

THE IMPACT OF GURU GOBIND SINGH ON INDIAN SOCIETY

by
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FORWORD

The tercentenary of the birth of the Khalsa Panth in 1999 provides us with an opportunity to have a fresh look at our heritage, reflect on what the Gurus had said with a view to relating it to the present, and make a reappraisal of what the Gurus did so as to appreciate it in the modern day context. In this respect, the Punjabi University has decided to publish new titles and reprint some old classics having a bearing, directly or indirectly, on the theme of Khalsa which Guru Gobind Singh had created as a microscopic form of the ideal socio-political structure of his vision.

Professor Gurbachan Singh Talib's *The impact of Guru Gobind Singh on Indian society* is an incisive and perceptive study of the evolution and orientation of certain socio-ethical ideals. According to the author, Sikhism redefined and applied these ideals to mundane human life with such sincerity and fervour as had inspired thousands upon thousands to lay down their lives to uphold them. The author contends that Sikhism gave to this land, for the first time perhaps, the sense of such great values without which individual and corporate life would become vulnerable to moral and social degeneration.

The book was first published, in 1966, by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh. The University expresses its deep sense of gratitude to the Foundation for permitting it to bring out this reprint of the book which has contemporary relevance and will be of immense interest and use to the students of Sikh Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

This small book does not profess to be a historical study. I must disavow at the outset any claim to an intimate or original acquaintance with history. The historical facts lying in the background of the discussions in this book are such as I believe are generally accepted and considered more or less to be authentic by historians who have worked in the field of medieval, and particularly Mughal history, with which the story of Sikhism is intertwined. The scope of this book is further limited by its not being an exposition of what may be called the 'philteophy' of Sikhism or of the Indian religious tradition in general. Such a philosophical approach would require much more detailed knowledge of sources, particularly in Sanskrit, and an infinitely more abstruse presentation, than is here attempted. With these main limitations, and with the further proviso, that the details of Guru Gobind Singh's life, and of the preceding Gurus are here accepted as they are current among scholars, and have not been investigated afresh. As a matter of fact, biography of the Gurus enters only occasionally and indirectly into these pages, as bearing on their teachings and actions.

Properly speaking, these chapters are to be considered as discussions (they are so also in their manner of presentation) of certain ideas and ideals which Sikhism, and Guru Gobind Singh as the Preceptor who brought them to perfection and culmination, may be said to have emphasized and applied to individual and corporate life. These ideas and ideals, treated here, are not intended to be taken as an exhaustive or definitive statement of the great work of Sikhism. They are presented here as a segment of the totality of Sikhism in a spirit of tentative formulation of their precise nature, direction and significance. As said ear her, the philosophical, metaphysical and the spiritual are outside the scope of these discussions. These concern themselves mainly with the evolution and orientation of certain socio-ethical ideals, which it

is the glory of Sikhism to have restated and to have applied with such sincerity and fervour, leading to the martyrdom of thousands upon thousands to uphold them. It is claimed here for Sikhism that has given to this land, for the first time perhaps, the sense of certain great values, without which individual and corporate life become corrupt and subject to all manners of moral and social evils. It is in the light of such an objective, therefore, that this book may be studied.

In view of the nature of its contents, the book may present to the reader the character of something like a thesis. Such it is—not in the formal academic sense perhaps, but in the general sense of a point of view, supported by accumulated evidence and close argument. Here and there, the reader may also feel there is a little overlapping, but there is not overmuch of it. In view of the character of the book as it grew, and of the time-span within which it had to be prepared, to be ready before the great event—the tercentenary of Guru's birth—perhaps such imperfections could not be avoided.

The book is not documented, as a scholarly thesis would be. The references are few, and much of the historical information is given in impressionistic and digested form. Quotations from Sikh religious literature (in translation) are generally referred to their source. As a matter of fact, such references are the most valuable props of the argument.

'Guru' is an ancient Indian concept meaning generally 'teacher'. Literally also, it would not be inappropriate to render it as 'Enlightener', as has been done in the English translation of the Holy Granth by Dr. Gopal Singh. In this book it is variously rendered as 'Teacher', 'Preceptor' and 'Apostle'. The Guru in Sikhism is Teacher as well as Apostle (Messenger of the Lord), something like the sense in which in the Semitic faiths the equivalents of 'Prophet' are used. But 'Guru' in no sense is *avatar* or incarnation of God. Such an idea is most vehemently repudiated in Sikh teaching.

The translations of the hymns and other pieces and phrases from the Adi Granth, Dasam Granth, *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and other works are my own. Although a number of translations into English, particularly of portions of Adi Granth have been made, it cannot be claimed for any one of these versions that finality or perfection of expressiveness or definitiveness belongs to it. A translation, for which something like the finality of the Authorised

Version of the Bible in English may be claimed, does not yet exist. I have, therefore, thought it more useful to make such renderings as I thought would more closely convey the meaning, and particularly the power of the original. Obviously, I do not claim finality for my own renderings either. Transliteration of the names drawn from Sikh, mythological and Muslim sources is that familiar to the average English-knowing Indian. Ultra-meticulous rendering of the various consonant sounds of Arabic along with elaborate diacritical marks has been avoided so as not to confuse the general reader.

GURBACHAN SINGH TALIB

CONTENTS

	Introduction	(v)
Chapter I	THE IDEA OF GOD	1
Chapter II	EVOLUTION OF THE HEROIC CHARACTER	11
Chapter III	INVOKING INDIA'S HEROIC TRADITIONS	31
Chapter IV	RELIGION VIEWED AS UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD	64
Chapter V	APOSTOLATE TO THE PEOPLE	90
Chapter VI	ECCE HOMO	111

CHAPTER 1
THE IDEA OF GOD

THE SUPREME BEING OF THE GURUS' CONCEPTION

The Sikh religion, like all dynamic religious movements, made its impact on numerous aspects of life in India, and influenced not only thought about the nature of the Supreme Being, but stirred far-reaching and revolutionary ideas in the sphere of the relationship between man and man, to which it gave a new humanitarian and idealistic direction. It was, in other words, much more than the enunciation of a new creed or the founding of still another sect, in the babel of myriads of sects into which the people of India—Hindus as well as non-Hindus—were already divided. It was, when we look closely upon its characters, the founding of a new order, a new society, on the basis of a concept of God which should satisfy the highest spiritual urges of man by drawing him towards the Infinite, instilling in him the feeling of human sympathy for all mankind, thus making for the founding of noble and fulfilling social institutions, in place of the state of strife which would obtain in the absence of such sympathy. These various influences are discussed in some detail in other portions of this book. What must not be forgotten is that the Sikh faith has had a harmonious development, which proceeded from its original enunciation in the vision of Guru Nanak, of the immortal, infinite character of the Godhead and what (despite its triteness) may be called the Brotherhood of man. These two cardinal ideas are seen operating and expanding in the development of the Sikh Church and the Sikh people during the five centuries since Guru Nanak, the Founder, came into the world.

In the Creed which Guru Nanak enunciated in the first stanza "°Pu (popularly called *Japuji*), the basic Sikh prayer, which means 'holy chanting' or 'rehearsing' and in an applied sense the meditation of the Name (Reality) of God, conceives of God as Infinite

2 THE IMPACT OF GURU GOBIND SINGH ON INDIAN SOCIETY
 and Unbounded by Attributes, since to attribute to Him any qualities would be to limit and circumscribe Him. Hence the Creed runs as: "He is the Sole and Indivisible Om, 'Eternal Reality, the Creator-Purusha,² Fearless, Rancourless, Timeless Form, Unincarnated, Self-existent. Through His Grace alone can He be contemplated." Thus is the Creed, brief and self-explanatory. God is Infinite, not subject to incarnation, free from any fear of losing His sovereignty of the universe, as would be postulated by the various mythologies current among nations; free from rancour—hence not the sole protector of any race, nor the enemy of any other, be they be called by the prejudice of man *kafirs*, *malechhas* or gentiles or others. These and other implications of the conception of God in such terms should be fairly clear to the modern enlightened mind. Other forms of the negative description of God, which are confessions of the helplessness of man to understand Him, are : *Again* (Inaccessible); *Agochar* (Unknowable); *Alakh* (Unsurpassable); *Niranjan* (Free from the taint of matter); *Alekh* (Beyond Computing); *Abinashi* (Indestructible, Immortal).

