hindu sects (Gorakh Nath Yogis, Siddhas, etc.) developed this pattern. Some of the recent sociological studies enunciate the social meaning of renunciation in that it is an alternative to caste system and that it achieves equality in transcendental seclusion and monkhood. It is claimed that a renouncer above all renounces his caste living and the caste role ascribed to him. Thus, the argument developed is that renunciation no more needs to be looked at as a life-negating principle, but as an alternative institution contradictory to the caste society. A revised

approach has been proposed postulating a positive social role to the institution of renunciation that it inspires the society towards radical changes.

Taking into consideration this argument, one is compelled to look at the analytical moments of the renunciative ideal. The chief attribute of the renunciative ideal is that it shares with many transcendental systems absolute non-action as its basis. Even knowledge is understood as an aspect of materiality—and so of activity. Consequently, all theoretical and practical activities are exempted from the renunciative ideal. Thus, the renunciative critique of casteism becomes purely abstract and Utopian. That renunciation inspires change is a argument debatable. By renouncing all action and sources of action from itself, renunciation turns incapable of inspiring any action for change. A careful look at the history of the institution of renunciation shows that it has failed to inspire change, and on the contrary, it has become an “addition” to the religion which has advocated caste system. Louis Dumont is right when he says, “the discipline of the renouncer by its very tolerance of worldly religion (read: Caste Religion - NMM) becomes additional to it.”

The universalism of the renunciative ideal is also a cunning one. It hides behind itself an individualism. Renunciation of the world and one's body is possible only by presupposing the individual existence of *atman* or soul as distinct from the world and body. This is again postulating an individualistic position at the transcendental level. It is an apparent universalism hiding behind itself its own opposite. It is interesting here to note that Sikhism outlaws renunciation on the grounds that it is abstract, Utopian and non-dynamic on the one hand, and individualistic on the other hand.

The Sikh Gurus have left an extremely large corpus of verses criticising the phenomenon of individualism. *Haumain*, a Sikh concept for individualism and I-am-ness is found to be repudiated in every alternative line of *gurbani*. It has been identified as the greatest malady of mankind and a wall which divides man from man, every individual from the whole. *Haumain* is interpreted by the Sikh Gurus in terms of contemporaneous social realities in that it is the root cause of caste pride, renunciation, despotic rule and economic exploitation. The entire socio-religious thought of Sikhism is aimed at eradicating the evil of *haumain* and to make the man a *sachiar*, to achieve a truthful mode of living, that is to unite oneself harmoniously with the whole.

The Sikh Gurus did not encounter directly the Western liberal democracy, and their critique of individualism was worked out in a different social context. Possibly, it was the context of India encountering the Islamic religion and rule, and above all the unleashing of the fresh wave of individualism as the result of the above. The despotism and arrogance of the ruling elite, and the wars and aggression steered by them are attributed by the Sikh Gurus to the phenomenon of *haumain*. We understand that individualism, as indifferent to others and to the whole, must have rooted by this time with a fresh stress. As a response, the Sikh Gurus decided to uphold the primacy of justice and holism against the unbridled individualism of the age. They bring to the forefront the subtle forms of the functioning of *haumain* and make the critique of it the corner-stone of their thought.

The Sikh rejection of individualism as a structuring principle of society appropriates a crucial meaning because it contains the possible criticisms to the Western mode of liberal democracy, which has been celebrated as the end-model of social governing in history. Individual is the atom, cell or the unit of the Western modernistic system. It is true that it assures certain amount of legal or judicial form of equality among the citizens of the system. It is from the point of view of this legal form of equality, for example, Ambedkar criticised the Hindu caste system of inborn inequality and hierarchy. But equality in real terms is not ensured by the system structured by individualism nor by the legal form of equality. Individualism as the basic unit of society has the other side of it in that man is alienated from one another, removed of his rootedness in society, community and culture, and that he is split and got in limit situations. The Sikh thought looks at individualism, above all, as alienated and unrooted.

It is often held that the Western liberal pattern guarantees creativity and dynamism. Apparently, it is there and the individual becomes highly mobile and dynamic due to his alienated and individualised position in the system. He mobilises all his vital energies as an individual in order to survive and to have power over the other and to defeat the other. As a postmodernist writer says, "The vital energies of an individual are mobilised to transform himself into wild, primitive and completely merciless in and against the other."<sup>10</sup> The ethical responsibility to the other is completely lost in this way of thinking and living. So, the individual is "destructively creative" in the system, a form of individualisation destructive of unity. The only way left to the individual to rebuild the social wholeness is the

illusory inter-subjectivity of bureaucratic rationalism. It is interesting to note that the Sikh Gurus were able to identify very subtly the outcomes of the *haumain-oriented* dynamism, that is destructive, arrogant, oppressive and despotic to the other and to the whole. As the renunciative model, the individualist episteme, too, is ontologically dichotomic. It presupposes the dualism of I and the Other. The I-ness, for its assigned freedom, manipulates, disregards, overpowers and oppresses the Other. The Other — whether it is nature or woman or next man — is made into a lifeless object for subjugation. The philosophers say that through dichotomy, the Other is made to undergo the process of objectification.

Sikhism, on the contrary, builds a non-dichotomic system of man's being-in-a-world-with-others. It resists any form of suppression of the Other. The Reality is perceived as dynamic to establish justice and to resist the evil of dichotomy. Sikhism really poses an alternative social ideal to the modes living history has witnessed.

## CHAPTER V THE KHALSA ORDER

### I

This chapter deliberates the idea and identity of the Khalsa Panth created by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, on the splendid Vaisakhi day of the year 1699. The Khalsa is a unique socio-spiritual organization, embodying the great principle of *miri-piri*, culminating as a glorious movement of subaltern masses for universal brotherhood, justice, equality and a new piety. This is how Professor Puran Singh exalts the spirit of the Khalsa: "In Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Nanak's sword is unsheathed... With the Guru, Heaven unsheathed its Word to save the people from both religious and political oppression — the fanatic, savage oppression of the oppressors. There is the feeling of Buddha in the breast of Guru Gobind Singh, the same renunciation, the same *nirvana*, the same goodwill for all living beings, and yet, it no more wears the 'Yellow Robe'— A wholly new shape, long tresses knotted on the crown of his head, a soldier's dress, a sword by the side, and riding on his bay charge....". Professor Puran Singh continues, "We can trace the most modern tendencies of human aspirations in the Khalsa that Guru Gobind Singh created in the Punjab. Some of us trace in the Khalsa the beginning of a socialistic society... Modern humanity must come to accept the conclusions of the Guru on the problem of an ideal, yet workable, social reconstruction". Sardar Jagjit Singh sees in the creation of the Khalsa a well designed programme of a revolution more popular and plebeian than that of the French Revolution and other revolutions of secular type.

The modern poet of the Tamils, Subramania Bharati (1882-1921), celebrated the birth of the Khalsa at Anandpur Sahib as the only alternative to the existing Indian society, an alternative of casteless, egalitarian republic. Suddhananta Bharatiar (1897-1990), a junior contemporary of Subramania Bharati and the one who dedicated around 2000 lines of chaste Tamil poetry to the Sikh movement, visualizes the formation of the Khalsa,

where the fifth member of the *Panj Pyare* is a Tamilian, referring obviously to Bhai Sahib Singh of Bidar (Maharashtra). Suddhananta Bharathiar, as if, gave shape in his epic to the desire of the Tamils to associate themselves in the making of the Khalsa. Or, it is another poetic expression of the general view that exists in South India that Sikhism marks a significant premonstration in the history of non-Brahmin social upheavals in India, premonishing the ideals of Narayana Guru in Kerala and the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu in the recent period.

We need to explore the interspace or the complex relations between the rational and the real in the study of the Khalsa. In the metaphysical sense, idea may be just an abstraction whereas identity means the actuality. However, the Hegelian philosophy criticised the western metaphysical tradition in a particular way. For Hegel, the terms *metaphysical* and *abstraction* meant one-sidedness, least oriented on life and, consequently, lifeless, static and dead. Hegel had a different definition of idea which is multifaceted, dialectical and concrete. According to Hegel, an abstraction cannot be realized in life whereas a concrete idea is realisable as it contains the seeds of actual life. Otherwise put, an idea must always contain the possibility of becoming an identity. The problem between the Western metaphysical tradition and Hegel is also the problem between Indian metaphysical tradition and the Sikh Gurus. As we can recall, Vedanta in the Indian philosophical tradition stood for a vague and abstract Brahman-idea which is proposed to be situated beyond the *mayic* actuality. It is a speculative one-sidedness, a negation of reality and death of life and concreteness.

Guru Nanak does not take the Vedantic conceptions as real. He calls them dead matter and they are good only for the museum of human thoughts. They have no use in the field of life. He says that the sun is real, the earth is real; all we see and touch, meet and love and feel, and are happy or sorry about, is real. Thus, there is a paradigm shift in the Sikh thinking from the very beginning. Guru Nanak starts his spiritual search with a programmatic question: "How to become a *sachiar*?" The question is a practical one, or a search for a concrete idea, an idea which is alive, a question which is aimed at its realisability. Similarly, the famous statement of Guru Nanak: "Truth is the highest, but higher still is truthful living" is a programme intended to transform the idea into an identity. It is not at all yet another attempt to "discover" the truth through the traditional ways

such as meditation, or contemplation, or rational analysis. The Sikh programme is very much actual. It is to achieve a concrete form, or a real result, in the form of a living, or a way of life of an individual and society. Thus, travelling from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, one finds the project of *sachiar* or truthful living realized in the *sant-sipahi* (at the social end). It is thus that the concrete idea took its birth in the first Guru, became an identity in the Tenth Guru, and so the Khalsa comes into existence.

In terms of the concepts of idea and identity discussed above, one notices that modern historiography is more attracted by ideas than by identities. Despite its declarations of being rational, or due to its being rational, modern historiography shares with the traditional thinking its metaphysicalism or logocentrism, and tends to shatter the unity of the phenomenon with its analytical-again metaphysical and one-sided categories. It pierces the actual identity to separate its movements into mere abstractions. It demands the actual history to be in accordance with the conceptual or ideational necessities. Categories of modernist historiography, such as economic system, peasant community, social classes, progress, etc. are so conceptualized that they become universal to be applied to any phenomenon in any part of the world, in any age. As the post-modernists say, they are meta-narratives. It can be accepted that the modernist historiography can give a skeleton-frame of the actual history. However, it leaves out the blood and flesh and nerves of the actual history, and the unique features of the phenomenon go unnoticed.

Modernist historiography does not recognize the factor of identity or the visible face achieved by a particular people. It is forgotten that the entire history of that particular people is due to that identity. Moreover, the modernist becomes incapable to indicate, or to analyse, the source of inspiration upon which the actual identity and the history of the people really stand.

Finally, the modernist historiography pre-supposes domination or a relation of power, over the actual happenings of the history. The point of view is kept with the historian while actual history is seen as a raw material. Its philosophy is the dichotomy of the historian and actual history, subject, (reason) and object of study. It is the reason of the historian which infuses meaning into the raw material, otherwise said, the historian uses the rational tools to transform the actual history into usable commodities. Thus, actual

history always remains outside the disinterested subject who studies the phenomenon of history. The idea stands always antithetical to identity.

It is important to us here that such a rationalist historiographic approach to the history of the Khalsa is not only unacceptable, but also, it is virtually at variance to the philosophy of Sikhism which consciously aims at overcoming the metaphysical nature and abstraction of ideas. It is necessary to be stated that modernist historiography occupies a pre-Sikh position in its philosophical maturity.

Sardar Kapur Singh, the classical philosopher of the Sikhs, touched this problem in his special address at Punjab Association, Madras, in 1976. Referring to the modernist European attempts to squeeze the historical Nanak from what these scholars designate as the 'legendary Nanak', Kapur Singh says, "European literary tradition delights in generalizing, and in the abstract, and the impersonal, while the genius of almost all the oriental languages... is personal, particular and concrete. The 'historical Nanak' that sought to be churned out by modern scholars is not the Nanak who gave birth to the historical upsurge and movement known to history as Sikhism".

Professor Puran Singh deals with the same problem in his own way. He rightly points out the impersonal or abstract approach to the history of Khalsa as Brahmanical.

"The Khalsa moves round the names of the Ten Gurus in all practical life and happily, not in any great fascination round the unknown name of some unknowable Infinite, deathless or Timeless impersonal Being... Social construction is always to be around a person, a living person, and not round an abstract principle... The last test of truth is the growth of life by it and in it". This is not only the philosophy of the Khalsa but also the philosophical basis needed for study of Khalsa. In this sense, the Khalsa cannot be reduced to the type of 'peasant community', or a 'medieval phenomenon'.

The critique of the philosophical inconsistencies of the modernist historiography, consequently, leads us to the issue of identity of the Khalsa in the context of medieval Indian society. Such a placing, we suppose, would tell us the unique features of the Khalsa. The making of the Khalsa encounters three factors :

- (i) the active oppression hailing from the rulers of the day,
- (ii) the inertia formed within the Sikh fold in the form of the *masand* system during a period of a century in Sikhism ; and

(iii) the casteist Hindu atmosphere prevailing in and around Punjab in its most complex and accumulated form. It is the 'magic of the great Guru Gobind Singh and the wonder of Khalsa that the creation of the Khalsa successfully comes upon and contests the said situations. This miracle has been vividly expressed in the militant mobilized resistance enshrined in the Khalsa, on the one hand in the abolition of the Masand system within the Sikh fold, and the declaration of the *nash* doctrine, on the other hand.

The abolition of the *masand* system and the proclamation of the *nash* doctrine are so vital to the history of Sikh religion that, without them Sikhism as we have it today cannot be perceived at all. History of many other religious movements, even protest movements, evidences that during a short span of time, say 100 or 200 years, after the formation of such movements, they turn into their opposites, losing all protests or democratic content with which they come into existence. Such was the fate of Christianity, Islam, the Bhakti movement and many more. During the fateful years of the post-formation period they used to exhaust the initial enthusiasm and allow feudal structures to be crystallized within their fold, or to succumb to the feudalizing surroundings. But the creation of the Khalsa shows that the tenth Guru-consciously-abolished the possibilities of such a course of history to Sikhism. By eradicating the *masand* system, Guru Gobind Singh refused to award sovereignty to the sacred power usually claimed by the priests in religious systems, and thus rejected any space for Brahminism within Sikhism. Similarly, the *nash* doctrine too checked the slipping-back of Sikhism into the caste order of the day.

This is the Spirit of the Sword of Guru Gobind Singh, a determinate negation of the oppressive moments, within and without the Sikh movement, to pursue a positive project of social justice and spiritual innovation. One observes a still more intensive spirit of negation in the creation of Khalsa. The order of Khalsa has been created by the Tenth Guru on the basis of test of selection of the first *Panj Piara*. It is a test of life and death. A great affirmation is established on the sound foundation of a great negation. "Die, while you live" is a recurring theme in the verses of almost all the Gurus. The Great Guru celebrates God as All-Death, All-Steel and All-Sword. He even says, "First, God created the double-edged sword, and then, the universe". First, a negation is created, then to create life. Finiteness and limits of human inertia are encountered first, then to unleash the infinite creative potentialities of life. Negation becomes

a tremendous source of Revolution.

Such a negation for life is unknown to Indian history, as Indian history does not know any revolution. Sikhism, particularly, the creation of the Khalsa, makes a clear and radical departure from the Indian tradition, making the Khalsa a boundless source of permanent revolution and an innovation of life. And that is the spirit of the sword of Guru Gobind Singh.

## II

The creation of the Khalsa by the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, was a remarkable event in the history of the Sikhs as well as in the broader contexts of Indian history and world civilization. The creation of the Khalsa gave birth to a new people, a new ethos and a new philosophy. The creation of the Khalsa represents the culmination of the genius and efforts of the Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh. As it has been aptly mentioned by the famous historian G.C. Narang, there is inner coherence and unity among the Gurus' contributions. He says - "The harvest which ripened in Guru Gobind Singh was sown by Guru Nanak and watered by his successors. The Sword which carved the Khalsa's way to glory was undoubtedly forged by Gobind, but the steel had been provided by Nanak".