This conception of God without Attributes (*nirguna*) or without form (*nirakar*, or as current among the Sikhs {*nirankar*), however, does not preclude the idea of a personal God who is the source and guardian of truth and righteousness and can be loved and responds to man's love and yearning for him. Throughout the meditations of Guru Nanak and his successors in Guruship such ideal personality is assumed for God. Hence, He can be invoked to succour, to grant and to fulfil. He is addressed by the questing human spirit in the way in which a human personality would be called upon, invoked, propitiated and appealed to. He is called by a vast variety of names, each the expression of a living, responsive, loving soul, intervening in the universe all through eternity to succour Right and Truth whenever these are threatened by the forces of Evil and Unrighteousness. The Eternal Being is thus known, among others, by such names as these, all indicative of ideal human qualities: *Par-Brahman* (Supreme Brahman); *Thakur* (The Lord); *Sahib* (Master); *Gosain* (Lord of the Earth); *Sat-Guru*

1. *Om* is the 'substantive' Name of God, the Infinite. In its connotation it supersedes and rejects the idea of all other deities, conceived by the mind of man in lower stages of spirituality.
2. *Purusha*, literally the male, is the creative Divine force of the universe, self-existent.

(Eternal Master); *Swami* (Lord); *Parmeshwar* (Supreme Lord), *Jagdishwar* (Lord of the Universe); *Hari*, *Ram Narain*, *Madho*, *Kesava*, *Gopal*, *Raghurai* (all these are names of deities in the Hindu Pantheon, adapted as synonyms to stand solely for the Infinite); *Kartar* (Creator); *Wahguru* (Hail, Lord!); *Deva*, (God), etc. Besides, there are numerous attributive names, all indicative of faith in the ultimate mercy and preservation of God, inspiring the hope which overcomes suffering and death, in the vision of the life infinite. Among such names are *Rahim* and *Karim* (both from the Arabic of current Islam, meaning, respectively, Merciful and Bountiful³); *Qadir* (Almighty, also from the Arabic); *Bhagat-Vachhal* (Popular form of Bhakt-vatsala, Beloved of His devotees); *Murari* (one of the attributive names of Krishna-Destroyer of the Demon Mur); *Kirpal* (i.e. Kripal, Beneficent); *Patit-Punit* (Purifier of the fallen) and scores more.

All these attributes in their infinity belong to God : these do not limit Him, but are only an infinitesimal portion of His infinity, which the mind of man can understand only in brief glimpses of spiritual illumination. These attributes inspire man with hope, and point towards the direction which his endeavours must take, that is, righteous action.

GURU GOBIND SINGH'S ORIENTATION OF THE IDEA OF GOD

In Guru Gobind Singh's compositions the idea of God is reoriented and His attributes are expanded so as to become a veritable treasure-house of the attributive names of the Supreme Being. The particular name of God which has such an appeal and fascination for him, is descriptive of one aspect of His infinity-Akal or the Timeless. This existed already in the creed of Guru Nanak's *Japuji*, quoted above. In this attribute He is Uncreated, Immortal and Infinite. This name, besides, came to acquire the heroic overtones given to it by the contexts in which the Guru was to use it. It occurs in the Sikh battle-cry, inspiring the Sikhs to heroic action and sacrifice to this day-'Sat Sri Akal' (True is the Immortal Lord!). This cry has fervour and inspiring passion and rings with accents of heroic determination. The Guru's devotional composition, expressing in various terms and descriptive phrases the attributes of the Lord, is called 'Akal Ustati' (Praise of the Timeless Lord). This name, Akal, therefore, may be taken to be in

3. *karim* also may mean 'Great'.

Guru Gobind Singh's enunciation of the substantive name of the Lord (in view of God's heroic aspect which for this Guru overshadowed all others, it would be more appropriate to mention Him by this awesome name of the Lord than the philosophical Supreme Being). It may be taken to answer to the Guru's yearning for heroic endeavour in the way of the Lord.

Among the varieties of names for the Lord, contemplated by Guru Gobind Singh, the following categories may readily be distinguished:

(a) Names attributive of heroic qualities: some such names have existed since antiquity, as for example Murari (destroyer of the demon Mur), which is a periphrastic name of Krishna, conceived of as the Supreme Being; Madhu-Sudan (destroyer of the demon Madhu, also an attributive name of Krishna). In the Adi Granth, which contains the hymns composed by the Gurus who preceded Guru Gobind Singh in the Apostolic seat, God is often invoked by names evocative of His heroic qualities as the Destroyer of Evil and the Succourer of Right. Such, for example as 'Gur Sura' (The Heroic Lord), 'Bhai Bhanjan' (Dispeller of Fear). The theme is constantly running through the Adi Granth—the destroying tyrants and intervening to preserve the saintly and the innocent. This aspect of God, therefore, was well-known in the Indian religious tradition and had been emphasized by the predecessors of Guru Gobind Singh. He gave it particular emphasis in his struggle with the tyrants and oppressors of his own day, involving terrible suffering and sacrifice. In this struggle, he made God his only support: in meditating on the idea of God, he naturally gave prominent emphasis to His heroic attributes. Thus, God is Asipan (Wielder of the Sword); Sarang-Pani (Holder of the Bow); Sri Kharag (the Sacred Sword); Bhagauti (the Sword); Sarb-Loh (The All-Steel, that is, the Mighty); Maha Kal (The Supreme Lord of Time); Prabh or Prabhu (The Lord); Kal (Time or All-Time, the Eternal); Maha-Kalika (The Mighty Kali, that is the, Divine Might to destroy Evil); Parma-Purakh (The Supreme Might); Dhanur-Pan (The Holder of the Bow), Asiket, Asidhuj, Kharag-ketu (All these mean Holder of the Sword-Banner).

(b) A related series of attributes of God is expressive of His glory and grandeur. Spread over the compositions of the Guru are phrases and compounds which can be subsumed under this head. Thus, God is destroyer of foes, protector of the humble; the Sword, which is the symbol of His Might, is 'Ever Victorious' (*jai tegham*);

it is 'destroyer of hosts of barbarians' (*khal dal khandan*). God is Indra-Indran (lord of Indras'). He is Shah-shahan (King of Kings). He is Sarab-Karta (Creator of all that exists); Sarb-harta (Destroyer of all); Dev-Deva (God of gods); Agham-Ogh-Harta (Destroyer of Evil and Sin); Sarb-Gian (All-knowing); Sarb-Bhog (All-absorbing); Bhanan-Bhan (Sun of suns); Garb-ganjan (Breaker of arrogance); Chhatran Chhatri (Hero of Heroes); Sarbatra-Jaho (Pervasive Glory); Chatur-Chakra-Varti (Lord of the universe); Anadam Bibhut (Of Eternal Glory). These are only a few of the hundreds of attributes of glory contemplated by the inspired spiritual vision of Guru.

(c) The most numerous attributes of the Lord are those which express His Infinity in the negative form, expressive of the helplessness of the human mind to compass His Reality. In the compositions *Jap* and *Akal Ustati* these flow into verse with the movement of the tempestuous torrent. The opening lines of the *Jap* strike the key-note of the whole composition:

Without sign or mark and beyond caste and category;
His face and feature, shape and form, none can tell;
Beyond mutability, sensitiveness-illuminated, of illimitable
Might—

The Lord Supreme of millions of Indras; King of kings;
Lord of three universes, of gods, men and demons;
His Infinite glory each leaf and grass-blade proclaims—
Who may recount the roll of all His Names.
Content, the human spirit with mention alone of His Attributes!

In a flood of pouring attributes, God is described as Arup (formless); Anup (Incomparable); Alekh (Indescribable); Akai (Formless); Ajai (Uncreated); Aganj, Abhanj (both mean Indestructible); Anam (of the Ineffable Name); Atham (Unbounded); Akarm (Unbounded by actions); Adharm (Unbounded by man-made religions); Ajit (Unvanquished); Abhit (Unbounded); Abah (Not Acting with Limbs); Adhah (Indestructible); Anil (Immaculate); Anadi (Eternal); Achhed (Indestructible); Agadh (Unfathomable); Abhut (Uncreated); Alok (Unbounded); Ashok (Untouched by Sorrow); Nir-tap (Unoppressed of Sickness); Asarg (Uncreated); Ajat (Of no category); Adheya (Not compassed by contemplation); Ajai (Ever-Emanipated); Na Satrai nai Mitrai (Without Foe or Friend).

4. Indra is the King of the Gods in Hindu mythology.

These and many more such attributes are the outpourings of the mind which, deeply immersed in spiritual contemplation, conceives of appropriate terms to express the infinity of the Lord. These formations, negative in their philosophical form, are all derived from the traditional philosophical learning of India.

(d) There are, again, the attributes of the Lord, evocative of man's philosophical and mystic attempts at comprehending His Reality. This group of attributes is also derived from the mystico-philosophical tradition of India. These attributes differ from those in the preceding group in not being cast in the negative form, so as to express the sense of God's Infinity, but are redolent of emotional and mystical experience, and express such attributes particularly as the human spirit has apprehended in its communion with the Infinite. In the Adi-Granth such attributes are, for example, 'Pritam' (The Beloved), 'Lalan' (The Cherished); 'Sajan' (The Noble Friend); 'Mukand' (The Emancipator); 'Karuna-mai' (The Merciful), and many more.

In Guru Gobind Singh's compositions, such attributive names are somewhat more elaborate, in all likelihood the result of an attempt to provide a full thesaurus of names of the Lord to replace the names of the gods and goddesses of the traditional pantheon, conceived to be personalities apart from the Supreme Lord, the Creator: 'Triguna Atit' (Beyond the three attributes³) is followed by 'Sargun samet' (Of Divine Attributes). 'Jih Neti Nigam Kahant' (He of whom the Veda says, 'Not this'); 'Abiyakt Rup Udar' (Of Hidden Limitless Glory); 'Sadaieam Sada Sarb Sabatra Sneham' (Endless All-pervasive Love); 'Sada Sacchadanand Sarbam Pranasi' (Of Eternal Spiritual Joy, All-destroyer); 'Namog Jog Jogeshwaram Parm Sidhe' (I bow to thee, Mystic of Mystics, the Supreme Saint); 'Parm Jugt' (Of Supreme Intelligence); 'Sada Siddhata Buddhata Bridha Karta' (Giver of Ever-increasing Saintliness and Wisdom); 'Rag-Rup' (Harmony and Loveliness Surpassing); 'Parm Gyata' (The Supreme Intelligence); 'Lok Mata' (The Universal Mother⁴). In the following stanza God's attributes of supreme Beauty are poured forth as in ecstasy :

5. In the Indian ethical philosophy, the human personality is conceived of as being in one of the three states—Tarn, Raj and Sat—respectively Darkness, Activity and Spiritual poise.
6. Elsewhere His character as Purusha or the Father-Creator is emphasized. He is both Father and Mother, in contradistinction to an imagined Father (Shiva) and Mother (Shakti).

'Namo Chandra Chandre;
Namo Bhan Bhane;
Namo Geet Geete;
Namo Tan Tane'

(I bow to thee, Moon of Moons; I bow to thee, Sun of Suns; I bow to thee, Song of Songs; I bow to thee, Harmony of Harmonies!)

(e) One characteristic of the attributes of the Supreme Being as conceived by Guru Gobind Singh is the free and unrestricted use of Arabic terminology which naturally would have strong Muslim associations. A sizeable Arabic and Persian vocabulary had gained currency in the various languages spoken in the northern parts of India since the establishment of Muslim rule and the growth of Muslim populations in Punjab, the Purabi areas (modern U.P.), Bihar, Bengal and into the Central parts. In many spheres the Persian or Arabic equivalents had driven from currency the native Sanskrit or Apabhraṃsh (corrupted Sanskrit) forms in popular parlance. Consequently, both in the secular and religious literature produced during the medieval ages in India, by Hindus as well as Muslims, there is a fair admixture of Arabic and Persian. This can be seen in such saints as Kabir, Ravidas, Tulsidas and Namdev, among others. In the compositions of the Preceptors of Sikhism since Guru Nanak, Arabic-Persian words, expressive of the attributes of God or of certain spiritual or ethical experiences had been used without any prejudice. As a matter of fact, the main direction of Sikhism being to inculcate the spirit of religious tolerance and goodwill among sects, such vocabulary was employed specifically to drive out exclusivism and fanaticism both among Hindus and Muslims. Thus, among the attributes or names of God occur the Arabic 'Rahim' (Merciful); 'Karim' (Bountiful); 'Qadir' (Almighty); 'Khasm' (Master); 'Shah' (King); 'Sultan' (King); 'Allah' (Khuda; Parvardgar (Cherisher); 'Mihrvan' (Gracious). Apart from the names and attributes of God, words from Muslim context were also used to describe states of spiritual experience. For example, 'Arz' (Prayer, Supplication); 'Bandagi' (Prayer); 'Mehramat' (Mar-Hamat—Grace); 'Ardas' (Arz-dasht—supplication); 'Andesa' (thought, anxiety); 'Palit' (Palid—impure, especially in the spiritual sense); 'Jama' (Robe, implying the human body); 'Kateb' (Kitab—The Koran); 'Murid' (Disciple); 'Muhtaji' (Lack, Poverty); 'Kurban' (sacrifice); 'Furman' (command, ordinance); 'Lai Jawahar' (diamonds, pearls, implying noble spiritual qualities); 'Garib, maskin' (*gharib maskin*—the meek and

the humble).

There are, besides, numerous such words in their native, current forms, employed metaphorically to express spiritual experience. Guru Gobind Singh gave even more emphasized sanction to the use of such vocabulary, specifically to inculcate the spirit of tolerance of the Muslim people as such among his followers, the Sikhs, when he felt impelled to draw the sword against the tyrants of his day, who happened to be the Muslim rulers. Thus, his sons were called Sahibzadas (Young Lords or Princes); his banner was designated by the Persian word 'Nishan'; for Victory he made current the Arabic 'Fateh' which is still part of the daily salutation of the Sikhs. For the new order that he created, he chose the name 'Khalsa' (Khalis is Arabic for Pure⁷); for constancy in faith he adopted the Arabic 'Sidq'; for a Sikh observing all the articles of traditional discipline, the phrase is '*tiyar bar tiyar*' a phrase made up of repetition of the Arabic word for 'ready' or 'prepared'.

In enunciating the attributes of the Lord, Guru Gobind Singh attempted a fresh source of effect in expression. Not only did he intersperse with attributes formed from Sanskritistic lore attributive phrases formed from the Arabic, but further made compounds between Sanskrit and Arabic or Persian with Arabic conjunctive, 'al' or 'ul' used in Arabic grammar to make the possessive form. This last category has not gained currency perhaps because of the utter incompatibility of the two languages combined, but the attempt bespeaks eloquently the Guru's noble resolve to inculcate the spirit of tolerance and goodwill among people of different religions by a kind of cultural synthesis or fusion.⁸

Examples of compounds from purely Arabic or Persian or Arabic-Persian constituents are as follows: 'Rozi Razak' (Cherisher and Bread Provider); 'Pak Beaib' (Pure and Immaculate); 'Ghaibul Ghaib' (The Supreme Secret); 'Afwal gunah' (Pardoner of sins); 'Shahan Shah' (King of Kings); 'Husnul Wajuh, (Of Beauteous Countenance), Tamam-ul-rajū'⁹ 'Mindful of all); 'Hameshul Salam

7. I adhere to the view that Khalsa is Khalisa (Arabic for Pure), in the literal-spiritual sense, and not in the legal sense of the Royal Troops. For the Sanskrit-educated Nirmalas, the name of their Order is the equivalent of the Arabic 'Khalsa' Nirmal too means Pure—Nir = without +mal = impurity. Both 'Khalsa' and 'Nirmala' were given by Guru Gobind Singh as synonymous words.

8. There are Arabic-Persian compounds too, equally incombustible.

9. Strictly Arabic would be 'Tamam-ur-rajū'.

(Eternally secure); Ghanim-ul-Shikast' (Vanquisher of Foes); 'Tamizul-tamam' (All-knowing Omniscient). Gharibul niwaz' (Cherisher of the Humble); 'Husnul Jamal' (Beauty and Loveliness Ineffable); 'Zahir Zahur' (The Supreme Manifestation).