The insights of the first Guru to make a simple and transparent spirituality, the deep social concern of the Sikh Gurus and their consistent attempts to synthesise the otherwise torn up spiritual and temporal realms of human life finally got the shape of the Khalsa. Khalsa embodies a new spirituality inseparably attached with social commitments and an idealism invariably associated with social justice. Thus, the creation of the Khalsa is truly something new and unknown in Indian history. This newness and originality of Khalsa had got registered in many of the Khalsa symbols too. One of such symbols is the sword - the double edged sword - which bears the highest and the thickest symbolism of the Khalsa ideals. The present section is an attempt into the hermeneutics of the sword in Sikh tradition. To make distinct the meaning implied in the sword, the section deals with the background context of the making of the khalsa, that is, the basic features of Indian culture in the late-medieval or post-medieval period. While the present write-up does not claim exhaustive study of the problem, however it aims at probing into the possibilities of interpretation on the same.

The Khalsa came into existence on the Vaisakhi day of the year 1699 and the Indian culture by then had more than 5000 years of known history, if we start from the famous Indus valley civilization. Obviously, Indian culture during that long period had given birth to many religions, many languages, many cultural traits, various political configurations, different types of influences, impacts and also interferences. Looking into its multifaceted past with continuities and discontinuity, in no way Indian culture could be defined in singular, simplistic, handy or transparent manner. It was a very complex fabrication of cultural traits, traditions and alternative traditions, syntheses and confrontations, unifications and decenterings among themselves. In this complex history of a civilization of continental dimensions India had achieved a no-less complex system of rituals, religious rites, beliefs, practices, symbols and finally philosophies and theologies interpreting and reinterpreting them.

Without going into the detailed complexities of the above situation, we can single out some of the basic features of Indian Culture which got solidified into its inbuilt mechanisms during its long period of existence.

One of the first aspects of Indian culture is its accumulative character. An accumulative culture gives least space for change and it prefers a static being. Its attitude to the emergence of new is negative and it dissolves the new into what already exists. It does not allow the structural components of the system to interact and exchange adequately, and on the contrary, it segregates them consciously and specially prepares the rules and codes of such segregation. Accumulative nature is a feature of tribalism with its closedness, inwardness and exclusivity. India is a classical example of accumulative nature of its culture. The most ancient tribalism here gave birth to the Varna system and then the *jati* system without having much change in their formation and content.

This discussion leads us to the second important feature of Indian culture that it is hierarchic. Again we have to start from the tribalism about which we have already mentioned. It seems that the ethnic fear of the Aryan races, possibly, then a minority group, to mingle with the vast population of native people determined a lot the course of Indian history. The ethnic fear of the Aryans grew into the fear of mixing of blood, fear of touch, food-taboos, theories of pollution, law of karma, etc. These are the rules and laws of segregation soundly founded upon the ethnic fear. Finally, this precipitates in the fear of change which is aimed to insure the rules of

segregation untouched by the winds of change that may come up from outside the Aryan centre. Theories of religious, psychological and philosophical nature were evolved to serve this social purpose of segregation and hierarchy.

The hierarchised social order and the segregated social superiority of a people from the vast majority got theorized into the philosophies of Dichotomy and Transcendence which could be called as the third basic aspect of Indian culture. The term hierarchy involves certain amount of quantitative characterization whereas philosophy, as a discipline which deals with qualities, invariably comes over to dichotomy (polarized and exclusive concepts of Brahman / Maya) and absolute Transcendentalism (Nirguna, Nirprapancha Brahman). Otherwise said, the social hierarchy could be expressed rigorously in philosophy only in the form of dichotomy. Indian philosophy, particularly the vedic-vedantic brand of it, inevitably but willingly met this fate.

It is into this type of culture that the Islamic rulers intruded during the medieval period. Islam as a religious ideology was basically different from the culture found in India. The Islamic rulers started carving out an urban-market-oriented society in India. The path was no doubt aggressive, violent and in many aspects shattered the crystallized patterns of Indian society. To the upper elite of Indian society the Islamic rule was only an ideological defeat whereas the common people underwent untold sufferings and forms of oppression of the political rulers. At the cost of death, agony and termination of the common masses, the rulers accumulated their wealth and luxury.

One of the notable features of the Islamic period of Indian history is that it activated (for good and bad) the individual who was bound confined within the traditional frames of family, birth, caste, profession, village etc. Cruel and continuous wars, fast changes in political fates, urbanised market economy, upward and horizontal mobilization of some of the erstwhile 'lower' castes of manual labour and other factors contributed to this process of individualization of man.

In the above said context, Sikhism was a fresh beginning and the Sikh Gurus made a fresh appeal to the Divine with enlarged spiritual quest and social concern. The sufferings of the Age found projected in the tender hearts of the Sikh Gurus. The Sikh Gurus made fundamental criticism of the traditional structures of *varna* and caste, unknown in Indian history. Their criticism was so deep that they found that the caste system could

not be dethroned without overthrowing the religious theories and scriptural sanctions defending that system. Theories of divine origin of *varna* system, pollution, karma, trigunas, rituals and the philosophies of Vedanta Transcendental Brahman, illusoriness of earthly life, passivity and inaction"- all these and others are found criticized in all their depth by the Sikh Gurus.

The Gurus addressed their critiques against the violence and oppression of the Islamic rulers too. Against the aggressive individualism of the market and political ethos, the Gurus forwarded the dynamism of the collectivity. A corporate dynamism was put forth by the Sikh Gurus. A casteless egalitarian society with inbuilt sources of change and innovation was the ideal of the Gurus. The Sikh principle of *miri-piri* redefined spirituality in terms of God, ethical purity and social welfare. The principle of *miri-piri* is a fundamental criticism against the onesidedly and abstractly postulated concept of Transcendence. The Sikh Gurus have left a relentless criticism of hereditary priesthood, orthodoxy, ritualism and external forms of worship. Inner purity and objectification of that inner truth in social arena are the intertwined ideals of Sikhism.

The creation of the Khalsa marks the fulfillment of the visions of the Gurus in reality. The creation of the Khalsa by the Tenth Guru sharpens the critical spirit of Sikhism, intensifies its practical orientation and identifies the agency that ought to act for social change. The fact that the personal Guruship ended with the Tenth Guru and the responsibility was entrusted to the Guru Granth Sahib and the entire Khalsa Panth shows that the Religion of the Gurus had now transformed into the Religion of the people. It was an episode of empowerment of the people-male and female-first of its type in the entire history of India, possibly, other parts of the world too. The famous statement "If the Guru is twenty measures, the Khalsa is twenty one measures", affirms not only the love and confidence of the Guru in his Sikhs but also the highest responsibility of the Sikhs before the Gurus. It was a presentiment of the democratic ideal in Indian history. The Panj Piaras selected from various linguistic areas and from among the socially downtrodden people suggest the federal democratic and representative character of the leadership the Great Guru had visualized.

It is appropriate that at this level of discussion of the creation of Khalsa we start probing into the hermeneutics of the Sword in the Khalsa tradition.

The Sword occupies a key, vital and core place in Guru Gobind Singh's entire thought. Guru Gobind Singh almost equates the Sword with the idea of Divinity. He says :

The Eternal God, Thou art our Shield  
 The Dagger, Knife, the Sword we wield  
 I bow before the Holy Sword with Love and Devotion.

If we closely look at the Guru's sayings, we find that Guru gives the status of the first immediate manifestation of the one Transcendent God to the Hold Sword.

"First, God created the double-edged Sword  
 And, then, the Universe"

Such a place of the Sword in God's manifestation makes the Sword equivalent to God's Name, Will, Word, Order (hukam). The latter too are the first immediate manifestations of God or the first becoming of the one God. God's Name and Order guarantee the dynamism of the manifested world which is rooted in God's Transcendent Being. The same could be attributed to the Sword also, moreover, the aspect of dynamism is explicit in the Sword.

*In Western philosophy, the fundamental principle of existence usually is denoted by the term of logos. In that sense, Sword is the logo of Existence. This means also a realistic understanding of the existence that it is not a closed or static being, on the other hand, the existence is a contradictory and strife-ridden process. The Guru says :*

And created He the gods and demons  
 And ploughed into their beings the germs of strife.

This is something similar to what Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, perceived the reality as Fire, War and stringed Bow.

The Tenth Guru elaborates the earthly aspect of the sword too :

The Sword cuts deep, destroys the host of the wicked ;  
 It has power to make glory in the battlefield.  
 It is the unbreakable shaft in the hand.  
 It is the sharp and its flash pales the radiance of the sun.  
 The Sword brings peace to the Saints.

It creates fear among the evil-minded and destroys the sin.

Here Guru Nanak's theme of God as the "Might of the meek" or "The Protector of the weak" is continued and has been given a concrete shape.

My only Refuge is my God, the Timeless Being;  
 Who is All-Steel, All-Death, All-Power.  
 May He protect me"  
 Such a God  
 Gave us the Wealth of faith in Righteousness.

Sword here symbolizes the "Wealth of Faith in Righteousness" and a real weapon in the struggle for justice : it is for this glorious role of the Sword, it is used to dissolve the sugar-pieces in pure cold water while preparing the *amrit* in the Sikh tradition. It is implied that a Sikh is expected to possess the "Wealth of faith in Righteousness" and commit himself in the struggle for justice.

This is not only the intention of the Guru, but it has also got enshrined in the history of the Sikhs. The Sword means self-respect and self-dignity to the Sikh people. The Sword contains in itself a people's history how did the Sikhs earn a dignified place in history and had achieved social emancipation. It also means to every other people that social liberation is possible only through hard-bound struggle and that there is no alternative to it.

The Sikh conception of Sword also envisages the long-cherished Sikh ideal of fearlessness, *nirbhai*. As we know, almost from the first line of the *Japuji*, the Sikh Gurus celebrated the ideal of fearlessness. Guru Nank is the first thinker who brought into the focus of religious literature this Ideal of fearlessness. During the modern period, the existentialist philosophers (Heidegger) have touched the problem of fear-fears of death, finiteness, insult, loneliness, etc., in some detail. It is to the credit of the Sikh Gurus that they had made the ideal of fearlessness as one of the basic aims of Sikh thought. Our discussion of the hermeneutics of the Sword too leads us to the conclusion that the Sword registers the ideal of fearlessness as one of its meanings.

Finally, the Sword also stands for the critical spirit, the moment of negation, the critical consciousness (awareness) involved in the making of the Khalsa. The test of the Sword (or Death) is the mode of selection of the First Five Beloveds and the creation of the Khalsa. In a sense, the test was suggested by the first Guru, Guru Nanak himself.

If you desire to play the Game of Love with me,  
 Enter into my lane with your head on your palms.

A fundamental negation is the need to achieve a truly new. "Die, while you are alive!" is also a theme consistently worked out by the Sikh

Gurus. It is the negation of selfishness, the ego, the *haumai* and all the evils associated with them that are to be abolished to achieve a positive birth. The *nash* Doctrine of Kul Nash, Karm Nash, Dharam Nash, etc., particularly in the context of the accumulative, hierarchic and Transcendentalist Indian culture, also indicates that without a strong moment of negation, the social history of the country cannot move towards a meaningful and just living. It is this spirit of the Sword that guarantees the Sikhs the critical awareness, creativity, freedom, the revolutionary zeal and a historic mission.

### III

The split of spirituality and temporality is one of the core problems of general philosophy, both Western and Eastern. It is core because it plays determinative role in the definition of metaphysics itself and implies itself in epistemology, social philosophy, social ethics and in various other philosophical disciplines. This is how a recent philosopher of eminence Alasdair MacIntyre describes the situation in Western philosophy, "The division of human life into the sacred and secular is one that comes naturally to Western thought. It is a division which at one and the same time bears the marks of its Christian origin and witnesses to the death of a properly religious culture. For when the sacred and the secular are divided, then religion becomes one more department of human life, one activity among others ... only a religion which is a way of living in every sphere either deserves to or can hope to survive. For the task of religion is to help see the secular as the sacred, the world as under God. When the sacred and the secular are separated, then the ritual becomes an end not hallowing of the world, but an end itself... To divide the sacred from the secular is to recognise God's action only within the narrowest limits. A religion which recognises such a division, as does our own, is one on the point of dying".

Indian relations tried to unify the split out opposites at the symbolic level, particularly as the unity of male and female principles. The tantric tradition always kept pressurising the Vedantic line of thinking towards such a synthesis. The *Bhakti* thought experienced the tantric pressure intensely however failed to go beyond the patriarchal family model of the male-female relationship. Later symbolisms as the Siva-Sakti Samarasa or Gorakhnath calling the Sakti as Nija Sakti and renaming Samadhi as Samarasa, etc. are a few examples of the attempted synthesis of the male-female principles. The spirit of synthesis is very strong in Sikhism which

got expressed in so many ways. One can observe the flexibility in the textual or linguistic level itself. There is a non-discriminative attitude to the Arabian and Persian languages, their usages and metaphors which decentres the linguistic rigidity of the traditional Hindu religious thought. The present shift is not only stepping out of the Sanskrit fold in favour of the regional languages as it was found in the expressions of the Bhakti thought, but also a movement towards entirely alien languages. Not that just the sacred was spread towards these alien languages, but the sacred was found, even got originated in those languages. The Sikh Gurus indicated the innumerable instances in Guru Granth Sahib as to how the idea of God has been expressed in Hindu and Islamic names. The Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh admirably enumerate their perception of God as an experience of sameness of Karta and Karim, Ram and Allah, Temple and Mosque, the Purans and the Quran.

The Sikh Gurus work out many fresh metaphors to insist upon the spirit of synthesis grasped by them.

In love, through sweet speech comes reunion.  
Denial of religious scriptures with truthfulness is healed.  
The deed to the world by righteousness is tied.  
These in the world be the means of reconciliation.  
Should brass, gold or iron be broken.  
The smith in fire fuses it together.

The Gurus take up this task of fusing together in terms of sweet speech, truthfulness, righteousness and other ethical values. Guru Gobind Singh even calls it the synthesis of light and darkness, the extremities blending into one united reality. He says in his *Akal Ustati* :

Whether things live in water or land and fly in the firmament,  
God made them all and will destroy them all.  
As light blendeth with darkness and darkness with light.  
So all things have sprung from God and shall be united in Him.

In the *Japu*, the tenth Guru perceives the God-reality in so many forms of unity of binaries - God as Life and Death, as creation and destruction, one and many, union and separation, the benevolent and the terrific. Let us remind here how Guru Nanak once unified the opposites.

Wherever I look.  
His sole presence I behold.  
Himself in each being immanent.  
Himself the sun with rays outspread.

Himself the visible forms.

Attributed and unattributed are two terms devised,

But in unison one reality formulate.

Guru Gobind Singh uses the same idiom to express in the *Akal Ustai* this idea of unity of binaries :

“As from one fire millions of sparks arise.

Though rising separately, they unite again in the fire.

As from a heap of dust, several particles of dust fill the air

And on filling it again blend with the dust.

As in one stream millions of waves are produced.

The waves being made of water all become water.

So from God's form

are manifested non-sentient and sentient things.

And springing from Him, shall all be united to Him again.”

The theme of God as transcendence and immanence too is inherited from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. On the one hand, the Primal Being is depicted as “invisible, imperceptible, distinct from all the world and of no form, no complexion, no outline and no costume.” On the other hand, He is also described as “in the water, dry land, forest, mountain, cave, space, time, earth and in the river, sea, tree, in its leaves, etc.” Often this kind of reconciliation assumes the form of paradoxes in Guru Gobind Singh - *Yogi - Bhogi*, *Life / Death*, *Creation / Destruction*, *Ik / Anek*, etc. A mystic way has been charted out to move freely from one end to the other, apparently exclusive and contradictory.

One of the finest forms of the synthesis of the spiritual and the temporal reached by Guru Gobind Singh is the declaration of the formula of “Gursikh and Sikhguru”, by which the unity of God, Guru and the devotees is achieved in Sikhism. This also forms the theoretical basis of the formation and the function of the Khalsa. Speaking of Hegel, a recent philosopher Adorno writes how Hegel “shifts (the responsibility) from the spirit's shoulders upon the shoulders of the ones who must obey it.” This occurs in Sikhism too in the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. In the traditional religions, God is always the only subject whereas men are only the predicates. Guru Gobind Singh transforms this equation and the predicates are made into the co-subjects. The theme was already available in the *Guru Granth Sahib* :

What difference between Thee and me, and me and Thee?