Among Sanskrit-Arabic compounds are, for example, the following:

'Parmam-Fahim' (Of Supreme Wisdom); 'Sarbam-Kalim' (in Communion with the universe); Raju-ul-nidhan' (Expender of His treasures); 'Nir-Sharik' (Without a rival, close to the Koranic La-Sharik); 'Samastul-Kalam' (With the Universe in Communion); 'Aganjul-Ghanim' (Unvanquishable by any foe); 'Samastul-zuban' (of Universal Speech or Languages); 'Barrishtul-nivas' (Dweller in Paradise); Samastul-Aziz' (Beyond of all—'Aziz' here meaning not 'exalted' as in Arabic, but 'beloved' as in Hindustani): 'Ajab-Sarup' (Of Marvellous Beauty).

Certain other unconventional formations are exemplified below : 'Karmam-Karim' (Of Mighty Grace), 'Anekul-Tarang' (Of Innumerable Waves); 'Samastul-nivas' All-pervasive); 'Namastul-Praname' (Reverence and Obeisance to Him!)

The main conclusion which can be drawn from the foregoing discussion and illustrations is the monotheism¹⁰ which is uncompromisingly at the basis of the Sikh faith. This spirit of monotheism is in harmony with the idealistic traditions of India itself, and its assertion amidst the welter of creeds and sub-creeds, each centred in numerous deities of various conceptions is of immense significance, as pointing to the reconciliation of warring sects and the universality of the religious ideal. Some thinkers have been led to postulate that the monotheism of Guru Nanak and his successors had its inspiration in Islam. This hypothesis is altogether wrong. The attributes of the Supreme Being, including the attendant nomenclature are of Indian derivation—the entire conception is Indian. The Muslim God—Allah—has attributes whose orientation takes different lines from those which can be traced in the development of the Sikh Church. In place of a God, who is exclusive and mightily vindictive, Guru Nanak's conception of God is of the Universal Father, Beneficent, the Cherisher of Right and Destroyer of Evil. This Evil which constantly calls forth the destroying hand of God is the principle of Darkness of Egoism

10. There is a philosophical view which would define the Sikh spiritual or metaphysical position as 'monism'. It is perhaps more truly Transcendental-Immanence-ism.

and Sin in its universal aspects and not any hostile creed or race opposed to any particular faith. A kinship can be traced between the Kartar (Creator) or Par-Brahman of Guru Nanak's conception and the highest idealistic teachings of the sages of India.

Sikhism, while it was the assertion of such monotheism, was also the bridge which the Guru threw across the gulf of hate and misunderstanding among the different warring creeds. It sought to reconcile, to bring peace where there was strife to teach true religion in place of hollow ceremonial, and to give a new, ethical-idealistic direction to the individual and to society. All these ideals were given an intensified powerful impulse by Guru Gobind Singh in whom the saint and the hero-crusader were united. Guru Gobind Singh brought to fulfilment not only the vision of the society in which Right must assert itself to prevail but also that flaming spirit of God-consciousness which issued in the mighty Bani or Word of Guru Nanak.

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTION OF THE HEROIC CHARACTER

GURU GOBIND SINGH AND THE HEROIC TRADITION

In the personality of Guru Gobind Singh, the aspect which has received almost exclusive emphasis is that of the liberator, the crusader against tyranny and oppression. This, no doubt, is the most striking quality and it has ever appealed to the millions who during the two and a half centuries and over have sought the inspiration for their lives from his personality. In contradiction to the other Preceptors of the Sikh faith he is thought of as the warrior, the hero with a resplendent knightly figure fighting against tyrants and evil-doers, somewhat like Saint George of the Christians. The descriptive names by which he is known are indicative also of glory, might and heroism, such for instance as the Lord of the Plume, The Lord of the Hawk, the Protector of Faith—all evocative of noble heroism and chivalry. His figure is conceived of as the Rider on the Bay Charger, shooting gold-tipped arrows and destroying in single combat tigers and other wild beasts. He is ever heroic in the thick of the battle, fighting without hate or rancour, merciful even to the foe. In suffering he is always unruffled, bearing misfortune with equanimity of spirit as destined by the Timeless Creator, who sends to man life and death, joy and sorrow, as it may suit His inscrutable purposes. This faith bouys him up even in the midst of the greatest misfortunes which a mortal can be called upon to bear—the loss of all his dear and near ones, including all his children, and the death in battle of his bravest followers, dearer than the children of his flesh. All this is enshrined in the popular imagination, and is substantially the true picture of his personality. This picture has been emphasized and re-emphasized all through these two and a half centuries of

¹ This chapter is substantially the same as read out at a seminar on Guru Gobind Singh, arranged in September 1966 by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla.

the history of the Sikhs—a page in history which is unexcelled in the record of the struggle of man for the preservation of his spirit unconquered against overwhelming forces of oppression and tyranny.

In this picture of hero, crusader and liberator, the element which tends to get somewhat obscured is that of the saint, the man of God, who lived every moment of his life in contemplation of the Eternal, and sought to guide his steps by His will and behest. Concentrated in the personality of the Guru was the faith and the spiritual vision evolved by his predecessors in the Sikh Church, from its Founder, Guru Nanak, onwards who had reiterated among the people the faith in the One Uncreated Being. Formless, Unbounded by Attributes yet the source and concentrated sum of all Attributes—the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer—the cherisher of righteousness and destroyer of unrighteousness. It is by this faith and its ideals that the peculiar quality of Guru Gobind Singh's heroism was fostered. This made him the mighty liberator, the creator of the chivalrous order of the Khalsa charged with the task of waging relentless war against tyrants and oppressors. To trace the formation of the heroic character as revealed in the personality of Guru Gobind Singh and the heroes and martyrs of Sikhism through faith and spiritual and moral discipline, would indeed be a highly rewarding study in the deeper aspects of the religious personality. The strength of the hero is the strength of his soul, in which purity of motive and purpose lends to man the strength to face up to the demands of a life of relentless struggle against pitiless forces and to overcome them both as martyr and as hero. This is in consonance with the Indian philosophical tradition, which has mythologized the might of Shiva or Rudra as attained after aeons of rigorous penance in the freezing snows of the Kailas or of the stony-hard limbs of the hero Hanuman moulded after his long *bhakti* or devotion to Rama (the God-Man). It is the ascetic (*yogi*) Shiva and his warrior-consort Durga who in her incarnation as Chandi fights the battles of the gods when they are oppressed by the evil force of the *asuras* or Demons.

A NEW EMPHASIS

While the Indian tradition has not chosen to mythologize any episode of martyrdom, as this idea is understood and absorbed by, for example, the Semitic or the modern mind, and has always shown the oppressor as destroyed by the intervention of divine

vengeance when bent upon his career of iniquity and evil, the Sikh religion has provided numerous examples of heroic martyrdom and has enunciated a faith in which martyrdom is viewed as a necessary process in making the purposes of God prevail. This heroism, born of such spiritual idealism and asceticism is, of course, a kind of sword-arm of the Divine Will, and it is through such heroism alone that the universe is from time to time rescued from the grip of evil and is made to fulfil God's purposes.

It is with such idealism and faith in the ultimate victory of righteousness after war with evil that Guru Gobind Singh in his powerful autobiographical narrative fragment *Bachitra Natak* (The Wonderful Drama) has revealed his mission. There is prominent emphasis on a long life of austere spirituality as the source of his power to wage war against evil. Thus the story runs :

'Now shall I narrate my own story; and how I performed austerities: At the spot where the mount of Hem Kunt is situated is the peak of Sapt Shringa. This is the spot where the Pandavas practised yoga. Here it was that for long I performed austerities, and invoked the aid of the Timeless Might. Through the force of such austerities, my self was merged into the Divine Being. So also did my father and mother contemplate the Inaccessible, and perform the practices of yoga; then did the Divine Lord shower His pleasure on them. When the Divine Will was revealed to me, I took birth in the Kali Yuga'. After giving in brief the history of the abuse of the divine mission to convert mankind to the worship of the True Lord by the generality of teachers and prophets, who instead set themselves up into deities, the Guru thus defines the mission entrusted to him :

I have exalted thee to be my own son,
To propagated the true faith,
Go thou into the world,
And turn mankind away from senseless practices.²

Further on the account proceeds in the Guru disclaiming divine attributes to himself:

Any who name me Supreme Being
Shall all fall into the pit of hell.
Know me to be His servant.
Understand this to be without a doubt true.

2- These extracts are also from *Bachitra Natak*. In the last extract an idea similar to the Gita is expressed.

I am servant to the Supreme Being.
 And have come into the world to witness its play.
 I speak the Word as I have heard it from the Lord;
 And suppress not Divine Truth for fear of mortal man.³

Then, after some more verses defining his faith, the Guru proceeds:

For this have I come into the world,
 The Lord God sent me for the protection of Righteousness
 (*dharma*);
 That I spread the truth everywhere,
 And defeat and destroy the wicked and evil-doers.
 For this mission have I taken birth;
 Let all holy men know this in their inmost minds;
 To spread the truth, to uphold holy men,
 And to extirpate the wicked root and branch.⁴

This longish extirpate will help in forming a clear idea of the crusading mission against the forces of tyranny and evil established in the age in which the Guru lived. The history of India during the later Mughal period, particularly the reign of Aurangzib, is a record of religious fanaticism and oppression let loose by an oligarchy which exercised its unbridled despotism over the masses of the Indian people. The only sanction which might restrain such oppression was armed revolt on the part of such sections of the people as could so rise. All despotism and tyranny is, of course, humiliating to the sufferers and by a malevolent law of human nature, there is a strong element of sadism in all exercise of arbitrary power. There was in the process of this exercise of power little sparing the feelings of the Hindus, and as a matter of fact, non-Sunni Muslims too. In the days of the earlier Mughal Emperors something like a countrywide peace prevailed, and although the Hindus suffered some of the disabilities of aliens in a soil which was by right theirs, things did somehow continue for centuries without flaring up into a religious war. The humiliating enactments of Aurangzib, such for examples as the reimposition of the Jizya, the demolition of Hindu places of worship, the imposition of restrictions on erecting new temples and on the teaching of the Hindu faith and such other acts roused the spirit of vengeance among the victims and a movement of resistance began which ultimately destroyed the fabric of Mughal rule.

3-4. These extracts are also from *Bachitra Natak*. In the last extract an idea similar to the Gita is expressed.

In this resistance the Sikh religious movement played a pivotal part in the Punjab. As a matter of fact, while resistance was sporadic in other parts of the land, or dynastic and feudal, as in the case of a few Rajput clans, the Sikh resistance was inspired with a high sense of mission which the Gurus and their followers felt called to achieve and to fulfil. Hence, it was that this movement acquired certain unique features. In the first place, it had a continuity and a stamina which enabled it to carry on one of the grimmest struggles in the history of man against the most savage tyranny for over three quarters of a century. Then it was in the true sense a people's movement, in which the leaders were thrown up by the masses of peasants, artisans and other classes ranking low in the Hindu caste classification. All these leaders were not only men of ability and character in the usual political and military sense, but owed their leadership primarily to their being men of religion and piety, who held uncompromisingly even in the face of horrible torture and death to the mission which they felt they had been charged by the Guru to fulfil. It has been these features which turned the Sikhs not only into steadfast, hardy warriors and martyrs, and established among them something akin to a democracy or federation of clans, but also made the entire Sikh people into an approximation of the idea of a nation at a time when in India people had not yet developed the idea of nationhood, in which the bond of a common soil and commonly held ideals might be the cementing force. In those times people thought at the most in terms of tribal or sect loyalties. This, of course, has not stood in the way of the Sikhs merging themselves into the concerns of the larger Indian nation, as historical forces during the nineteenth century and after forged the idea of Indian nationhood. But that is another issue.

FORMATION OF THE HEROIC CHARACTER

There has been a distinct course of evolution within the Sikh faith since the time when Guru Nanak preached the worship of the Eternal, Unborn, Formless God and the supremacy of the pure life over rituals and creeds. The evolution was towards what it would not be inappropriate to call an expanding social and national consciousness. As has been said on many occasions, the germs of the later manifestation of heroism and armed resistance were present in the original ideals which Guru Nanak enunciated and preached. Only there was a change—a vast and significant change indeed—in emphasis. Sikhism, while it greatly stressed

the purity and integrity of the individual life, has at the same time always set its face against the life of the recluse. It would not take long to establish this manifest thesis. The Gurus were themselves all householders, and encouraged their followers to set up in various callings, trades and occupations. Religion was to be the inspiring spirit in a man's daily life, and not an over-arching influence which might wean him away from the world of corporate, social life. Guru Nanak and all his followers right up till Guru Gobind Singh have been critical of the austerities and ritualistic practices which obscure from man the need for a life of purity and virtue. The man of God is to live in this world, to practise righteousness and truth, but not to be of it. He must bear in his heart *vairag* or renunciation, but must on no account retreat from the scene of action. His renunciation must consist in his refusal to immerse himself in the pleasures of life, which are the source of selfishness and sin. 'This earth is the home of the True Lord', says the Holy Granth, 'the Lord has His abode in it'. Hence the injunction against its renunciation. The consequence of such an attitude was that the Sikh Church was always extremely sensitive to the social and political milieu, as it was shaping in contemporary India under Mughal rule. While ascetics and recluses were not immune from persecution and tyranny, as is clear from the stories of the persecution of such men, both Hindu and Muslim, like Kabir, Namdev, Sarmad the mystic and numerous others, the Sikh Church with its potentiality for becoming a force which in time might become dangerous, did not escape the watchful eye of the Mughal riders. Hence, it was that Jahangir found a pretext to send to death the holy Guru Arjan, fifth in the line, the saintly and divine singer of hymns of the glory of God and of overflowing love and tenderness for all mankind. In Guru Arjan's time the Sikh faith was acquiring an organization and form which made the rulers look upon it as a potential political force. Henceforth, as is well-known, the Sikhs thought of the Sword in addition to the Rosary, each symbolical of a certain attitude towards life. The Sword and the Rosary, of course, as has been stated earlier, never got parted, and heroism continued and continues still, among the Sikhs, to be spiritually and religiously inspired. This fusion of these two forces kept the Sikh spirit of heroism idealistic, and despite many deviations at the hands of ambitious individuals, has kept it close to its original fount of inspiration and has largely insulated public life against the inroads of corruption.

THE ROSARY AND THE SWORD

In the religious writings of the founders of Sikhism, and in the history of the Sikhs, at least where the religious inspiration was powerful, and influences like empire with their tendencies to change the descendants of heroes and martyrs into feudal chiefs had not brought in confusing notes, two distinct strains are noticeable: These are first, a spirit of idealism and humility and secondly, the conviction of a mission with which the man of God felt charged in this world to combat and destroy unrighteousness and tyranny. There has been a change of emphasis from one to the other strain, particularly after witnessing the martyrdom at the hands of the tyrannical power of the rulers of two of the holy Gurus—Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur. These outrages convinced this growing sect of peaceful, religious-minded people of the need to add the sword to the rosary as the symbolical equipment of their faith. Thus, Guru Hargobind, son of the martyred Guru Arjan, on occupying the seat of Guruship replaced the traditional rosary by two swords, symbolising spiritual and temporal power. His seat, instead of being called the 'cot' as heretofore was now called a 'throne'—which spot has since served as the central cathedral of Sikh spiritual authority. This is the famous Eternal Throne (Akal Takht), facing the Hari mandir or Golden Temple at Amritsar. Guru Hargobind was detained too for a period by order of Jahangir, but was later on freed. He fought several skirmishes with the royal troops, and ultimately retreated into the hills beyond easy reach of authority. His son, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth in the line of Guruship, was beheaded by order of Aurangzib in Delhi in 1675, leaving behind him his young son, nine years old, who was later to create the heroic force of the Khalsa and to leave such impress on the history of India. Guru Tegh Bahadur set himself up to create resistance to Mughal persecution among the people of Punjab, of what is now called Haryana and the areas surrounding Delhi. This resistance was intended, of course, to spread and to bring to an end the helpless suffering of people. This was undoubtedly the first instance of such resistance to the policies of a powerful empire in India, on such a vast scale. Its character was also distinct, inasmuch as that it was aroused neither by ruling chiefs, as in the case of the few Rajput princes who revolted, nor by a feudal lord, such as Shivaji Bhonsle was, but by a widely respected saint, whose only hold over the people was his holy way of life and his persuasive

word. It was, thus, in modern parlance a true people's movement. That obviously alarmed the Mughal authorities, and by the usual process of obtaining a verdict against the Guru from the ulema as spreading opposition to Islam, he was beheaded after torture and disgrace in Chandni Chowk.