No more than between gold and bangle, and water and the waves.

Guru Arjun confirms again :

The Creator takes no bonds, so are we not bound ;  
 He takes no impurity, nor we made impure ;  
 As He is pure, so are we like Him.

This is man participating in God's continuing act of universal and social renewal and recreation. "A creative act is therefore a continuation of world -creation and means participation in the work of God. And this presupposes freedom." The Guru in his *Bachitra Natak* (VI : 20) declares :

"There shall be no difference between me and them (the Khalsa).  
 God and God's servant are both one,  
 Deem not that there is any difference between them.  
 As waves produced from water are again blended with it.

These are some of the dimensions of the synthesis of the spiritual and the temporal in the thought of Guru Gobind Singh. His famous metaphor or Sword too spiritises the "lowest" and hardest metal to make it the highest and the holiest. The same could be said about the Guru's ideal of "making the sparrows into hawks". The synthesis of the spiritual and the temporal leads to the formation of a philosophy of socio-spiritual transformation.

This part of the discussion raises a question too : Did not the Guru feel a tension between the two, the spiritual and the temporal ? It seems that he did feel. It is the reason why the Guru advises to meditate on war in the heart.

"Blest is his life in this world who repeateth God's name with his mouth, and Meditateth war in the heart"

Sikhism, especially Guru Gobind Singh makes a radical departure from the theme of ignorance (*avidya*) to formulate the ideal of eradication of timidity and fear. This is another important outcome of the synthesis of the Spiritual and the temporal aimed by the Gurus.

Ignorance (*avidya*) is a theme long-spoken in the Vedic-vedantic line of thinking and it is considered as the major, often the only, source of evil. The *avidya-maya* combination against the Jnana-Brahman is the basic and popular problematic in Vedanta.

Guru Nanak does take up this problem as the problem of *sach* (Truth), however instantaneously transforms the same into the problem of *sachiar* or *sach achar*. How to live truly ? How to make life truthful ? These are the questions raised at the original point of Sikhism. In this re-formulation of

the problem, one already finds the shift from pure epistemology or sheer theory, a shift in favour of temporality and practice. The theme of *avidya* is basically an elitist problem, particularly in the Advaita version of Vedanta. On the other hand, the ideal of truthful living with its opposite of false living is very much a problem of living, authentic or inauthentic. As we know, the problem of living takes us to the phenomenological and existential exercises of many of twentieth century philosophers. The problems of living cannot avoid of being spiritual as well as temporal.

The Sikh thought does not limit itself with the theme of truthful living either. It adds up the ideal of fearlessness (*nirbhai*) to the theme of living from the very beginning of its history. The entire circumstances in which Sikhism emerged make us read the themes of truthful living or fearlessness not as mere theoretical issues but as of deep sociological implications. Without going into the details of the sources of fear or anxiety, one can say that the problematic is related with the mentality of masses of people on the one hand, and with the forces involved in oppressing or terrorising the people, on the other hand. Sikhism addresses to both these factors, it brings to focus the social and individual dimensions of the problem of fear.

The Sikh Gurus assume the task of making the people free from all forms of oppression and nurturing a fearless (*nirbhai*) and a cheerful (*chardi kala*) mentality in them. Guru Gobind Singh makes the theme of eradication of timidity as the core problem of Sikhism. The symbolism of sword or the test of sword the Guru conducted upon his Sikhs evidences the thickness attributed to the problem of eradication of fear. The Sikh Gurus weaponised the common masses for justice and turned the sparrows into the hawks. Guru Gobind Singh declares :

First, God created the double-edged sword

And, then, the universe.

Guru Gobind Singh advises the Sikhs, as it has been quoted, to meditate on war. He says :

Take the broom of divine knowledge into thy hand,

And sweep away the filth of timidity.

Thus the elimination of timidity as a holistic objective, in both body and mind becomes the central problem of Guru Gobind Singh's thought.

The discussions conducted here and elsewhere show that the synthesis of the spiritual and the temporal in the thought of the Sikh

Gurus, especially of Guru Gobind Singh occurs at least in three important realms : in aesthetic, ethical and pragmatic. It is in the realm of aesthetics that the Gurus see the God and His creation as a wonder (*wismad*), prefer to see their Sikhs always in *chardi kala* (Cheerful) and the world as a beautiful garden. The Ethical realm unites the spiritual and the temporal by replacing the rites and rituals by moral values of honesty, truthfulness and love. The third or the pragmatic realm commits the Sikhs to justice and social action, thus making Sikhism the philosophy of socio-spiritual transformation.

In the so-called post-modernist age, scholars of culture studies are inclined to probe into the indigenous models of community living and self-governance in place of the modernist universal, if not totalitarian patterns of ruling and disciplining. Indian civilization is such a vast phenomenon of continental proportions that in various historical phases and spatial dimensions it has given birth to multifarious autonomous articulations and formulations of social alternatives. The creation of the Khalsa on the Vaisakhi day of 1699 by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, was one such attempt delineating a social ideal, alternative to the prevailing ones. The present section is a search to identify the realities and potentialities of the Khalsa order towards formulating a social alternative especially in its immediate Indian context.

Unfortunately, our present knowledge and search for social alternative in Indian history are not adequate to the needs of our time. Social scientists and culturologists have not yet explored this area in all its depth and breadth despite the common acceptance that there must be enormous scope and possibilities for such research. The alternative social patterns in history are rarely in the modern realistic language and idiom that we often become insensitive to identify them in their own. However, the general background in which the search for alternatives is supposed to be conducted seems to be the *varna*-caste system. Without going into the details of the system we assume that it is historically the longest social pattern prevailing in Indian history, with varying local versions.

Perhaps the earliest attempt for an alternative, possibly, at the emerging period of the *varna*-caste system, is identifiable in Buddhism, an east-Indian social vision putting a lot of stress on the egalitarian, inter-related, communitarian possibilities of social living. Some scholars have indicated that Buddhism has inherited this spirit from its tribal past. It is equally true that the Buddhist social proposal contained many Utopian overtones and

it was unable to guarantee adequate dynamism to its social system. It was a kind of monastic socialism in ancient India.

The next major attempt, rather a series of attempts, alternating the castes with devotional communities is found in the medieval Bhakti traditions all over India. The Bhakti too was not an unitary movement, but was a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon specifying the regional identities of their own. From the South Indian background I can say that there were some real attempts to form unified religious communities of Bhaktas of Siva or Vishnu, called Adiyar Kulam or Thondar Kulam. The word '*Kulam*' stood for the attempted new configuration of devotees transcending the primordial caste affinities. There was an open cry for "Give and Take" of brides (*Kolzhmin! Kodumin!*), a conscious call to go against the established endogamic marriage patterns of the caste society. Bhakti in South India, at the initial stages, was dominantly a non-brahmanic movement, if we look at the caste composition of the Nayanmar and Alwar saints of the Saivite and Vaisnavite brands. The Bhakti of the South also consolidated its regional identity, keeping itself out of the Sanskritic fold, even decentering the latter, declaring the regional languages as sacred, thus exploring a space for their own spiritual seekings. To quote an interesting theme, a Tamil poet declared that Bhakti is expressible only in "Wet Tamil", implying that his devotional songs are wet with the saliva of his mouth. This expression is to be understood against the status of Sanskrit as *apaurushya* and *sruti* (unspoken but heard).

We know that Bhakti could not develop itself into a full-fledged social movement and restricted itself within the religious realm. In its later phases, Bhakti even turned into its opposite, spreading the caste-feudal relations towards the remotest areas of the country.<sup>5</sup>

The third, in our order of narration, is the Islamic social theories and practice. K. A. Nizami, a noted author of medieval Indian history describes that the Islamic conception of society is the most egalitarian and dynamic in the entire medieval world.<sup>6</sup> It is true that during the Islamic rule in India, it contributed substantially to the vertical and horizontal mobilization of people of manual works. However, the great encounter of Hinduism and Islam in India also involved a lot of violence, destruction and religio-political aggressiveness.

It is in this socio-political background that Sikhism steps into the socio-cultural life of Northwest India. The making of Sikhism as a distinct post-medieval movement and thought, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, is

a response to the social, cultural and political environment prevailing in India at that historical time. The creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh was, on the one hand, a revision and, on the other, a reassertion of the spiritual and social ideals unfurled by the great Guru Nanak.

There is a well pronounced universalism in Guru Gobind Singh's thought. His religious personality goes beyond the formalism and sectarianism of the creeds existing in his time. Guru Gobind Singh yearns for the unity and integration of all mankind:

God has no marks, no colour, no castes, no lineage,  
No form, no complexion, no outline, no costume;  
none can in any way describe him.  
He is without passion, colour, form or outline,  
He is devoid of caste marks of everykind.

*Karta* and *karim* are the same. *Razak* and *Rahim* are the same. Let no man even by mistake suppose there is a difference.

This is in accordance with Guru Nanak who once called his God as nameless, formless and religionless (*anaam, adharam*). Guru Nanak too took up the job of a smith to fuse together the separated :

In love, through sweet speech comes reunion.  
Denial of religious scriptures with truthfulness is healed.  
The deed to the world by righteousness is tied.  
These in the world be the means of reconciliation.  
Should brass, gold or iron be broken,  
The smith in fire fuses it together

GGs, 143

It is an attempt to explore the interreligious and intersocial territory and articulate an integrative-spirituality. The spirit is basically synthetic and integrative, against the analytic, discriminating, differentiating, divisive and hierarchic spirit of the caste system and its ideologies.

The more important aspect of Guru Gobind Singh is that he does not stop with theoretically formulating and expressing his concept of universalism but he goes on for concretising of the universalistic principle. Did not his master once note - "*Truth is the highest; But Truthful Living is still higher!*" Guru Gobind Singh moves forward to the practice of the universalism he preaches. This is the process of socialisation of the principles preached by the Guru. It is in this process of concretisation - or socialisation - of the universalism that Guru Gobind Singh conceives the idea of Khalsa, which repudiates the caste society and represents an

unified nation of people. Guru Gobind Singh identifies that the division - and the hierarchy - are the factors which work against the unity and integration of the people. The Guru renders uniform external appearance to all his followers (*the panja kakar*) to make them one. Let us remember how caste system rendered different visual appearances to different people to maintain the distinctions intact. The same with the caste appellations to the names of the people. The Guru abolished the caste surnames and called them uniformly, "Singh" and "Kaur". The social composition of the Five Beloveds (*Panj Pyare*) too evidences that the Guru stood for an organisation of the oppressed, a broad alliance of all the oppressed.

The unity and integration pondered over by Guru Gobind Singh involve at least two major strategies. The first needs a broad mobilisation of the masses from *below* and institutionalisation of this mobilization and their resistance to the unjust order. This mobilization from below went deep and broad, as much as the enemy above was strong enough to reckon with. The second strategy is associated with the abolition of the *masand* system and proclaiming that there would not be any *purohit* system in the religion of the Sikhs. This means that a concrete step has been taken by the Guru, a radical reform from above insuring Sikhism against any future dogmatism, and also against religiously awarded privileges to any particular people. Interestingly, the religiously privileged class is the first historically powerful class of rulers in Indian history. Thus, Guru Gobind Singh perceived that the conscientisation and mobilization of people from below, and abolition of the privileges of the sacred class from above, as the two basic conditions to make possible, in real terms, the ideals of unity and integration of people in Indian context.

The two strategies of Guru Gobind Singh for social unity could be compared to what in modern Indian sociology is called the process of Sanskritisation (M. N. Srinivas) which is said to be the popular methodology for social upwardisation in Indian history. The Khalsa formation and the strategies the Guru adopted were clear cases of an alternative way for a people to achieve its identity.

There is a thick coloration of humanism in the ideals and pattern of the Khalsa formation. The Khalsa formation did not leave the problems of world, and man be resolved in the symbolic - or psychological - realms, as is expected from a religious organisation. The Khalsa endows its members with enormous rights and responsibilities to meet the problems of earthly problems then and there. This is how Hari Ram Gupta, a historian of Punjab

evaluates the role of Guru Gobind Singh : “Guru Gobind Singh aimed at regenerating a decaying people. He endeavoured to create a new nation. He planned to lay the foundation of a new society based upon justice and freedom of conscience. He designed to promulgate the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.”

The Khalsa conscientises the Man and elevates him to a conscious level. It makes known the rights to which a man is entitled. The Khalsa makes the man aware of oppression to which he is exposed for ages. The Khalsa energises the human beings to honest labour and dignified living. The *Kirpan*, a Khalsa Sikh wears, renders him a tremendous power of self-dignity and self-respect.

The Khalsa organisation embodies not only a successful social alternative in Indian history, but also it exhibits immense transformative protency. The project of Guru Gobind Singh was that the march of Khalsa must sow the seeds of transformation in all Indian culture.

There are explicit but inbuilt sources of change, innovation and critical spirit in the ideals of Guru Gobind Singh and that of the Khalsa. The sword - the *Kirpan* or the double-edged dagger - is one such metaphor which stands for innovation and change and also an intensive moment of negation involved in any process of change. One cannot brush aside the primary importance given to the sword in the philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh :

*First, God Created the double-edged sword of righteousness,*

*And, then, the universe*

*Having first remembered the Sword, Meditate on Guru Nanak*

Thus, the sword represents the critical spirit, awareness, fearlessness (*nirbhai*) and finally, creatively involved in the making of the Khalsa and *sant-sipahi*.

The *nash* doctrine of *Kul Nash*, *Dharm Nash*, *Karam Nash*, etc - a Doctrine of Negations - is the moral parallel of the metaphor of Sword created by Guru Gobind Singh. They both, together, indicate that without a strong moment of Negation, the otherwise stagnated social history of a people cannot move towards a meaningful and just living.

In conclusion, we can say that Khalsa is the *agency* to which the task of social transformation has been endowed by Guru Gobind Singh, whereas the Guru Granth Sahib, the living Guru of the Sikhs, renders the general framework of *structure* in which the task is to be accomplished. It is to be noted that both the structure and agency are to function coherently to assure successful socio-cultural transformation.

CHAPTER VI  
**SIKHISM, MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY**

I

Sikhism as a religion and as a way of living was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539). Chronologically, fifteenth century is counted as belonging to the medieval age in Indian history. But the question is whether the chronological characterisation should be taken as conclusive. One observes that the Sikh religion founded in the latter half of the fifteenth century is in many respects critical of the medieval spirit and is highly responsive to many of the problems of modernity. That is simply the argument developed in this chapter.

Above all, Sikhism demands a redefinition of the concept of religion itself. Classically, religion was defined as one which deals with the supreme metaphysical reality i.e., God, and usually evaluates the mudane reality as something mayic or sinful or place of suffering. Sikhism very modestly transcends such a definition of religion. Sikhism is not only a religion of metaphysical ultimate but also is a religion of active earthly life. Sikhism successfully integrates the spiritual and temporal realms of human life. At the one end it intensifies the faith in the transcendental God. God is beyond any one of our descriptions. He always remains above all our characterisations.

All God's laudation, repeated over and again,  
comprehends not His greatness;  
He is unknowable as the ocean  
Into which streams and rivers fall.

GG5,5

On the other hand, Sikhism intensifies the idea of reality of world and meaningfulness of living. The world is the creation of God. In the world one finds the becoming of God in time. And so the world and worldly life are wonderful, and renouncing the world has no meaning.

Thou art all-holy:

All-holy is Thy Creation.

GGS, 423

says Guru Amar Das. Guru Nanak characterises the world as *dharmasala*.  
 He created night and day, seasons and occasions.  
 So also air, water, fire and the nether regions;  
 Amidst these has He fixed the earth,  
 the place for righteous action (*dharmasala*).

GGS, 7

In this way unity has been proposed and achieved by Guru Nanak between the sacred and the secular. The sacred touches the secular and penetrates it. This revised definition of religion has an all-embracing implication in Sikh thought and Sikh way of life. The Sikhs live a pious but an active life. It is this definition of religion which brings up Sikhism to the modern age.

We know that the modern age coined the ideas of democracy and egalitarianism. The very same concepts are deeply embedded in Sikh thought. The composition of Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, is the best evidence of its democratic basis. Sri Guru Granth Sahib is free of any sectarianism in religious matters. The holy scripture contains not only the hymns and songs of Sikh Gurus but also that of the Sufi saints, the Vaishnava bhaktas and some other saints of the period. This strange but democratic spirit of tolerance and respect to the view points of other religious saints is a unique phenomenon in the history of religion. No other scripture of any religion in the world includes in itself the hymns of saints of another religion. This type of humane and brotherly attitude to people of other religions is found through the entire history of Sikhism. Indeed Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, stood and fought to defend the religious symbols of the Kashmiri pandits. In modern terms it was a heroic struggle for human rights in religious matters.

The institution of Khalsa in Sikhism established by Guru Gobind Singh contains in itself a broad and popular democratic basis. Guru Gobind Singh gave primary and utmost importance to the collective voice of the Khalsa and the *sangat*. The Guru had mentioned that while the "Guru's sovereignty is of twenty measures, that of the *sangat* as the voice of the people is of overriding paramountcy, of twenty one measures". Guru Gobind Singh formulated four principal vows for a man to be incorporated into the order of Khalsa :

(1) That he will have no pride of his occupation (*kritnash*)

- (2) That he will have no pride of high birth etc. (*kulnash*)
- (3) That he will discard all superstitious and traditional beliefs in false *dharmas*, rituals etc. (*dharmnash*)
- (4) That he will discard all social customs and practices, and instead fashion his life according to the injunctions of the Guru (*ritinash-karmnash*).

A careful scrutiny of these vows would indicate that they are directed towards abolition of all privileges on the basis of caste, birth, position etc. Guru Gobind Singh laid the principles of Khalsa to make it an ideal model for just and democratic society.

The spirit of egalitarianism is very deep in Sikhism. In Indian context, egalitarianism is not merely an economic category and it should be understood in terms of social justice too. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak as an alternative to the caste-ridden, hierarchical Hindu social order. Guru Nanak introduced himself not as a Khatri, but as the lowest of the low, as a friend of poor. Many contributors to Sri Guru Granth Sahib were born in families of 'low' castes. The great Guru founded the practice of *langar*, the common dining, a gesture of equality of all castes and to feed the poor. The Tenth Guru who instituted the Khalsa recruited the first five members (Panj Pyare) of it mostly from the so called low castes.

God and justice go together in Sikh religious thought. God's ordinance, the court of God is described as just and true. Guru Nanak says :

God approves not the distinction of high and low,  
None has He made higher than others.

GGG, 53

One of the salient features of modernity is its critical spirit. In the early centuries of modern age, the critical spirit of European philosophy was directed against the religious orthodoxy. Then it broadened its space and became directed towards changing the social reality which was despotic.

Before Sikhism it was only Buddhism which, in the history of Indian thought employed the critical spirit. But the criticism is neither passive as in the case of Buddhism. The Sikh Gurus were fundamentally critical to the Brahmanic and Islamic orthodoxy, the authority of texts as Vedas and Quran. Sikhism rejects the priestly orders of both the religions.

The Sikh criticism was not limited to religious realm. Guru Nanak and other Gurus were very sensitive to the socio-political evils of their time. It is out of this social sensitivity that the ideal of *sant-sipahi* emerged. Guru Gobind Singh declared:

When all other means have proven ineffective (to secure justice)  
It is right then to take up the sword.

– Zafarnamah

The Sikh criticism of Hindu caste-system is well known. Ultimately the critical approach of Sikhism has its philosophy of unity and difference with the world. It means that the world is true, one has to associate himself with the world but the world has to be transformed according to the just ordinance (hukam) of God, not that injustice is to be tolerated. Sikhism is optimistic at its ends too so that the world can be transformed through ethical enlightenment and social action.

Sikhism is modern not only because it transcends the communalism of Indian religious history but also by its wise understanding of the inevitable problems of the modern way of living. In European history, modernism reaches its end in consequence of its over-centredness at the individual. Among the recent western philosophies existentialism pays special attention to the sufferings, anxiety, fear and desperateness of the individual. It indicates how much the cherished European ideal of individual is split and alienated at the present age. Some other thinkers of West talk of the temporariness of the episteme of 'Individual' and propose to work out fresh forms of communicative living.

It is very interesting to note here that Sikhism at its core condemns the ego-centric way of living. *haumai*, the I-ness of the individual, has been identified as the major source of evil. *Fallenness* and liberation are understood in Sikhism in terms of *haumai* and its dissolution. Sikhism proposes community living and collectivism as the alternatives to the ego-centric way of living. Guru Amar Das says :

In egoism is the world ruined, further and further declining  
GGG, 555

In the same vein, Guru Arjan says :

Those caught in egoism are verily dead;  
Those whose egoism is dead are truly alive.

GGG, 374

Meticulous care had been taken from the time of the first Guru to develop the spirit of collectivism in Sikhism. Guru ka Langar, Sangat, Pangat and finally the Khalsa are important milestones in the history of Sikhism to build up the Sikh community. In Guru Granth Sahib one can find any number of songs in which "the holy company" or "the holy congregation" (*sangat*) has been identified as the necessary condition of living a

meaningful life. The religion of Guru Nanak even gains its name “Sikh Panth” from its stress on the importance of the community of its followers—the Sikhs meaning the *sishtyas*.

It is this spirit of pious collectivism and just action that Sikhism earnestly suggests to the post-modern age.

## II

This section is about the binaries found between Religion and Modernity. The first part of the section elucidates that the binaries developed between traditional religions and the ideologies of modernity are the inevitable outcome of the metaphysical dichotomy cherished by the traditional philosophical and religious systems between transcendental and phenomenal territories of Being. Such a discussion is made in the article from the Sikh point of view, in the sense that the Sikh principle of concrete unity of *miri-piri* discards abstraction and one-sidedness found both in the traditional thought-systems and in the modernist ideologies. The later part of the section is dedicated to the evidence of some of the recent developments in theological and philosophical thinking attempting to resurrect the concept of unity of Reality, its *miri-piri* realms and consequently, confirming the privileged ideological position of Sikhism in the post-modern conditions. The paper, thus, stresses the necessity of conceptually clarifying the standpoints of Sikhism in and against traditional transcendentalism and positivist modernism. Now let us pass over to the argument.

Modernity is said to be the biggest ever challenge to Religions. The European continent, as the torchbearer of the fastest changes in science, technology, industry and social sciences, which go with the name of modernity, has first experienced the severest critique of its traditional religion, Christianity, from the point of view of the new phenomenon and the flight of people away from religion.

The first prominent wave of critique of religion was marked by two ideologies of the age of Renaissance, namely, Humanism and Naturalism. “Philosophy during the Humanist period was man-centred, emphasizing the place of man in the universe, while that during the Natural Science period was cosmos-centered. In both periods, philosophers turned their attention from theological studies of heaven, the life to come, God, the church, and supernatural things to the study of man and nature, the earthly needs of man, nature’s relationship to man, and scientific methodology.

Thus, the Renaissance thought, as the beginning of the modern period, opened up the opposition between the religion and modernist ideologies and made man-the individual as well as social-and nature the focal points of the latter. Deification of man including his body, stress on man's activities, his social nature, etc., became the basic aspects of the new world-view".

At the wake of the humanist and naturalist ideologies of Renaissance, it is necessary to ponder over the shift that occurred in the social consciousness of the period. For many centuries by then, Europe lived with the medieval Christian philosophy centered, and even over centered, on the transcendental idea of God, Christian dogmatism-celibacy, asceticism, logocentrism, doctrinaire, etc., with least interest in earthly and existential problems of man and society. The German philosopher Hegel characterises the nature of traditional European religion in the following manner: "The object of Religion is not the earthly and worldly, but the infinite...Absolute Being is the object of religious consciousness and as such, is for it prominently the 'other', a 'beyond'. Guenter Lewy, the author of *Religion and Revolution*, maintains that traditionally religions encourage the meek acceptance of earthly suffering. "Religions have often been a force upholding the *status quo*, reinforcing the stability of society and enhancing political quietism...They certainly discourage social and political protest. They encourage either meek acceptance of suffering or withdrawal from the turbulations of human society". The gross negligence of earthly life and its problems by religions was above all conditioned by the dichotomic pattern of thinking of religions. Bertrand Russel enumerates the dichotomy characterised by various forms of dualism. "There is the dualism of clergy and laity, the dualism of Latin and Teuton, the dualism of the Kingdom of God and Kingdoms of this world, the dualism of spirit and flesh. All these are exemplified in the dualism of Pope and Emperor....St. Augustine's City of God led churchmen, at the time of the fall of Western empire, to look on passively at secular disasters, while they exercised their great talents in Church discipline, theological controversy, and the spread of monasticism". B. Russel concedes that the dichotomic mentality makes "most people regard pities as 'worldly' and unworthy of any holy man".

It is not mere dichotomising the Being, but introducing essentially an evaluative moment into the dichotomised parts and excluding the one from the other as meaningless, sinful, illusion or just an appearance. Thus,

the dichotomies are not mere oppositions, but they are oppositional hierarchies, aimed at creating meaning to a part through creating meaning to the other part. As a post-modernist writer puts it, "These oppositional concepts do not co-exist on equal grounds, however, rather, one side of each binary opposition has been privileged, while the other side has been devalued. Within these oppositions, a hierarchical 'order of subordination' has been established and truth has come to be valued over error, presence has come to be valued over absence and so on".

The Renaissance thought seems to be a powerful reaction to the above said mentality of hierarchised binaries and a justified protest against the otherworldliness and passivity of the medieval world. S. Radhakrishnan maintains that the Renaissance humanism "is a legitimate protest against those forms of religion which separate the secular and sacred, divide time and eternity and break up the unity of soul and flesh". Hegel too considers the Renaissance shift of focus as the necessary result of the transcendentalism of medieval Christianity. He says, "...when the formal culture of the mind, found among the Scholastics, became transformed into the Universal, the result necessarily was that thought knew and found in itself; from this the antithesis between the finite understanding and ecclesiastical dogma or faith consequently arose". The alternative proposed by Renaissance at times looked as if the newly emerging thought forwarded a holistic approach in place of the dichotomised systems. Indeed, the Renaissance thinking was able to suggest a synthetic portrayal in certain areas of understanding, namely, the unity of micro-and macrocosms, body and soul, man and his environments, etc. However, the actual history subsequent to the Renaissance period fastly moved in a different direction. The pendulum swung towards the other extreme. The modern thought became more phenomenalist and interested in the finite. The modern age became to be self-satisfied with mechanical explanations of the world. The newly emerged sciences exceeded the limits of their subject-matter and claimed to offer a fresh philosophical perspective. The results of scientism were cruel and inhuman. "According to Newton's Physics, the universe is a senseless, purposeless attraction and repulsion, collision and rebounding of so many mindless bodies. The world is an all encompassing machine operating according to the natural laws Newton had discovered and given precise formulation. Divine Will has no place in the explanation of the motions of this many-competent machine, and, so

far as physical science is concerned, the universe is nothing but this system of moving bodies. The universe is Godless determined, and purposeless. Man, for all his pretensions, becomes no more than one more body (or aggregation of bodies) obeying Newtonian laws of motion in the same senseless, purposeless fashion as all other bodies.

Scientism in social life made the individual the fundamental unit (atom or cell) of social living. Private property, individual's freedom and rights, individual's consciousness, etc., became the watchword of the period. This inevitably led to the binarism of individual and society, now hierarchised with exclusive privileges to the former. Individualisation fragmented social life as well as estranged man from the remaining moment of Being.

Scientific approach is not devoid of dichotomies too. In place of the traditional cosmological dichotomy of phenomenal and transcendental, it has produced dichotomies in the phenomenalist realm itself. Modern history of philosophy has witnessed in this regard the antagonism of empiricism and rationalism. Hegel indicates, "Knowledge from experience stands in opposition to knowledge arising from the speculative notion, and the opposition is apprehended in so acute a manner that the knowledge proceeding from the notion (Speculative Reason - MM) is ashamed of the knowledge from experience, just as this again takes up a position of antagonism to the knowledge through the notion". Descartes revitalized the split of corporal body and thought. The cult of subject became so intense that everything including consciousness is objectified or made into the object of observation, study, exploitation and manipulation. This marked also the epistemological dichotomy of subject and object. Thus, the modern age has not overcome the binaries produced by the traditional religions of medieval period. On the other hand, it has replaced them with new and aggravated them. The remark we do not make, however, to belittle some of the achievements of Modernity - the dignity of man, the sense of equality, priority to human action, etc.

As it is well-known, Sikhism did not encounter either the cosmological dichotomy of traditional Christianity (Transcendental against Temporal) nor the phenomenalist dualism of Modernity (subject versus object) in their European context. However, the dichotomy of phenomenal and transcendental was in vogue in India too in the form of the Vedantic dualism of Brahman and Maya (*Prakriti*). This is despite the claim of Advaita that it has represented a monistic viewpoint of one Brahman

reality. Brahman, as the only reality, was achieved in Advaita through rigorous discrimination of the world, body and human action. The Advaita ideal was consequently named as *nirguna*, *nirprapancha*, *nirakara* and *niskarmya siddhi*. Such a *siddhi* was to be attained only through an equally rigorous world-negating practice, that is asceticism. The ethical and social implications of this negativist philosophy too are important for assessment. As such, the transcendent idea of Brahman is without any concern about the world due to the fact that the world and society are advised to be negated, and ethical living was replaced by a large amount of Vedic rituals, which too were highly pragmatic. In difference to the Vedantic trend, the other side of the total reality was developed by the *Tantric and Samkhya* schools of thought in the form of *prakriti Parinamavada* and *hatha yoga* practices, but this trend could pronounce its naturalistic beginnings only in a highly complicated way, in the form of symbols and mysticism. Despite the one-sidedness present in these schools, the theory of world and human action developed by them were far away from a realistic portrayal and that too was succumbed to ritualism and magic-symbolic acts. The Prakriti School was not able to produce a viable ethical and social theory. Thus the total philosophical situation in India before the advent of Sikhism was torn apart into two philosophical extremes, namely, that of Brahman and *Prakriti*, God and world. transcendental and temporal, etc.

The Sikh Gurus successfully overcame the limitations found in the traditional religio-philosophical systems of India. Sikhism consistently and consciously denies the dichotomic methodology of the above schools and relevantly synthesizes the phenomenal and transcendental realms of reality. The Sikh principle of concrete unity of *miri-piri* is a holistic concept unknown to the traditional systems. Sikhism wages a crusade against the fragmented, bipolarized and hierarchised view of reality with all awareness. It proposes a unified, singular (Ik) and dynamic reality. "Himself is He immaterial. Himself material", says Guru Arjun G.G.S., p. 1236. "The spiritual and the mundane world by Thee are propped. In all beings is pervasive the sole Lord", Guru Arjun repeats G.G.S. p. 1148. The fifth Guru asserts beyond doubt that opposite words used to denote reality are just terms to portray the One Reality.

Wherever I took,  
His sole presence I behold;

Himself in each being immanent,  
 Himself the Sun, with rays outspread,  
 Himself the hidden reality  
 Himself the visible forms.  
 Attributed and unattributed  
 are two terms devised  
 But in union one Reality formulate.

G.G.S., 387

A thorough understanding of the Sikh principle of unity of *miri-piri* involves double negation. On the one hand, it negates a raw *miri* philosophy, that is empiricism and phenomenalism. In modern context, it means the negation of consumeristic life and mere positivistic attitude of reality. On the other hand, this means also the negation of a static and abstract *piri* position. This would condemn an overcentred transcendentalism and its practical form of ascetic way of living. Sikhism explores a middle, synthetic or third way discarding the old extremes. It is not a mechanical addition of *miri* and *piri* taken separately. The principle of *miri-piri* indicates the unity of the otherwise dichotomised pairs of subject and object, culture and nature, God and world, individual and society, matter and idea, etc.