SIKHISM AND THE HEROIC PAST OF INDIA

To revert now to the two strains which are visible all through the ideas which were moulding the Sikh character, it will as well be useful to relate these to the traditions of religion as these have grown in India for thousands of years. As has been implied earlier, according to the Indian point of view, heroism is the fruit of the penance and prayer of the man of God, of which the archetype and symbol is Shiva. The principle of Incarnation or Avatars, which is the basis of traditional Hinduism, postulates the assumption of human or other forms by Vishnu, the preserver, to restore the balance of truth and righteousness in the universe, when these are disturbed and menaced by rampant evil. That is what comes out, among other numerous texts, in the famous declaration of the Lord in the Gita, that He takes birth whenever righteousness is seen to fall into decline. Sikhism does not inculcate faith in the doctrine of Incarnation of the Creator—as a matter of fact, all through the Sikh Scripture such an idea is emphatically repudiated. But while the idea that the Divine ever assumes the human or other shape is rejected, and holy men are assumed to be spiritual guides, preceptors and heroes rather than gods, the ethical idea underlying this doctrine is reiterated in the teachings of the Gurus most forcefully. To a literal faith in the Incarnation of the Divine, the ethical-spiritual interpretation is given (and about the character and assumptions of such interpretation no ambiguity is allowed to remain), that the sway of evil is eternally challenged by the spirit of idealism in man, which despite suffering in sacrifice, must fulfil its function so as to challenge evil. This faith and vision is integral to Sikhism, and the Gurus, as has been said earlier, far from preaching a retreat from the affairs of the world in the way of the recluse, have constantly acted and striven to bring into the world the reign of truth. Guru Nanak has given expression in some of his hymns⁵ to the agony and suffering of his soul at the spectacle of the destruction and degradation caused in the Punjab by Babar, the founder of Mughal rule. This is, however,

5. Quoted below in excerpts.

not a mere static lament, but is of the nature of a profound meditation on the moral law which operates in shaping the history of nations and peoples: Defeat and degradation is the result of a life of selfish indulgence and godlessness. Those who are indifferent to the demands of the moral life must suffer as did the Pathan rulers of India in their encounter with Babar. Babar is the scourge. His invasion is the source of so much suffering to the innocent and the guilty alike. Mysterious are the ways of the Lord—who shall argue with Him? But, in words the pathos of which still wrings the heart after these centuries, the Guru addresses the question to the Creator: These (the Indian people) have wailed and cried under the conqueror's lash, didst thou not feel pity for them?

Such was, as the Guru expressed it, the mysterious dynamics of history. There is evil and there is suffering. Man has constantly to struggle to defeat this evil. The man of God must not shrink from taking on himself suffering, if necessary. In this struggle, God will, of course, be on the side of the righteous and the holy. His purposes must prevail, but whereas in the traditional Indian mythology the *rakshashas*, symbolizing evil, are destroyed by the miraculous intervention of the deity or the *avatar*, whose bolt smites the head of the demon just when he is about to perpetrate the most heinous outrage, in the Sikh religious thought only the ultimate triumph of good is assured, after long travail and suffering, and self-sacrifice on the part of the good and the holy. This is what introduces into Sikh thought the idea of martyrdom as the means towards the re-assertion of Good. The imagery of the compositions of the Gurus is so powerfully evocative of the experience of suffering that it leaves no room for the illusion that suffering is something distant or unreal or that it can be annulled by a miracle. The faith expressed by the Gurus is not in the annulment of suffering, but in the patient bearing of suffering as the mysterious way in which righteousness must triumph. To the man of God joy and sorrow are alike, and his spirit is attuned to passing through the one as through the other with the same equanimity. The experience of suffering is one of the constantly recurring themes of the meditations of the Gurus. Says Guru Nanak⁶:

6. *Guru Granth*, p. 360

7- All the references, unless stated otherwise, are to *Adi Granth*.

The soul hungers after the True Name :

By such hunger are all sorrows consumed. (Asa, page 9)

In another hymn again :

Fear has gripped my heart; to whom shall I express my travail?

My only recourse is to the Annuler of suffering, the Ever-Bountiful Lord. (Dhanasari-page 660)

The fourth Guru, in the course of a hymn, says :

If thou sendest me hunger, O Lord, I feel, still filled, and in suffering too find joy. (page 757)

The Word of Guru Arjan, who was subjected to unbearable tortures by the fiendishly sadistic minions of Jahangir, is a constant anticipation of suffering to be undergone in God's cause, yet his Word is also a constant paean of joy in God and in submission to His will. What is at the basis of such expression of bliss is not the hope of a miraculous annulment of suffering, but the transmutation of inevitable suffering through resignation and submission into the experience of bliss. Below are a few excerpts from the hymns of Guru Arjan, illustrative of this theme :

1. One who is in the extreme of difficulties, without succour and support from anyone,
And is beset by implacable foes, and deserted even by his kith and kin;
Is bereft of all shelter and hope of finding refuge—If such a one contemplate the Supreme Lord, not a breath of hot air shall touch him. (page 70)
2. One in whom is the love of the Lord,
All suffering, pain and doubt shall flee from him. (page 186)
3. Lord, those who have Thy succour
No suffering shall touch them. (page 188)
4. Under the wing of the Lord not a hot
breath of wind will touch me;
I am begirt with the miraculous
protective Arc of Rama—suffering fails to penetrate to me. (page 819)
5. Saith Nanak, my life has been one long joy. This life's night has
been a time of bliss. (page 1209)
6. Whatever be Thy will, O Lord, it is sweet to me :
All I crave for is the wealth of Thy Name. (page 394)
7. He who leans on the strength of the Lord,
All his desires are fulfilled; no suffering touches him. (page 1223)

Guru Arjan, who could bear with unruffled peace inhuman torture at the hands of persecutors, lived such a life as is expressed

in one of the sublimest passages in all religious poetry by a devotee, Bhai Gurdas, who was closely associated with him all through life. It is alone from a life so lived that such martyrdom can come.

As the fish are one with the waves of the river,
so was the Guru immersed in the River that is the Lord :

As the moth merges itself at sight into the flame,
so was the Guru's light merged with the Divine light.

In the extremest hours of suffering
he was aware of nothing except the Divine Lord,
like the deer who hears no sound but the beat of the hunter's drum;

Like the bee who is wrapped inside the lotus he passed the night
of this life as in a casket of joy;

Never did he forget to utter the Lord's Word, even as the *chatrik*
never fails to utter its cry;

To the man of God joy is the fruit of devotion and meditation with
equanimity in holy company.

May I be a sacrifice unto this Guru Arjan!

(Var 24)

The theme of resignation and self-surrender to the Lord is at the core of the teaching of the Gurus. Open the Holy Granth at any page, and in hymn after hymn is expressed the ideal of life as issuing forth in the spirit of humility and submission. As against egoism, the spirit of viewing all life in terms of pampering the self, and the consequent attitude of discontent and dissatisfaction, the Gurus preached what is at the core of all Indian idealism—renunciation and humility. Only in their system renunciation involved not a retreat from the normal concerns of existence, but the sacrifice of inordinate desire, and freedom from the five forms of evil enumerated by the traditional ethical philosophy of India. Through innumerable similes and images this point is brought home to the devotee. The man of God is like the *hansa*, the Swan, who has the power to separate the milk of spirituality from the water of worldliness. Thus does the man of God reject the ephemeral pleasure of the world, and enrich his soul only with the joy in the Eternal. By another simile, that of the lotus, the man of God is seen as resting on the water of the material world without being touched by it. Says Guru Arjan in his famous composition, *Sukhmani*.

The saint is ever undefiled as the lotus,

Untouched by the water on which it floats.