Towards the 15th-16th centuries, India had not yet witnessed the binaries of religion and modernity as it was the case in Europe. However, Sikhism did evidence modernity facing traditionalism in a specific way as the rupture between Hinduism and Islam. This point needs certain clarification. It has to be noted that Hinduism in this case stood for transcendentalism, world negation, ritualism and caste system, whereas Islam represented social activism with an overstress on political activism and intensification of individualism. The modernity-potential of Islam is to be understood not in absolute terms, but in comparison to the conservative-potential of Hinduism and Hindu society. Hinduism and Islam, once they encountered each other, polarised themselves towards their abstract ends. Thus, Hindu system became more and more transcendental and ritualistic, whereas Islam became more and more political and individualistic. The Sufi mysticism too was not devoid of the latter, although in a hidden form.

The Sikh Gurus identified the formation of this binaries and its limitations. They fought the one-sided spiritualism and earthliness found

in both Hinduism and Islam. Against the *mayavada* of Hindu orthodoxy, the Sikh Gurus asserted the reality of the world. They declared that God is holy and His creation too is holy. Similarly, against the over-attachment of rulers with material wealth and power, the Gurus did not hesitate to state the illusoriness of earthly pleasures and falseness of political pride. While Sikhism is ready to accommodate the material world as an inalienable part of reality, it makes its criticism of it as the same is given absolute and ultimate status. Against the *niskarmyavada* of Hinduism, Sikhism poses human action as the only thing which is to be counted. But, against the prevalent violence unleashed in the contemporaneous society, Sikhism speaks about human deeds dyed with ethical concern.

Sikhism has enabled itself to crisply understand the problems of modernity. The theme of eradication of alienation is a widely discussed problem in the writings of the Gurus. Alienation as *haumai* is deeply discussed in Sikhism. Man's individualism leads him to lack of rootedness in total being. Man separates himself from God and from social living, and feels non-related. Individualism has been identified as a malady both in its *miri* form (non-relatedness in society) as well as in the *piri* form (philosophical aloneness of Brahman). Sikhism provides priority to voluntary ethical commitment. This is important in the modern context of impossibility of mere bureaucratic (rational) management of society and human affairs. Sikh ethics is communicative in the sense that it is based on understanding and commitment, and on the well-being of the whole. This has to be appreciated against the rational-instrumental ethics of modernist individualism, which inevitably objectifies the other. In Sikhism, one observes a keen environmental awareness.

It celebrates the whole which includes the natural environment with which man is proposed to have familial relatedness. Sikhism in its critique of *haumai*, dehomocentrises the perception of reality. Anthropocentrism of modernist ideologies is overcome in Sikhism. Sikhism is pre-situated to modernity in discussing themes such as equality, social justice, human dignity, women's liberation, human rights, etc. Thus, in a very fundamental sense, Sikhism transcends traditionalism and modernity while absorbing the achievements of the latter. This is still more evidently confirmed when we look at some of the recent developments in theological thinking and compare them with the Sikh tenets.

We compare in this regard Sikhism with Liberation Theology, Process Theology and Zen Buddhism, which have left their impressive marks in

twentieth century life. Above all, some mention needs to be made regarding Max Weber's studies on religion. Max Weber, a twentieth century German sociologist of religion, ventures into the history of religions and indicates that the history of world religions moves from magic, ritualism and world negation to increasing rationality and this worldliness. Weber's major study is on the history of Christianity, and he shows that Protestant Christianity emerged out of the shells of traditional Catholicism with its priority to the moral making of man and critique of ascetic orthodoxy. Protestantism, according to Weber, contains in itself a type of economic ethics, which advocates a this-worldly asceticism, an ascetic spirit invested in earthly activities. He sees in Protestant ethics an entrepreneur spirit which forms the essential feature of modernity. Max Weber has also left certain remarks on Indian religions, particularly on Hinduism and Buddhism. Following Albert Schweitzer, Weber criticises them for being other-worldly and ritualistic. Otherworldliness always breeds a passive attitude to earthly problems and makes impossible and unnecessary any transformation of given social set-up. Other-worldness also discourages human resources to be mobilized for productive activities.

Weber did not visit India and we do not find any reference in Weberian writings to Sikhism. However, Weber's studies throw some light on some of the original contribution of Sikhism. Certain core features identified by Weber as the basis of modernity are found in Sikhism. Weberian approach leads to conclude that the history of religions moves towards the principle of *miri piri*.

This has happened indeed in the case of Liberation Theology, a recent development in Catholic Christianity itself. Liberation Theology as a distinct trend within Catholic Christianity emerged in post-war years in Latin America where the Christian priests took up arms against fascist dictatorships of their respective countries. Liberation Theology is an ideology of the transcendent descending on earth. It claims that Christianity can no more attend only to theological problems and scholastic discussion, and that it should come forward to respond to the existential problems of man and humanity. Theologians of Liberation see Jesus as a revolutionary who courageously fought the Jewish orthodoxy and oppressive rulers of his time. This recent trend of identifying inspiration for social change in religion is well-founded in the case of Sikh history. The struggle for social justice is an immanent feature of Sikhism all through its theory and history. The Sikh philosophical principle of *miri-piri* is

concretised in Sikh theology of liberation. The Sikh as well as Christian theology of liberation throws away the millenarian expectations and last judgement, and suggests to establish the Kingdom of God- the just order- here and now.

Process Theology, a recent trend now in Protestant Christianity too contains very interesting moments which can be compared to the achievements of Sikhism a few centuries earlier. Process Theology, represented by A.N. Whitehead, fundamentally criticises the transcendental and purely metaphysical ideas of God found in traditional religions including Christianity. A.N. Whitehead coins certain new terms in understanding the idea of God and world, such as “relatedness” or “relationality” of Being. According to Whitehead, God is always related with the world and, together with the creation and changes occurring in world, the idea of God too is to be understood as in a Dynamic Process. Whitehead asserts that God has a primordial nature as well as a consequent nature. God is temporal and non-temporal at the same time. God is immanent in world and the world is immanent in God. Time and history are the ways God actualizes Himself in real terms.

There are certainly many differing moments between Process Theology and Sikhism if we compare them in their totality. However, one cannot miss the similarities available between them. About 500 years ago, Guru Nanak described God as unity of transcendence and immanence, and the reality as the relatedness of God and world. The Guru also declared that God is a dynamic Being eternally creating and recreating. The reality of the changing world was made by the Sikh Gurus one of the cardinal principles of Sikhism.

Finally, let us have a look at some of the ideals of Zen Buddhism, now an Eastern school of thought, often attributed as the ideological source of Japanese mind pattern, entrepreneur spirit and discipline. Zen thought is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism which was famous for its formulation of middle path, excluding the extremes of asceticism and consumeristic materialism. That Mahayana did not follow the middle path in its correctness is a problem of history. However, Zen Thought inherits and revitalizes this age-old principle of Buddhism. It formulates the middle path as the unity of *nirvana* and *samsara*. This description is very much in line with the Sikh principle of *miri-piri*. Zen identifies the unity of *Nirvana* and *samsara* as a third position leaving behind. *Samsara* and *Nirvana* in their separateness. Raw *samsara* is characterized in Zen as

ego-bound and suffering and *nirvana* reached after negating *samsara* as unproductive and nihilistic. According to Zen, *nirvana* continues to have the residue of egoism—the individualistic attachment to liberation. Therefore, it proposes a third position, a return to the world enlightened. Zen suggests to achieve enlightenment in a spontaneous manner. The term used in Zen to indicate the later is *sahaj*, which is common to Sikhism and Zen. This means an enlightened mind even within the thickness of everyday life. Zen asserts that enlightenment is possible even while a man attends his war duty. Thus, Zen advocates wisdom associated with everyday earthly activities. This Zen ideal takes it closer to the Sikh concept of *miri-piri* and *sant-sipahi*.

In the above discussion, we have tried to establish the ideologically privileged position of Sikhism in comparison to traditional religious systems and to the ideologies of modern industrial society. Scholars studying Sikhism have the duty to bring out the potentialities of Sikhism in various socio-cultural situations and the implications of its principles to modern and post-modern societies.

This becomes imperative in the context of spreading apostasy among the Sikh youth. No doubts, there are various other - social, political and cultural-reasons for the phenomenon of apostasy. However, ideological non-commitment is one of the basic causes for the said problem. Ideological non-commitment among youth is often conditioned by inadequate intellectual activity of the respective culture and the shyness of the intellectuals to highlight the achievements and potentialities of the given culture. Sikhism indeed has rich achievements and plenitude of potentialities to its credit. The Sikh organisations and institutions, above all the Sikh community, must come forward to mobilize its intellectuals, support their activities of theoretical studies in order to make them wage a consistent and well founded struggle explicating and elucidating the appurtenances of Sikh philosophy. Unity of the Sikh community and Sikh intelligentia is a prerogative to achieve this end.

### III

Let us ponder over the importance and relevance of the teachings of Guru Nanak to modern life, to the youth of this country, to the students of our times. I know a bigger part of the students undergo their education in science and technology, in commerce and management studies.

The present-day life demands the most up-to-dated education of this

kind. And the humanitarian sciences are also undergoing radical changes nowadays shifting themselves to modern problems and social needs. It is understood that Indian universities, colleges and other educational institutions are coming forward to prepare our youth and students to another phase of development of our country, which goes with the name of globalization and global living. With a developed infrastructure of science and technology, with a new work ethics, and a fresh entrepreneurial spirit and a revised social policy of distribution of wealth. Indeed at the threshold of 21st century, no country can remain isolated from the global processes.

However, slavish copying of western sciences, or industrial and managerial techniques, cannot transform us into a modern nation. There needs a fundamental revolution in our ethos, mental attitude to meet the challenges of modernity. Culture and social ethos are the collective memory of the people which conditions its members to move faster, as well as to be entailed in stagnation: to have a universal vision, or to be engulfed by narrow sectarian views. Social scientists and psychologists have identified that Indian mind has an accumulated kind of inertia which works against any radical change in our social set up, and has developed a type of passivity and limitedness which makes us stop before any fast growth. These values of inertia, passivity and inaction are related with the culturally conditioned ethos, and with certain trend of our age-old traditions, religions and philosophies. Of course, this is not the whole picture of Indian culture. However, we must acknowledge that some of our religions and philosophies have imbibed in us, deep in our consciousness a type of attitude, and a temperament which pulls us back before any global and universal thinking and living.

Can one meet the challenges of global living with the ideology of renunciation and world-negation? Can one declare the earthly life as *maya*, and then work out a social ethics? Can one go for global living with the *varna*, or caste system, which we have preserved so long? Can we be globalized with our theories of untouchability? Can we programme a modern work ethos with an ideology that every action leads to bondage and suffering?

It is in this context that we have to ponder over the alternative models of living, different types of societal ethos, activist ideologies which would liberate us from some of the pacifistic ideals of our own culture. We can be sure that such alternative ways of living are available in the cultural heritage of this land, which is multifarious and varied. One has to keep

one's eyes open and, without bias and prejudice, look for those indigenous sociocultural and sociological programmes available in the cultural memory of our people.

Again, it is at this juncture that one identifies the life and teachings of Guru Nanak who teaches us and encourages us to adopt a positive type of social ethos, universal living, dynamism, human dignity and activist understanding of life.

Guru Nanak refuses the assertions that the world is *maya* and so one has to renunciate the world to reach or practice truth. He warns: don't revile this world which has been created by God and at every moment God recreates the world. Spirituality is not something which is to be achieved only on a few passive meditative moments. Spirituality is not something static and en bloc searched and reached beyond the world. It is here and now, it is you who by your dynamic and truthful living make it explicit. Guru Nanak debated with the siddha yogis, questioned them for keeping themselves beyond the boundaries of everyday life. Guru Nanak declared his philosophy of *miri-piri*, by which he united the dichotomized existences of religiosity and secularity. Life is one, it is united, religiosity is to be practised at every moment of gross earthly life.

Guru Nanak's thesis of the reality of the world as it has been created by God has many very deep implications. These implications have elaborate relevance to the problem we are discussing, namely the issue of modern global living. Guru Nanak says that the earthly life is meaningful and it is the place for righteous deeds. It means that Truth is to be sought not in any transcendental realm, but it is to be sought here and now and, even more, truth is to be lived and practiced with your total being. This standpoint brings the idea of spirituality intimately linked with every one of our earthly activity. Whether you are a student or teacher, engineer or manager, a social worker or a doctor, a businessman - whatever may be your occupation, the Great Guru teaches you a new work-ethos, a dynamic and pious attitude to the profession with which you are associated. This new work-ethics is not directed just to produce wealth for your individual consumption, but your honest labour itself as expression of your existence in earth. Labour and activity transform the conditions to which man is entailed, and labour and activity transform the man and his inner world too. Labour is no more painful, it is not suffering, neither is it a curse. Labour is not related with consumption as with its opposite. Consumption is only a physical condition for our activities which are to be dyed with

spirituality. A celebrated poet and writer of Punjab Professor Puran Singh says : "Physical labour is the only way to transcend the physical. Labour is true knowledge that resides in human limbs, it is brought out by work. Work is worship. Transcending the physical is to rise above the physical in rest, in sleep, in ecstasy, in rapture of the spiritual infinite by incessant labour. Bird and beast, man and tree in physical labour to this great end." *Spirit of the Sikhs*, Part II. Vol. I. 1993. p. 69.

I continue reading the beautiful words of Puran Singh on Guru Nanak's message: "The Guru exalts honest work and labour: he abhors indolence. There is indolence of body, there is indolence of mental life, of mere conceptions, and both are not of the true spiritual activity. Service through work is the best of thoughts - it is thought personalized. Mere thinking is impersonal. Diligent work is the worship both of man and God. Labour is the perfume of life. In the Guru's system, labour is the only right knowledge. Ecstasy that is not the fruit of labour is superstition. Sweating in hard labour is true prayer: tolling the bells and telling of beads seem to mock at the eternal truth." *Ibid.*p.69.

When I represent Guru Nanak's ideas so intensely stressing on human labour, this type of work ethics does not imply that the conception of human activity is purely anthropocentric and that it can go egoistically detrimental to its natural and social environment.

According to Guru Nanak, labour is the expression of beauty and dynamism of human being who is part and parcel of the beauty and dynamism of nature, society and the total existence. One part should not act in detrimental to the other parts. For example, nature is not a raw-material which can be exploited irresponsibly by human labour.

We find in Guru Nanak a deep awareness of the environment, an eco-philosophy in which nature has been portrayed as the kith and kin of man. Guru Nanak says:

The air is the Guru ;  
 Water our father ;  
 And the great earth our mother ;  
 Days and nights are our two nurses-  
 male and female  
 Who set the whole world playing.

G.G.S.,8

Guru Nanak expounds here a familial relation with the natural environment of human labour. Consequently, nature should not be

exploited in the egoistic interest of mankind, but preserved in a harmonious life cycle.

#### IV

It is appropriate to start with identifying Sri Guru Nanak Dev as the founder and propagator of the Bhakti devotionalism in this part of the country. One is overwhelmed by the intensity of devotionalism and poetic genius found in the hymns of Guru Nanak Dev. As a man hailing from Tamilnadu, one of the lands of the origination of the Bhakti thought, I may be permitted to enter into the debate about the distinguishing mark of the type of devotionalism present in Guru Nanak Dev. Devotionalism in India during the medieval period had at least two major forms, namely the Puranic devotionalism represented by the north Indian Vaisnavism on the one hand and the emotional poetic form of devotionalism available in the south India, mainly Tamil Bhakti movement on the other hand. In a sense, the north Indian one was very much mythically prosaic and narrative from the point of view of the Tamil Bhakti, whereas the latter was personally expressive and poignant. Musical spontaneity was one of the very attributive aspects of the south Indian Bhakti form of manifestation. It was simple, democratic and lucid in its expression. From this point of view, one finds the type of devotionalism initiated by Sri Guru Nanak Dev very much characteristic of south India. In very unambiguous terms Guru Nanak Dev repudiates the Puranic form of perceiving and worshipping God. On the other hand the structure of Sri Guru Granth Sahib with its thirty one sections of thirty one ragas is of unique type in the history of Bhakti literature of the world. I have to add a little more. When the Tamil Bhakti saints were composing their wonderful songs, the Puranic way of thinking was not the dominating one in their environment. The case of Sri Guru Nanak Dev was different. When the Guru appeared on the map of Indian devotional culture in this part of the country, the mythological-Puranic pattern of thought was enough overriding in the popular mentality of the people. Consequently, Guru Nanak had to resist such an attitude and had to travel against the tide. The Guru had to assert the spontaneity and musicality of Bhakti afresh and consciously against the Puranic one.

We find in Guru Nanak Dev a puritan form of Bhakti. Guru Nanak had to talk about the true form of Bhakti. One is astonished to find the vogue usage of the term truth (*sach* or *sacha*) in so many contexts by Guru Nanak Dev. The Guru was not living in a society where there was lack of Bhakti or

its multifarious esoteric forms of worship. On the other hand, the Guru had met with abundant forms of worship, from which he had to distinguish the simple and the truest form. This is particularly important in the late-medieval context that is characterized by the institutionalization of Bhakti, not only in north India but also in the south. By that historical period, nothing democratic of Bhakti remained and the devotees—common people were thoroughly ruled by the maths and the caste system advocated by them. Thus Guru Nanak Dev had to resist the intensive ritual, institutional and sociological burden of medieval Bhakti and to freshly propose the simple, spontaneous and emotional devotionism.

Guru Nanak represented a devotionism permeated by ethical concerns. Usually ethics is not the realm of popular masses. Often ethical questions are addressed by a few intellectuals or aristocratically oriented selected few. The Siddhas in some parts of the country cared about inner purity and humanistic ethics. Brahmanic Hinduism almost never addressed ethics in its humanistic and universal form. We have to add that the Bhakti movement too was not so much directly interested in ethical problems. Bhakti had a tendency to be unmindful of ethical concerns if one is thoroughly involved in God. The interesting part of Guru Nanak Dev was that the Guru equated Bhakti and ethical purity. Ethically pure act is in all senses one with the form of devotion for Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak very earnestly throws away the traditional idiom of impurity of body and prefers to insist upon the mental purity. At one place, Guru Nanak says that the body is only the paper on which the mind writes its intentions. Consequently, it is the mind that makes the body good or bad. Possibly, only in Guru Nanak devotionism and ethical priority so exceptionally integrate into one. I remember Sardar Kapur Singh, the learned scholar of Sikhism of yesteryears maintaining that in Sikh religiosity ethics acquires an absolute status. When religiosity and ethical concerns unite, there arises a rigorous demand to make ethics a mass phenomenon. It is in all history a new phenomenon, almost an impossible task. But this happened in Sikhism, the most difficult task set by the Guru to his Sikhs, a simple, spontaneous and emotional devotion thoroughly penetrated by universal ethicalism.

Sikhism with its priority to ethical questions, particularly with its commitment to universal and humanistic ethics thickly steps into the post-Bhakti realm. Ethicality in Sikhism gets deepened and broadened to become, to work out a social philosophy of a different type. One must agree that

Bhakti as such classically did not have enough sociological input. If at all it had, it inevitably slipped into the caste form of sociality only. The caste form of sociality is only a type of non-sociality<sup>3</sup>. This we particularly meet in the matured form of Bhakti when it got institutionalized into temple and math culture. The Brahmanic varna system which was centering upon the yajnas in ancient India, later got adopted to infuse mass all-pervasive casteism now centering upon the temple culture. Sikhism played a different note when it rebelled against the temple-math-ritual complex. In this respect, Sikhism is a massive entry into post-medievalism. Let us remind here the findings of Max Weber, the famous sociologist of religion who mentions about ethical and social rationality rebelling against ritualism in the history of religions. Philosophically this had got registered in the Sikh conception of *miri-Peri* declared by the Sixth Guru, Guru Har Gobind, where the spiritual and the temporal interests of the people were unified into the grand ontological principle. The principle of *miri-Peri* with all its ramifications was a revolution in Indian metaphysics and not only Indian, it is also a principle of social justice and social action. It is true religiosity dyed with social and humanistic concerns and purposeful action for such concerns. The Guru dares to question the Master while the weak are molested by the powerful. The Guru had a great heart when he felt pain for the oppressed and the downtrodden.

In Indian context, the theme of social justice is invariably bound up with the question of caste and the religious and ideological structures sustaining it. No metaphysics or religion can elude this problem however pretending they may be. Guru Nanak Dev had the greatest moral courage to address this reality and occupy a clear cut partisan stand in favour of the subaltern masses of this land. The Guru refused to wear the sacred thread, discarded it to become a twice-born, thus preferred to remain the lowest of the low. The term lowest of the low, often one meets in Guru Granth Sahib is not just a statement of religious humility but also an assertion of social protest. Guru Gobind Singh institutionalized this principle while creating the Khalsa on the Vaisakhi day of 1699 by abolishing the caste titles of the Sikhs (*nash* Doctrine). First time in the history of Indian culture, there appears a religion that recognizes the concept of society as a reality and proposes the principles of justice and love for a communitarian living.

The idea of post-medievalism found in Sikhism suggests us also to discuss about the theme of the type of renaissance or enlightenment India

had when it was entering into the historical period of modernity. Let us raise the question; what was the nature of Indian enlightenment? When did it start? What were its basic features? Is it all right that it started only after the English landed in India?

Paulos Gregorius, the former Arch-Bishop of Delhi debates this problem in his work *Enlightenment : Eastern and Western* and informs us that the Indian Enlightenment was different from the Western one in so many ways. Discarding the typically Western conception of linear form of history, he maintains the view that Indian enlightenment was alive and active in all stages of Indian history from the ancient to the recent. He brings to focus the philosophical and ideological opposition exerted by Buddhism to the Brahmanic way of thought and living in ancient India. In terms of philosophical, ethical and social input, Buddhism was the initiator of Indian enlightenment in Indian history, according to Paulos Gregorius. We continue this discussion to its logical end. Enlightenment in Indian history has to be identified in terms of its variation from the Brahmanic system in philosophy, ethics and social philosophy. It has to be recognized from its protest, from the intensity of protest it poses to the Vedic authority, including its categorical rejection of the *varna*-caste system proposed and defended by the Vedic, Sastric and puranic ways of thinking and living. Enlightenment in Indian history has to be understood also in terms of its repudiation of the linguistic and cultural hegemony of Sanskrit and assertion of regional, linguistic and non-Brahmanic identities. Samkhya and Vaishesika philosophies, Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India, a few regional versions of Bhakti, and finally Sikhism in medieval and late-medieval period were representing the enlightened thought of India in varying degrees. It has to be noted that the Sikh enlightenment thought was social democratic in content and stood for a non-totalitarian pluralistic culture and egalitarian living. The Sikh Gurus sensitized the spiritual seekings of the best minds to the social environment as well as made the temporal life to be spiritually meaningful. The theme of spiritual liberation was liberated from its individualistic shell and was thoroughly socialized. The very old theme of action (deed) as Karma was freed from the casteist, ritualistic and other worldly connotations and given specified socio-ethical meaning. The Vedantic problematic of *maya* and *avidya* is renounced and in place of it, the themes of truthful living and fearlessness are projected.

The journey of Sikhism into the subject of inter-religious spirituality

too is astounding. In a sense the entire life and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev could be seen as the greatest experiment in inter-religious relations. As we know, Guru Nanak lived during the most intensive and sensitive period of inter-religious tensions in Indian history and Punjab was the battleground of the thickest meetings of Hinduism and Islam. No other land or people in India had so exhaustive experience in multi-religious living as the Punjabis and later the Sikhs. The birth of Sikhism is a grand response to the inter-religious reality of this region and in the process Sikhism has developed a unique form of inter-religious spirituality that is unknown to any other religion in the world. The life of Guru Nanak evidences endless meetings with so many saints and fakirs of various religious denominations. The Guru's *udasi yatrās* were willful attempts of the Guru to reach the different ways of religious faiths and living. The option of the Gurus to revere the religious genius of Baba Farid, Kabir and Sheikh Bhikhan on the one hand and to venerate the piety of Ravidas, Ramanand, Namdev and Jai Dev on the other does not have a parallel in the history of religions. The tradition says that the first revelation of the Guru was on the inter-religious theme to announce that there was no Hindu and there was no Musalman. All the Gurus have left their remarkable contribution to inter-religious amity and search of true religiosity. The Gurus were trying to transcend the parochial limitations of every religion and to reach out the realm of trans-religious spirituality. Guru Nanak Dev vocally asserts the very simple truth that God must be *adharami*, non-religious or beyond religions, thus challenging the monopoly claim of every religion that it only had realized God. Many scholars had indicated the fact that the Gurus had used equally both Hindu and Islamic nomenclatures to describe the nameless and formless God. It has to be also pointed out that the Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the world that bestows equally holy status on the linguistic groups of Sanskrit and Arabic. Without any discrimination, the Gurus use the linguistic idioms of both Hinduism and Islam, thus discarding any bias to anyone of these religions.

Guru Nanak's acceptance of the idioms of both Hinduism and Islam does not mean that the Guru was assimilating them uncritically. After all, one must remember the fact that Sikhism has a very strong critical spirit and it does not agree upon anything without weighing its merits. And Sikhism may not agree upon the popular definition that secularism is respecting all religions. Sikhism would say that it is a very passive definition

of secularism. On the other hand Guru Nanak in a very fundamental way looks into the contents of each and every creed and practice and leaves his rigorous evaluation on them. Guru Nanak's critical spirit gets expressed unequivocally at least in two points that have actual relevance in the prevailing international and Indian situations today. Guru Nanak Dev is categorically critical towards religions serving political dominance and social dominance.

Let us clarify these two points on the significance of Sikhism. As a religious thought hailing in Indian context, Sikhism identified that the basic social problem here is the problem of social inequality constructed and nurtured by the dominant religions of this country. Some of the holy scriptures gave religious sanction to the birth of the varna-caste order and it was justified and canonized through so many other religious literatures. The religious institutions too stood in defence of such order and systematically punished those who went against it. Thus it happened so that most of the Hindu religious literature is the one to unify the broadest spectrum of people and communicate to all of them on equal footing the message of God. On the other hand, here religion was understood as isolating and hierarchising the people, infusing in them an attitude of seclusion, hatred, suspicion and immanent feelings of superiority and inferiority. Hindu religion was more particular to create and safeguard the barriers among its groupings than to create communication among them. This was done in place of brotherhood and communion. Are we going to call it a religion or an anti-religion? This is a very ticklish problem in Indian context. Guru Nanak encountered this problem and he created a religion blending the four varnas into one, as Bhai Gurdas states. This critical spirit has been enshrined consistently in Sikhism from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh and it has culminated in a most wonderful way in the *nash* Doctrine (the negation) and in the creation of the Khalsa. In more general words, the critical moral fiber of Sikhism is directed against religions serving the function of social dominance.

Another critical bearing of Sikhism is unflinching resistance to religion serving political dominance. Sikhism had very painful experiences with the later rulers of the Moghul empire and it opted to fight it out. This experience had turned Sikhism to assume a critical approach to any form of political dominance, particularly political leadership mobilizing the public support in the name of religion for its coercive interests. Guru Nanak Dev was as well against religious debates turning into conflicts of civilizations.

Sikhism is against crusades or *jihads* when they are aimed at political hegemony and totalitarianism in global politics as well as in national politics. On the other hand, Sikhism is not shy of politics when it is grounded upon justice. It is this subaltern religiosity that makes Sikhism ever alive in history.

## V

The theme of classless social order is largely a Marxist concept. Although the terms such as class and classless society were in vogue in the pre-Marxian political economic works, the terms became rigorous concepts in the Marxian theory. An entire corpus of concepts and a systematic theory emerged out of the Marxist concepts of class and class struggle. No sociologist can ignore the contribution of the Marxist theory of classes to social and historical studies.

Equally, one cannot shun the fact that the Marxian theory was overwhelmingly Eurospecific and capitalism-specific. A large amount of Marx's writing is dedicated to the analysis of European capitalist economic structure. Present-day Marxists indicate the shortcomings of the Marxian theory of classes. Anthony Giddens brings to focus at least two forms of reductionism involved in the Marxist theory. First, he (Anthony Giddens) insists that only in capitalism can class be viewed as the central structural principle of the society as a whole. Therefore, in general, class structure provides an inadequate basis for specifying the differences between social forms. Second, he argues that societies are characterized by multiple forms of domination and exploitation which cannot be reduced to a single principle, class.

The post-modern critique of Marxism makes the case more intensive in that it accuses the latter with two modernist prejudices, (1) essentialism or transcendentalism and (2) historicism. The post-modernists indicate that reducing the multiple forms of domination and exploitation to the one - economic, involves essentialism or transcendentalism of non-religious type. They also maintain that historicism presupposes a unilinear pattern of consistently progressive course of history. Consequently, the post-modernists suggest to discard the economic essentialism and the 'progress - development' paradigm of the Marxist school.

Postmodernism does not stop with the critique of sociological theories but it identifies the sources of oppression and exploitation in the entire metaphysical tradition of the West. It develops the Heideggerean theme

of a theological bias as characteristic of the Western philosophy in all its various dimensions. Once the logocentric and essentialist foundations of Western culture are kept under suspension, post-modernism becomes capable of seeing the episodes of oppression in every microform of human existence. Linguistic acts, gestures, space distribution, behavioural patterns and every other form of human living gain utmost significance in identifying and eradicating oppression and exploitation.

Thus in place of the reductionist one (such as the economic one), we acquire a wide and comprehensive framework in which the multiple forms of oppression and exploitation become deeply recognised. The latter one also gives adequate space for indigenous forms of understanding and resistance to oppression.

It is in such a broad framework that, interestingly, one locates the Sikh thought. An appreciation of Sikhism as the religion of Third Millennium, above all, thus involves its holistic and comprehensive framework in which it situates the entire gamut of the oppressive forms without giving priority or essentiality to any one of them. The present section deals with the above problematics.

Many scholars of Sikhism start their appreciation of the relevance of Sikhism from the principle of *miri-piri*, that is, the unity of spirituality and temporality. This is how James Massey enunciates the unity: "Guru Nanak's basic concern in life was the human need, which he expressed at the beginning of his most important work, *Japu*, in the form of a question "How can one be true, how can the veil of false illusion be torn?" This was the concern with which Nanak was engaged in all his hymns; and it was in the course of dealing with this concern that all his thoughts, including those on *Ik Oamkaru* or the Ultimate Reality took form". Here the Sikh concern of social or human existence finds its inalienable place in the Sikh experience of Ultimate Reality itself. Dharam Singh visualises the same in the following manner: "The Social phenomenon is considered (in Sikhism) an inseparable aspect of the spiritual continuum.....Sikhism attempts at the spiritualisation of the social on the one hand, and socialisation of the spiritual on the other". The holistic philosophical input of Sikhism is that it criticises the dichotomy of spirituality and temporality not only for religious reason but also for social reasons. Both the realms go together. Human interests on both operate inseparably.

It is necessary here to indicate how the principle of *miri-piri* is related with the classless social order, with which we started discussion. The

dichotomy of the spirit and the object is, in a sense, a reflection or registration or articulation of the class-divide that occurred in human history. Non-communication of the spirit and body is another expression of the non-communication that occurred between the social divides, for example, between the touchable and untouchable communities in Indian context. By isolating the spirit from the world and by making it to be in itself man 'despiritualises' the society and thus makes it a mere object. An object here means a raw material, an instruments, a thing which could be possessed, manipulated, exploited and oppressed. We mean that by despiritualising 'the world, we make a part of the human beings available for exploitation and oppression. Despiritualisation or objectification, thus, forms the philosophical or cultural justification for oppression, exploitation and hierarchy. Dichotomy of the spirit and body is the starting point of hatred, alienation and master-slave relationship.

Talking in terms of the Western tradition, Alasdair MacIntyre says: "The division of human life into the sacred and secular is one that comes naturally to Western thought. It is a division which at one and the same time bears the marks of Christian origin and witnesses to the death of a properly religious culture. Only a religion which is a way of living in every sphere either deserves to - or can hope to - survive. For the task of religion is to help see the secular as the sacred, the world as under God. To divide the sacred from the secular is to recognise God's action only within the narrowest limits. A religion which recognises such a division is one on the point of dying."

On the other hand, the Sikh principle of the unity of *miri-piri* is a grand return to the philosophical holism which simultaneously means the vision of a social order devoid of oppression, dominance, exploitation and hierarchy.