Spiritual bliss and joy imperishable, which overcomes all

suffering as experienced and bodied forth in their Word by the Gurus, is the fruit of this spirit of renunciation of man. They are viewed as fugitives from life, which demands of man a perpetual struggle with evil within the self and in the outside world, so that righteousness can be made to prevail. In his discussion on matters spiritual with the siddhas (saints) on the heights of the Himalays, Guru Nanak is reported in the words of Bhai Gurdas to have expostulated with them on their retreat from the world:

'The Saints have returned to the mountain heights :
who may then bring salvation to mankind?' (Var I)

Not a retreat away from the theatre of the perpetual struggle against evil in the world, but endeavour in the way of a pure life; to seek salvation and to bring salvation to the ideal as envisaged by the Gurus. At the end of his philosophical-spiritual composition, *Japuji* (Prayer Recitations), Guru Nanak sums up thus the end of the spiritual life:

Those who have meditated on the Name, have indeed made heroic endeavour;
Saith Nanak, their faces are illumined with the light divine, and through them countless others have obtained salvation.

The accent is on the man of God scattering the seed of his spirituality all around, so that others may participate in his God-consciousness and idealism.

Humility* is stressed as the quintessence of the noble and righteous life. To forgive and to live at peace with all mankind is the way of godliness. The Gurus have expressed themselves thus on this theme:

1. Make forgiveness and patience thy milch-cow; Thus will the calf of thy soul be fed with the milk of spiritual bliss.

(Guru Nanak—page 1329)

2. Humility is my mace; self-effacement is the spear I bear.

(Guru Arjan—page 628)

3. With forgiveness, self-discipline, noble conduct and contentment as my support,
Neither sickness nor the torments of death afflict me.

(Guru Nanak—page 223)

4. The lowliest of the lowly—the most despised among the castes—

Nanak stands by them—he emulates not the great and the

8. Bhai Gurdas in his First Var or Canto states that Guru Nanak returned from the sight of God with 'the ninefold wealth of the Name and Humility.' (*nau-nidh nam garibi pai*).

proud.

Lord, Thy grace and mercy **fall** on the land where the lowly are cherished.

(Guru Nanak—page 15)

The attribute by which Guru Nanak is known most is *patit-pavan*, the Sanctifier of the Fallen. This truly reflects his vision and ideal. This theme, as said earlier, is pervasive in the compositions of the Gurus and the Bhaktas like Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Farid and others whose hymns were approved for inclusion in the body of the Holy Granth by the compiler, Guru Arjan.

Idealism in the form of non-attachment is also a constantly recurring theme in the spiritual and ethical compositions of Guru Gobind Singh, who combined with his character of hero the ideals of saintly life. As a matter of fact, this fusion of the saintly character with the heroic is the special feature of the evolution of Sikhism, which it is the endeavour of the present chapter to show in its different facets.

Heroism is no less the pervasive theme of the Sikh Scriptural texts, but this is such heroism as is the final reward of a life of truth and righteousness. The men of God are designated by Guru Nanak in the wonderful concluding portions of the *Japuji* as 'mighty heroes, in whom is infused the spirit of Lord.' The bearers of heroic virtue among the women are like Sita, 'whose noble beauty is beyond description.'

Again, the man of God, without fear of worldly power and apprehension of what the evil of man can do, is the true hero. It is out of men bearing such a character that martyrs and heroes are made. The man of God continues fearless on the path of righteousness, secure in the faith that God covers him over like a shield. One of the favours which the man of God asks of the Lord is to be rendered fearless. Man is in fear as long as he is attached; it is his moral weakness which presents to him to spectre of fear. In *Sukhinani*, God is called "dispeller of fear, effacer of unrighteous thinking, and the protector of the unprotected.'

Guru Arjan reiterates it as the especial favour of the Lord to His servant to send him the gift of fearlessness.

Guru Nanak emphasises truthfulness to be the especial attribute of the pure in spirit. Only those who have attained true heroism dare utter the true word in the face of tyranny and persecution. This is the theme of the Guru's hymn, addressed to his host, the humble carpenter Lalo, in the midst of the carnage

by Babar's victorious hordes. Sparing neither Babar, the tyrant, nor the defeated rulers and people of India, who had forgotten God and righteousness, the Guru says, in words flaming with the spiritual passion:

I utter what the Lord puts into my mouth : Babar has descended upon India with his wedding party of lust, and unrighteously demands the surrender of the womanhood of India.

Decency and religion have hid their faces from sheer terror; unrighteousness struts about in triumph.

Muslim and Hindu priests are all thrust aside; the Devil is making unholy marriages:

Nanak, in this carnage everywhere rise wails and laments. Blood flows all around to serve for ritual saffron; Spare not to speak.

Just, however, is the Lord and just is His doom ; He is just ever.

(Those who live in sin) their life's garment shall be torn to tatters and shreds—let India remember my warning !

(page 722-23)

THE TRANSFORMATION UNDER GURU GOBIND SINGH

The transformation effected by Guru Gobind Singh in the Sikh character, seen in the total background of Sikh thought and the prevailing ideals would appear to be in the nature of the fulfilment of an urge which had all along been the basis of the faith communicated by the Gurus to their followers. Prominent in the Sikh mind was the image of the Creator as the foe and avenger of tyranny and evil.⁹ This faith was, of course, handed down to the Gurus and the Sikh people from the ancient past of India. Scattered all through the Guru-Bani or Scripture is the faith in God as the rescuer and succourer of the pure and the innocent from tyrants and oppressors. In the Indian past this idea had been transmuted into mythology, and numerous legends of the destruction of demoniac powers at the hands of the various forms that Divine Retribution took, were current among the people. Belonging to the primeval past are the legends of the destruction of *asuras* like Sumbha and Nisumbha, Mahikhasur and such others at the hands of Durga or Devi (the goddess par excellence) known by various names such as Bhavani, Chandi, Bhagauti, Chamunda, Mahakali and numerous more. This legend has been

9. This is the point in emphasizing which Sikhism distinctly stands out from the other medieval religious movements, labelled as Bhakti.

poetized again and again by Guru Gobind Singh himself and by the poets residing at his court. This legend with its power to instil heroism, and breathing in fierce intensity the spirit of endeavour was treated as the basic symbolic epic, to rouse the spirit of crusading zeal and sacrifice among those whom the Guru wished to prepare to take the sword against the oppressors of his own day.

There are then, the legends of the Avatar Narsimha, destroyer of the godless tyrant Harinakashyapa or Harnakash; of Rama who humbled the pride of the arrogant Ravana, and of Krishna, the destroyer of the murderer Kansa and other tyrants. In the Sikh tradition are embedded more recent stories of the men of God succoured by Him, such as the saint of Maharashtra, Namdev, who was traduced before the Sultan of his day; and the great Kabir, arraigned as a heretic. Guru Ram Das, the fourth Apostle, was slandered by a Khatri of the Marwaha clan, but his slander only recoded on him. The Guru has narrated the incident in a hymn of thanksgiving. His son Guru Arjan was sought to be attacked by a petty commander, Sulahi Khan, under the instigation of his own elder brother Prithia, smarting with chagrin at being passed over in nomination to the Guruship because of his crooked worldliness. It happened that Sulahi, while he was proceeding to attack the Guru with a force, fell into a burning brick kiln, and was charred to death. Guru Arjan has sung a song of thanksgiving on this deliverance. Note the imagery expressive of the might of the Lord to destroy and uproot tyrants. Such imagery is significant, as coming from Guru Arjan, whose heart was overflowing with gentleness:

Sulahi is rendered powerless to do harm; he has died wrapped in impurity.

The Lord, at one stroke of the axe smote his head; in a moment he was reduced to ashes.

He was destroyed, involved in his evil designs;

God who created him pushed him on to his death.

The power of his arms and his supporters, his wealth—

all shall cease to be; he has been wrested away from kith and kin.

Saith Nanak, I am a sac; **lfice** to the Lord who made good the word of his servant.¹⁰

10. In the great epic *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, Guru Arjan is reported also to have preached thus :
Fight with the tyrants who oppress the humble—therein lies true piety.'

The God worshipped by the Gurus has the attribute of might to destroy evil when it is rampant and becomes a menace to the existence of righteousness. This character comes out in numerous hymns : Guru Arjan, for example, refers to God as 'mighty to succour.'¹¹ Guru Nanak, in an exalted vision, refers to the destruction of evil and tyranny age after age. Thus runs one such hymn :

The beloved Lord created Krishna in the form of the child-hero and gave him the strength to drag by the hair the tyrants Kamsa and Chandur; He is the true Might, destroyer of the power of intoxicated brutes.