The Sikh critique of the dichotomy of spiritual and temporal, the body and the soul, the transcendent and immanent opens up two major "post-modern horizons: The first horizon is the post-metaphysical, and the second is ethical, a new ethics, an ethics of ethics, an analysis of love,..... the concern with the other."

The second horizon, that is the ethical one, is significant because without it a raw and uncritical unity of whatever called *religious* and whatever *earhly* might get their justification. Otherwise put, the pseudo-religious and the pseudo-temporal must be discriminated and discarded as unreal. The Gurus distinctly enumerate in their hymns both the pseudo-

religious and the pseudo-temporal. The asceticism of the Nath Yogis, or the Jains, the corpus of literature which goes with the name *Vedas* and *Puranas*, or the casteism and ritualism advocated by them, are rejected as unreal. Similarly, the wealth and luxury of the rich and the kings, the political oppression exercised by the rulers are, again, evaluated as unreal. The falsity or inauthenticity of such things both in the religious and temporal realms is often named as out of *haumai*, sometimes as *maya*. The ethical in Sikhism serves as the yardstick to measure how real is the reality in its unified form of spirituality and temporality. Sirdar Kapur Singh formulates the priority of ethics in Sikhism in the following words. "Sikhism raises ethical conduct to a higher, and more independent, absolute status and makes it the true expression of the harmony of human personality with the will of God."

As such, we can summarize that the unity of spirituality and temporality opens up at least three great realms of Sikh dialectics. They are (1) the ethical realm where the ethical conduct acquires independent and absolute status, (2) the pragmatic realm in which Sikh ethics achieves a social dimension; thus the struggle for social justice becomes one of the essential aspects of Sikh living, and (3) the aesthetic realm where the reality of God as well as the world is seen as wonder and beauty (*wismad, wahiguru*).

Formulating thus the philosophical foundation of Sikhism for its social vision, now we can safely pass over to the various means by which the Sikh Gurus aimed to realise their vision.

As it has been mentioned in the first part of the present chapter, the Sikh Gurus do not reduce the sources of inequality and oppression to the economic one. They prefer a broader and comprehensive framework in which the multiple forms of inequality and hierarchy exhibit themselves.

The Sikh programme of a new social order, probably, starts with the Gurus' criticism of the caste order specific to Hindu India. Each and every defensive strategy of the caste system finds vehement criticism by the Sikh Gurus. The saints from the Islamic and depressed communities acquire the status of co-authors of Sikh tradition. The sacredness of the *Vedas* and *Puranas* is challenged. The *Guru Granth Sahib* emerges as the alternative scripture in Sikh history. Along with that the authority of Sanskrit language is questioned. The Sikh Gurus freely use the Persian and Arabian terms and metaphors to express their spiritual experience. The food taboos established by the Brahmanic orthodoxy are dethroned by the new order of *langar* and *pangat*.

The Tenth Guru radicalises the initial spirit of Sikhism in so many obvious ways. The establishment of Khalsa order witnesses the above. The uniformal external appearance of Sikhs, adorned with the five 'k's, and the common naming of the Sikhs into Singh and Kaur are meant to abolish the caste distinctions of the Sikhs in unequivocal manner. Guru Gobind Singh *conscientised* the people and *weponised* them for relentless struggles against tyranny and oppression. The passivity, social inertia and slave mentality of the people about which the German philosopher Nietzsche later wrote, were abolished and an entirely new value of fearlessness was invested in the minds of the oppressed people. The theme of fearlessness (*nirbhai*) operates in Sikhism in the existential plane, as well as it transforms the traditional theme of abolition of *avidya* (ignorance) into the more fundamental theme of elimination of fear. An alternative communitarian value of love was awarded to the people. An ever-living attitude of optimism and cheerfulness (*Chardi Kala*) was made part of the Sikh character.

Niharranjan Ray focuses on the significance of the values of dignity of labour and a negative attitude towards begging that have been developed in the Sikh culture. "The Sikh Gurus had, from the outset, the vision of a different kind of society, different from what they had known hithertofore, and different from what they saw before their eyes. It was the vision of a society in which no one should be obliged to beg for one's barest needs and in which one must do some amount of manual labour".<sup>8</sup> *Langar* and the concept of *sewa* complement the above arrangement. Allievation of poverty and achievement of earthly success by just means become a cardinal value of Sikhism. The theme of *sewa* as a social commitment reaches its intensive practical form in the Sikh anthropology of *sant-sipahi*. Sikhism discards the earlier Indian ideals of man; *sanyasin* and mere *grahasta*. The symbolism of sword, along with the *nash* doctrine, means uncompromising negation of accumulated and crystallised forms of oppression, inertia and exploitation. The history of Sikhism clearly evidences that there is an anti-establishment spirit in the Sikhs all along in their history, whether it is the Moghul establishment, the British, the caste-system or the totalitarian Hindu-Indian.

The quoted author indicates how, besides being merely humanitarian in attitude, the Sikh values are directed towards a new kind of consideration of the ordinary people and that too in a social sense.<sup>9</sup> The abolition of *masand* system was yet another revolutionary act of the Tenth Guru as it

was aimed to avert the emergence of priestly class in the folds of Sikhism.

Thus the Guru's vision of an egalitarian and non-oppressive communitarian way of living does not aim at analysing and discovering any essentialist single cause for oppression and exploitation. On the other hand, it aims at the abolition of oppression at the micro and macro levels, in the linguistic and behavioural discourses. It represents a fundamental transformation in and out, in the individual as well as in the collective, in the spiritual and in the temporal. Thus Sikhism provides a conscientecus model, more a methodology and a non-essentialist paradigm of a classless social order which can withstand the needs of the Third Millennium.

## CHAPTER VII

### SIKHISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY

#### I

Sikhism emerged as a distinct religion in a religiously pluralistic situation existing in late-medieval India. At the macro-level, it was Hinduism and Islam which represented themselves as the varying religions of the time. As a micro-level, *saguna* and *nirguna* Vaisnava Bhakti, the Nath Sampradaya, the Sufi tradition of Islam, the Siddhas of Tantric Buddhism, Kabir-panthi and many more formed the religio-cultural multiplicity of late medieval India. Sikhism is a positive response to this situation. The thought of Guru Nanak is an indigenous result of a grand religious dialogue. The life of Guru Nanak is full of religious seeking, wanderings (*udasis*) over the entire length and breadth of India and not only India. The great Guru visited Multan, Pakpattan, Hardwar, Kurukshetra, Kashmir, Rameshwaram, Baghdad and Tibet and there are some suggestive references that Guru Nanak visited Madurai and Palani. In all these places Guru Nanak not only provoked serious discussions with religious scholars of varying types but he has even recorded some of his dialogues and comments. One of the Tamil Siddhas, Poorananandha claims that he had got his inspiration and esoteric knowledge from the disciples of Guru Nanak. I repeat, Sikhism is an indigenous product of a grand religious dialogue and of the genius of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus.

The Sikh Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, is unique in its composition. The compilation of the work was organised by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev and the final edition was done by Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru. Whom do you think as the authors of Guru Granth Sahib?

The Guru Granth Sahib contains the hymns and verses of thirty six saints, of which only six are the Sikh Gurus. The remaining thirty authors of the holy scripture of Sikhism are non-Sikhs. Jaidev belonged to Bengal Vaisnavism of Krishna worship. Namdev and Trilochan were of Maharastrian Krishnite movement. Sheikh Farid and Bhikhan were Muslim

Sufi fakirs. Ramanand and Ravidas hailed from Uttaradesh and they were radical Vaisnavite Bhaktas. Kabir was a Muslim weaver and the one who is known for his revolutionary ideas. To Kabir scholars of today, Guru Granth Sahib becomes one of the primary source books. There are 534 hymns songs of Kabir recorded in Guru Granth Sahib. Eleven more bards of Punjabi Vaisnavism too find a reverent place in the Sikh scripture.

It must be mentioned here that two Sikh Gurus Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahadur were put to death by the Delhi rulers. But for that reason Guru Gobind Singh, the final editor of Guru Granth Sahib did not opt to edit away the songs of Farid, Bhikan or Kabir from the Sikh scripture. The same can be said regarding the other side too. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the Hindu Rajas of Himachal and Brahmin orthodoxy of North-west India developed a lot of hatred towards Sikhism. Again neither for that reason, the Sikh Gurus opted to omit the songs of Hindu saints from Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh Gurus were supremely honest and magnanimous that they were true to their First Guru and equally true to the spirit of religious tolerance. In each and every Gurdwara all over the world, the scripture which contains the hymns and songs of Sikh Gurus together with that of Bhagats and saints is respected as the revelation of God. One cannot be a Sikh if one affords to disown Ravidas, Narnamdev, Kabir and Jaidev on the one hand and Sheikh Farid, Sheikh Bhikan on the other, because they are all integral part of the Sikh Scripture."

Sikhism as a positive response to the religiously pluralistic situation existing at the time of its making has registered the spirit of tolerance and dialogism in its theological concepts themselves. The Sikh concepts of God, Naam, Haumai and other concepts pronounce the dialogic spirit proposed by the Sikh Gurus.

First, the Sikh concept of God: There is a particular definition of the concept of God in Guru Granth Sahib which needs special attention here. This particular definition says that God cannot be comprehended by human mind, that His greatness cannot be defined. I quote from Granth Sahib:

His infinity no one may measure or state

.... ....

All God's laudation, repeated over and over again,

Comprehends not His greatness

He is unknowable as the ocean

Into which streams and rivers fall,

Yet know not its extent.

.... .... .... .... ....

Many yearn His extent to know,

Yet it even eludes them.

GGS, 5

The *Japu* of Guru Gobind Singh expresses again the same idea: "By human mind He cannot be comprehended even though it cogitated a hundred thousand times." This quite simple definition regarding the indefinability of God has found elaborated in many more words throughout the Sikh scripture. In this seemingly negative definition of the idea of God is contain a very positive attitude of Sikhism to various other religions. The idea is that if God cannot be comprehended by any particular attempt, it means that no particular religion, or individual or anyone scripture can claim monopoly over God. This forms the theological ground for unity acceptable by every religion.

Another concept which prepares the ground for religious dialogue in Sikh perspective is the concept of *Nam*. Sikhism gives central importance to *nam simran* which can be translated as devotion to the name of God or meditating the name of God. The concept is so central that often Sikhism is identified as a Naam Marga. The concept of *nam* is of very rich content in Sikhism. It has at least two dimensions: First, it is the manifested being of the Transcendent God. In this sense it is the dynamism and creativity of God. It is this dynamism and creativity which created the universe and sustains it. The second dimension is that forms the point of view of the devotee. *nam* is the name of God. Consequently, the devotee is expected to devote himself to the Name of God, remember it and mediate on it.

However, the question still remains unanswered: What is the name of God? The Sikh Gurus reply that there is no Name of God. He is the nameless. Otherwise put, it can be any name of God who is Nameless. Consequently, *nam simran* means spontaneous and voluntary devotion to the Name of God who is the Nameless. How can one devote himself to a Nameless Name? It is here, one identifies the space for dialogism and unity of religions in Sikhism. The idea here is that Sikhism does not stress the particular Name of God, but its stress is on devotion itself. Particularism and sectarianism are transcended here and a pristine devotion is proposed. It is at this juncture that the Sikh scripture says: "Through whatever the road a man takes or the mode of worship he adopts to achieve nearness to God, verily receives him and accepts him."

Deconstruction of ego or haumai is another conceptual ground for religious dialogue in Sikhism. Haumai is appropriately translated by Sikh scholars as I-am-ness, self contredness or individualism of man. It has been identified as the greatest malady of mankind. Haumai is characterised as a curtain or a wall which stands in between man and God, man and man.

Within us abides the Inexpressible;

Yet he is Inaccessible;

In between is spread the curtain of egoism (*haumai*).

GGs, 205

In Sikhism, *haumai* is attachment of man with worldly possessions, status, power and birth. In our present context, *haumai* is also the religious pride, attachment to religious particularism, exclusiveness, sectarianism, attachment to rites and rituals of one's own religion, etc. In so many words religious pride has been condemned in Sikhism.

Kazis, Sheikhs and mendicants of numerous garbs arrogating greatness to themselves, in torment of egoism are caught, says Guru Nanak. "Ego-prompted man from pride engages in ritual acts, mentions Guru Amar Das, Consequently, to get liberated from *haumai*, one has to deconstruct his egoistic religious pride.

Religious ritualism is replaced by an alive humanistic ethics in Sikhism. Possibly, the Sikh Gurus considered that religious dialogue and unity of religions could not be achieved at the level of rituals and rites. And instead ethics can serve such a purpose. Sardar Kapur Singh rightly points out the importance given to ethics in Sikhism. "Sikhism raises ethical conduct to a higher and more independent, absolute status and makes it as the true expression of the harmony of human personality with the will of God." The Sikh Gurus were very sensitive to the ethical degradation of religious leaders to their time and this became one of the reasons for the emergence of Sikhism.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, has left many sharp criticisms addressed to the ethical fallenness of religious leaders :

The Quadi speaks falsehood and eats filth.

The Brahmin, guilty of much cruelty,  
makes a show of ritual bathing.

The yogi, blind and misguided,  
knows not the true practice.

All three are at one in bringing ruin to the people.

GGs, 662

Guru Nanak in another of his compositions proposes to meet a Muslim or a Hindu at an ethical plane :

Nanak maketh this emphatic declaration,  
 Let all men ponder over it:  
 Ethical conduct is the only foundation of  
 human life on earth.

Again, he says in the *Japuji* :

Make contentment the earrings:  
 Modesty thy begging bowl and pouch ;  
 Contemplation thy ashes.

.... ....

Make enlightenment thy diet;  
 compassion the dispenser:  
 Let Divine music resound in each heart.

GG5,6

The Sikh Gurus did not propose anybody to quit his own religion, but suggested only "deeper penetration of one's own religion in thought, devotion and action. In the depth of every religion there is a point at which religion itself loses its importance and it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom."

Metaphysical exclusivism in doctrine and asceticism in way of life are general patterns of most of the traditional religions. History of religions evidences that most of the world religions centre themselves too much in the metaphysical territory. They over engage themselves there and loose sight of earthly life. This phenomenon goes in the history of religions as logocentrism. Logocentrism develops a score of non-dialogism with earth and earthly problems. Ultimately most of the religions have become dichotomous. An uncrossable barrier is built between sacred and profane, between spirituality and mundaneness.

The prime victims of this over engagement with metaphysics are ethics, social justice and dialogue with the other. A religion which is over engaged with its own metaphysical territory becomes so self-satisfied and self-authentic and it cannot start a dialogue with the neighbouring religion. Attributing overauthenticity to one's own religious experience makes it refuse recognition even to the existence of a neighbouring religion.

Sikhism is a different type of religion. It is not a religion of pure metaphysics. It is not a religion of ascetics or asceticism. Even its inspiration

is not from the ascetic end. The Sikh Gurus have left sharp criticism addressed to the ascetics who beg for food without any earnings for themselves. The Sikh Gurus opened their religion for justice in earthly life. The Sikh ideal is expressed by concepts such as *miri piri*, *sant-sipahi*. They mean the unity of spiritual and seoular, metaphysical and physical, spirit and matter, phenomenon and noumenon. In the words of Sardar Kapur Singh, "there is no essential duality between the spirit and matter...They are not antagonistic to or dissevered from each other, the one subtle, the other gross, but that they are simply and just dissimilated, and that the core of the human nature which is self-conscious, and the physical nature, are accountable ultimately in terms of 'the subtle'....A true comprehension.....removes the basic duality between spirit and matter. The subtle and gross are in fact identical."

Sikhism has a unique synthetic spirit, synthesis of God and the world, God and creation of God. Sikhism proposes a synthetic, whole life philosophy. The world and its problems are harmoniously united with God. It is this same synthetic spirit which leads it to the ideal of social justice. The Sikh Gurus included the concept of social justice into the core thought of Sikhism. God and justice go together in Sikhism. The Sikh Gurus consciously waged a long crusade against the caste system of India.

It is this synthetic spirit of Sikhism which opens up enormous possibilities for real and meaningful dialogue.

## II

The present world situation has suddenly become the most complicated, especially in terms of inter-religious relations. The leaders of the world have started talking about civilizational conflicts, *jihads* and crusades accompanying war and destruction of human lives. Beyond the pale of war, there are hate crimes and curtailing of civil liberties and human rights. Religious feelings of the common people are massively manipulated for political designs. We are afraid that the predictions of Samuel Huntington have turned true. The people of the world are terror-stricken and want to end this situation at the earliest. The world religions have a special responsibility towards this end. One of the ways of encountering the situation is to probe into similar experiences in the past and learn from them. We are not sure whether humankind has the capacity to learn from

the past. However, it is our bound duty that we entertain such an exercise.

The Punjab of Guru Nanak was the land of the most intensive interactions between different religious communities. In a sense, Punjab was the place where the Hindustan and the Arabio-Persian continent geographically and historically came into convergence. In addition to this, there were the Turks, Afghans and the central Asians concocting with the Indians. Punjab was situated on the war routes of the various campaigns conducted during the entire medieval period. As well as Punjab was also on the trade routes leading to the middle eastern countries from India. Let us remind that the medieval kingdoms of this region alternatively had their political capital in Lahore, Delhi and Agra in between of which one finds Punjab situated. The kingdoms of India during this period undertook urbanization and spread of manufacture as one of their major economic activity.

The wide variety of religious denominations found during this period in the region of Punjab is astounding. The blanket usage of the term Hindu may not be very much appropriate here. Vaishnavism was popular in most of the north India then ; however, the hilly regions of Himalayas were known for their Saivite leanings too. Kashmir Saivism emerged from mid-medieval period with a distinct philosophical identity. From 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, one finds the Tantric sects reorganising, the Gorakh Nath Sampradaya taking the lead. The Nath yogis were popular, it seems, in Punjab having direct relevance to the making of Sikhism. So many other yogic sects too find their reference in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. From the Islamic package, apart from the general coverage of Islam, Punjab also had the massive influence of the Sufi orders. The overall spread of Islam as well as of the Sufi sects had immanent bearing to the shaping of Guru Nanak's thought and Sikhism. The prevalent Sant tradition emerged at the syncretic space between the Hindustani religions and Arabio-Persian counterparts. It is interesting to note that so many linguistic syntheses occurred in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent during this period as a result of the religio-cultural interactions and fermentations referred. The north-west region, in a sense, was leading the social history of India then.

Guru Nanak could be seen as an inter-religious personality, somehow inspired by the above mentioned cultural scenario of the region. The Sikh historians have brought out abundant materials indicating the multicultural and multi-religious linkages associated with the life and activities of Guru

Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. Kapur Singh states, "Guru Nanak's hymns and compositions, revealed pronouncements and spiritual statements are replete with literary allusions, sophisticated and subtle references to ancient writers and classics of both Hindus and Muslims and all his poetic revelations are characterized by a rich acquaintance with literary conventions and styles of his times and are permeated with deep learning and astonishing common sense." (Kapur Singh 1993:43). The journeys Guru Nanak undertook covering the wide world known during his period too evidence how the Guru deliberately went out of the local world where he was born and brought out. The *Janam Sakhis* illustrate that the Guru came to meet with so many types of religious personalities and communities all over India and outside. Apart from his visits to established and known religious places, he had got wide introductions with different types of folk and tribal religious groups some of which are unidentifiable till date. These were all very much living encounters in inter-religious relations.

The inter-religious and multicultural situation of Guru Nanak's times could be named as the phenomenon of postmedievalism. Postmedievalism is a type of crisis of the medieval values and institutions, although the period inherits certain important aspects of medievalism. To paraphrase Fredrich Jameson's terminology on postmodernism, Postmedievalism may be understood as the cultural logic of late-medievalism. postmedievalism steps outside the prevalent religious paradigm and blurs the boundaries between the realms of sacred and secular. There appears an ambiguity or a dynamic interaction between the sacred and profane. Otherwise put, it is a creative rupture between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, the spiritual and the temporal. The rigidity of each realm breaks, it becomes decentered and the limits are transcended. However, the direction of the trend is from the religious to the secular, from the metaphysical to the temporal. We do not hide the fact that we find certain similarities between the postmodern condition we live today and the postmedieval situation portrayed above, particularly in terms of interrelations between the secular and the sacred. This is one of the reasons why we resort to the study of Guru Nanak and Sikhism particularly in the context of interreligious relations.

The postmedieval theology finds itself adequately expressed in Guru Nanak, above all in his conception of God. Guru Nanak proposes a trans-religious theology, where he defines the idea of God as *adharami*, the term

*dharam* meaning religion. Often the Guru resorts to a negative theology that states that God cannot be comprehended by human means.

“His infinity no one may measure or state ;

... ..

All God's laudation, repeated over and over again,

Comprehends not His greatness

He is unknowable as the ocean

Into which streams and rivers fall,

Yet know not its extent.

... ..

Many yearn His extent to know,

Yet it even eludes them.

GGS, 5

The Guru forwards an inclusive theology where the fights for names become meaningless. Sher Singh brings to focus the Hindu and Islamic names Guru Nanak uses to indicate God, although the Guru holds the view that God is nameless (*anaam*). God is nameless, formless, garbless, without any *avatar*. This universal idea of God must be the positive outcome of the inter-religious space Guru Nanak was trying to explore. It seems that Guru Nanak was well aware of the quarrels of the Hindus and Muslims for separate paths of their religions. He states :

Know the Lord to be one,

Even the paths be twain.

GGS, 1349

And :

He who knows the two paths to be one

Will alone find fulfilment.

GGS, 142

To conceive separate gods by various creeds, according to Guru Nanak, is equivalent to superstition.

Saith Nanak, when the Guru had removed superstition,

Allah and Parabrahm are the same.

GGS, 826

There is the great spirit of concord and synthesis running in the line of thought of Guru Nanak. All the traditional opposites are brought to unite and integrate in the perception of Guru Nanak :

Wherever I look, His sole presence I behold:

Himself in each being immanent,

Himself the sun with rays outspread,

Himself the hidden reality,

Himself the visible forms.

Attributed and unattributed are two terms devised

Both in unison one reality formulate.

GGS,387

It is a clear case of enlightened religiosity in which every phenomenon is made into a moment or an aspect of the reality Guru Nanak perceives. The Sikh Gurus in unequivocal terms reject the otherwise popular theme of *maya* in Indian religions and declare the wonder of multiplicity and variety of life on earth. The world is real, true and even holy to the Sikh Gurus. The world and life are rooted in God, consequently, they cannot be illusory. The world along with God is a dynamic reality, like an evergreen tree (*ped*) that is rooted deep in the earth and stands high up to the skies. The world is often equated to a beautiful garden that is taken care of fondly by God Himself. God is an infinite ocean (ocean of love) in which living beings are said to be the fishes. All these metaphors speak about the inalienable unity of God and the world, in broad terms the inalienable unity of the Being and the Other. Breaking the traditional boundaries between the being and the other, the sacred and the profane opens up an entirely fresh territory of inter-religious spirituality unknown in the history of religions. An immensely enlarged heart of Guru Nanak is seen in this fresh territory of inter-religious spirituality as he says :

O Lord, Whom shall we call false and untrue,

When there is no one else but Thee,

Thou pervadest all, O God.

Everyone dwells ever upon Thee,

Yea, every one asks from Thee,

And Thou blessest all.

Every one is under Thy sway,

O God, there is no one outside of Thee

Everyone belongs to Thee,

O Lord, and every one merges in Thee.

O my love, every one leans on Thee,

Everyone dwells upon Thee alone, O my King.

GGS,670

Again, he says :

I have befriended every one :

Unto every one I am a friend.

The separation of my mind has been removed,

And I am united now with my God.

GGS,671

The oneness of God so strongly advocated by Guru Nanak on the other hand means the deep recognition of and is always accompanied by the reality of temporal multiplicity. The intensity of clarity the Guru puts on the oneness of God has the other side that he equally appreciates the reality of the temporal multiplicity. The temporal diversity of the world is justified by the concept of immanence of God in all beings, existing in all beings in equal amount.

We made a statement above that there appears a creative rupture between the sacred and the profane in the post-medieval thought of Guru Nanak. Now, let us ask the question, where do the sacred and profane meet? How do they interact creatively? In which ground the spiritual becomes a transformative inspiration to the temporal and the temporal makes the spiritual a dynamic one?

The decentering of the transcendental occurs in Guru Nanak in favor of the primacy of the ethical. It is in the ethical, one finds the spiritual and the temporal meet. Kapur Singh states, "Sikhism raises ethical conduct to a higher and more independent, absolute status and makes it as the true expression of the harmony of human personality with the will of God." (Kapur Singh, 1993:129). Macauliffe sees an inter-religious context to the ethical commitment of Sikhism. "Guru Nanak exalted his mental vision to an ethical ideal beyond the conception of Hindu or Mohammadan" (Macauliffe, Vol. I, 1963:liv).

Ethics is a discipline, in terms of Kantian philosophy, related with practical reason. It is in ethics, the ideals become normative and get realized in the social life of the individuals. Ethics is a fluid territory between the spiritual and temporal where there are least possibilities for institutionalization. Ethics rather is a voluntary realm that gives a lot of space for human consciousness. Ethics also averts the politically coercive means to achieve its ends. Max Weber, the sociologist of religion brought to focus that in the early history of religions the ethical played the role of rational and the social reformation. In this sense, ethics is a type of proto-rationality and even proto-sociology. In the history of Indian religions, we know how the Buddhist and Jain traditions countered the ritualism of Vedas with their priority to ethical questions. In the Western tradition, the crises of the ancient world as well as the medieval world got registered in enlargement of ethical concerns. Similar situation one finds in Guru Nanak too. Guru Nanak's mode of thinking contains a strong moment of internalised values and world-view that is characteristic of ethics. The

earlier Sant tradition and the Siddhas might have contributed to this atmosphere. However, the Guru is keen to avoid the risk of falling into the trap of extreme forms of interiorization such as asceticism and prefers to direct his thought within the socially meaningful limits.

The entry into the ethical is conditioned in Guru Nanak by his deep realization of the corruptness of religious life. Guru Nanak addresses the legitimacy crisis and moral degradation of the religious leaders of their time :

The Quadi speaks falsehood and eats filth ;  
 The Brahman, guilty of much cruelty,  
 Makes a show of ritual bathing ;  
 The Yogi, blind and misguided,  
 knows not the true practice ;  
 All three are at one in bringing ruin  
 To the people.

GGS, 662

To counter the situation, Guru Nanak appeals to the term *sach* or truth which plays a very prominent and key role in Sikhism. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, opens up with the questions, "How to become a Sachiar? How to live a truthful living? How to do away with the falseness abundant in life?" Thus the corruption of social and religious values becomes the central problematic of Sikh philosophy. The term occurs repeatedly in all the writings of Guru Nanak and other Gurus. So many conjectured terms appear in Guru Granth Sahib with the prefix *sach*. They are *satnaam*, *satguru*, *sacha aachar*, *sacha badsha*, *sachi bani*, *sachi sewa* etc.,. The Gurus mobilize the people for true words, true deeds, true values, true trade, true coins, true worship, true prayer, true pilgrimage, true fasting etc., This is something like the Buddhist eightfold path which talked about right speech, right seeing, right deeds, etc. The simple term truth is pregnant with heavy semantic import in the usage of the Sikh Gurus. The term does not seem like meaning the usual concept of correspondence with reality but means the quality of living from which emanate words and deeds of a human being. The spectrum of meanings Guru Nanak attributes to the concept of *sach* becomes clear when we look at the list of falseness Guru Nanak enumerates in his hymns :

Neither worship, nor fasting, nor a saffron-mark,  
 Nor ablution, nor customary charity,  
 Nor any other discipline is pleasing to the Lord,

However sweet one speaks.

.... .... .... .... ....

No other meditation, nor austerity, nor wander-lust,  
Nor raising one's arms to the skies  
Pleases the Lord,

Though one goes the way of a Yogi or a Jaina. GGs, 674

Guru Nanak poses the ethical thematics very consciously against all types of ritualism as well against all types of scholastics, sophistry and elitism in religious matters. The Guru was very particular in his criticism of the ascetic institution that had thrived in the history of religions. Guru Nanak replaces the ideal of ascetic hero by a fresh concept of ethical hero for the reason that the ethical hero is always tested in social life.

Another important concept, this time an inter-religious concept Guru Nanak proposes is the concept of Sahaj. Sahaj literally means natural, spontaneous and a state of original in humans. This concept was first made prominent in Buddhism, then taken up by the Tantric Siddhas. Guru Nanak picks up this concept and calls the humans to return to their naive, innocent, natural state. Sahaj has been portrayed in Sikhism as the highest state achievable by human beings. Sometimes this state has been equated with the state of *sunyata* or *nirvana*, again the Buddhist concepts. Sahaj like the concept of *sach* is the final ontological end Guru Nanak addresses in the conditions of thriving falsity of the religious circumstances. It is not excluded that *sahaj* as the ultimate ontological point gives space for temporal multiplicity. The concept of *sahaj* is a call to the authentic being of the humans, which the Guru optimistically believes to be divine. It again shows the love the Guru was having for the humans.

To reach truth or one's authentic being of *sahaj*, Guru Nanak proposes a fundamental deconstruction of the subjectivity. This problem is well elucidated in Sikhism under the theme of eradication of Haumai or individualism, which occupies a very prominent place in the hymns of almost all the Sikh Gurus. Haumai is explained as the individual pride associated with one's attachment with his caste, wealth and status. Haumai is the pride of one's own religion too. Haumai could be the claim of a particular religion that it is the sole possessor of the revealed truth. By eradicating this feeling of individualism and chosenness, one reaches truth and the state of *sahaj*.

We are witnessing Guru Nanak as an Inter-religious personality and are presenting Guru Nanak as evolving an inter-religious theology

appropriate to his times. Primacy of the ethical thematics becomes the major component of his approach to the post-medieval conditions. We understand that by all means Guru Nanak did not prefer a passive proposal at the given conditions. On the other hand, the Guru actively interferes with the given inter-religious situation. The Guru does not yield to a passive position that one has to respect all religions in all circumstances. Outwardly, that may be safe standpoint. But Guru Nanak's greatness lies there that he had the courage to look at the merits and demerits of every religion from the point of view of the subaltern masses he was truly representing. The inter-religious conditions did not make him to surrender before the environment, but created in him a critical awareness of the situation and to respond befittingly from the point of view of the common people he was representing.

Guru Nanak's critical spirit is very clear at least in two important points. Firstly, the Guru is intensely critical of any so called religion sanctioning and safeguarding hierarchical structure among the people. This means that the Guru did not agree with the idea that the humans were unequal by birth or by descent. The Guru was fundamentally critical to the spirit and philosophy of the Vedic tradition that the humans could be classified according to the *varnas* or *jatis*. In Guru Nanak's theology all the humans are equals irrespective of their birth. God has created men and women as equals, being immanent in them in equal proportion. Consequently, Guru Nanak discards any religion as illegitimate if it supports inequality by religious means.

Secondly, the Sikh Gurus were vehemently and uncompromisingly critical of any religion that mobilizes the mass support of the people in the name of the religion to serve the interests of the ruling political classes of the time. This means that religion should not become an instrument of the political dominance, particularly when the political power is exploitative and oppressive. The Sikh Gurus reached this standpoint undergoing all the political tyranny of the later rulers of the Moghul empire. But this is appropriate even today. Sikhism is against religion serving any oppressive purpose, especially at the hands of the political classes. Political religiosity for global dominance or for national dominance is categorically rejected by the Sikh Gurus. The entire concept of religiosity undergoes a fundamental change in Sikhism that religion is no more a solace or asylum of the voiceless and helpless people, but it is the weapon of the suffering people. Religion helps to consolidate the oppressed people and gives

confidence and divine support to the struggle of those people.

**Conclusion :**

The interreligious experience of the Sikh Gurus is very significant to the present day world situation. We are at the verge of restructuring the relations between the sacred and secular. But this has to be done keeping in mind interest of the common man and woman. This has to be done at the interests of the subaltern masses. Passive acceptance of the concept of respect to all religions may not serve the purpose. On the other hand, we need the courage and competence to look critically at the in-built oppressive structures of different religions and to persuade the corresponding religions to correct them as the time demands. The Sikh Gurus undertook such an exercise and they are remembered for this.

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