The Lord who made the universe, has kept all its affairs in His own power;

The universe is on His leash; He drags it withersoever He pleases; The proud tyrant shall inevitably be destroyed; while the saint meditating on Him shall be merged in Him. (page 606)

In another hymn on a similar theme, Guru Nanak enumerates the tyrants of mythology and legend such as the arrogant Ravana destroyed by Rama, Madhu-Kaitabh, Mahikhasur and Raktabij destroyed by Durga, Harnakash torn to pieces with the claws by the Lord as the Lion-Man; Jarasandha destroyed by Krishna and such others¹². In the words of Guru Arjan elsewhere, God 'destroys and uproots arrogants.' Anyone contemplating aggression on the meek and the poor, shall by the Lord be consumed in the fire of His wrath.¹³

Such hymns, to reiterate a point made before, but which will bear repetition, express faith in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, as against the facile belief encouraged by the mythological tales prevalent in India, inculcating the belief in the miraculous intervention of the Lord whenever the innocent and the saintly are facing oppression. The form that the faith in the ultimate triumph of righteousness has taken in Sikhism is to view such triumph as the consequence of the fearless and heroic struggle of the godly against the tyranny of the ungodly. In the rendering of the mythological tales of the epic fights between the forces of the gods and the demons by Guru Gobind Singh and the poets at his court, significantly, the battles are long drawn out, attended with terrible carnage and the victory of the gods is

11. Gur-Sura, literally the Heroic Lord (Page 293)

12. Page 224

13. Page 199

extremely hard won. The see-saw of battle is described in detail and with great gusto—the demons all but winning, but ultimately worsted against Durga or Rama or Krishna, as the contending deity may be. There is nowhere a hint of the easy, miraculous victory of the popular imagination. The struggle is terrible, full of travail and is the fruit not only of supreme heroism. In this feature is implicit the whole lesson which Sikhism was to inculcate regarding the true character of heroism both as a dedication and a course of self-invited suffering and travail in the pursuit of the ideal, which is to rid the world of evil and tyranny.

There are anticipations of such heroism in the compositions of the Gurus who preceded Guru Gobind Singh, and of some of the saints whose hymns are included in the Holy Granth. Says Guru Nanak while enunciating the hard path which the man of God must tread—the path of self-dedication and sacrifice, 'shouldst thou cherish the desire to participate in the play of ture love, place thy head on the palm of thy hand : then alone mayst thou enter this quarter : Shouldst thou put thy foot forward on this path, hesitate not to give up thy head.' (page 1412)

The man of God is defined as one who can 'bear the unbearable.' His steadfastness in the face of the temptations of the world and his endurance in suffering must almost be superhuman. Bhai Gurdas, the earliest of the chroniclers of the Gurus, has characterized the House of Guru Ram Das, from which were descended all the subsequent Gurus, as marked for its capacity above all 'to bear the unbearable'. This was in part a prophecy of the martyrdom, heroic suffering and righteous endeavour of the successive occupants of the throne of Guruship.

Guru Nanak has reprimanded the Kashatriyas¹⁴ of his day, proud of their martial descent and their role as heroes, of making abject surrender to the ruling Muslim clans, whose language, ways and customs they adopted to curry favour with them. While Guru Nanak did not lead an armed crusade himself, his Word continued to be the seed from which sprang the later heroic history of Sikh resistance to the tyranny unleashed by Aurangzib and his successors.

The saintly Kabir in words which continue to this day to inspire the Sikhs with the zeal and fervour of holy and patriotic war, has made what sounds like a clarion call to heroic endeavour.

14. Page 663

His call also makes true heroism in chivalry towards the poor and the humble :

The sky-resounding kettle-drum (of spiritual inspiration) is struck, and the heart is pierced with the true passion (for righteousness) : The hero is engaged in battle; now is the time to fight up to the last :

He alone is the hero who fights to defend the humble and the helpless;

Who even though hacked from limb to limb, will not flee the field."¹⁶

(page 1105)

This pervasive theme of heroic endeavour and travail and sacrifice taken on the aspect of joy in heroic campaigning in the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh, who grasped the sword to fight oppression in the field. In words which ring with the sound of fearless heroism and leave the heart deeply imbued with the spirit of dedication and devotion to an idealism demanding the supreme sacrifice, he has defined role and character of the true hero. In quatrains in the measure called *savaiya*, the attribute of God as the cherisher of the righteous and the foe of tyrants is repeatedly expressed with the emphasis and conviction born of undying faith. Below are quoted single lines or groups of lines from these compositions:

1. He cherishes the humble, protects the righteous and destroys evil-doers. (Akal Ustati)
2. He consumes into flames suffering and evil, and crushes the hordes of the wicked in an instant. (Akal Ustati)
15. Sikh history furnishes examples of thousands of martyrs, who in the spirit of the teachings of their religion underwent the most inhuman tortures without flinching. There is thus the story of Baba Ajit Singh, Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son, who with a body of Sikhs rescued a Brahmin woman from a petty Muslim dignitary and restored her to her family. There is similar incident in the life of the great warrior Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who rescued Hindu women from the aggressive Nawab of Kasur, when a supplication was laid before the Khalsa (the Sikh People) at the Akal Takht or Eternal Throne of the Guru for extricating them. Again, Mehtab Singh, hiding in the sand-dunes of far-off Bikaner, when he heard of the desecration of the Harimandir (Golden Temple) by a Muslim commander, called in Sikh History Massa Ranghar, vowed that he would cut off the head of the defiler. He made the arduous journey to Amritsar, and braving infinite dangers pounced upon the petty tyrant, cut off his head, while it is said he was doing horrible sacrilege at the holy spot by drinking and witnessing a performance by nautch girls in company. Thus was the desecration led off with the blood of the tyrant—in the true spirit of epic and legend.

3. Millions of demons such as Sumbha, Nisumbha, has He destroyed in an instant;

Dhumar-Lochana, Chanda, Munda and Mahikhasur has He defeated in a moment;

Demons like Chamara, Rana-Chichhura, Raktichhana has He slaughtered at a stroke—

With such a Master to protect him, why need this servant fear anything? (Bachitra Natak)

In a spirit of deep humility, the hero-saint seeks the protection and mercy of the Lord :

Exalt me into the Mountain in Sumeru from a straw :

In cherishing the humble art Thou unparalleled;

Forgive my errors O Lord. I that am compact all of errors;

Those who serve Thee, their homes Thou fillest to overflowing with wealth.

In this Iron Age in the mighty arms of the Wielder of the Sword of Eternity alone is my trust.' (Bachitra Natak)

Guru Gobind Singh has in numerous places expressed the ideal of the crusader in the path of God—yearning to attain the qualities which go to perfect such a character.

At the end of the rendering of the epic of Krishna in which, contrary to the usual presentation of this god as immersed in dalliance in the idyllic surroundings of Braj, his heroic aspect has been emphasized, the ideal heroic character is thus enunciated in verse which acquires sublimity in its flow;

Praised be he whose tongue is ever uttering the name of the Lord, and who is constantly contemplating holy war; This body shall one day turn to dust, but sailing in the ship of noble endeavour, his fame shall carry him across the ocean of this world;

A biding in the house of spiritual poise, he shall make his wisdom shine forth like a lamp;

And grasping firmly the broom of divine wisdom he shall sweep away the filth of cowardice.

Towards the close of the stirring epic narrative of the war of Durga, representing the avenging aspect of the God-head against evil and unrighteousness, the heroic character is defined in words which thrill with their undying idealism :

Grant me this boon, O Lord: May I never turn away from righteous action;

May I never know fear as I engage in battle with the foe, and resolve firmly to win;

May I ever instruct myself in the passion to utter Thy praises;

And at the last when the hour of destiny arrives, may it be granted me to lay down my life fighting on the field of battle!

With such ideals before him, the man of God is exhorted to fight on in the way of the Lord, in the faith that He will ultimately succour those who tread His path :

Against sickness and sorrow, from the dangers of land and water He gives protection in numerous ways;

May the foe's attacks be never so numerous, not one of these shall even graze His servant. (Akali Ustati)

Whosoever is protected by the Friend, what can the foe accomplish against him?

Not even his shadow can be touched; all the efforts of his brutish foes shall go in vain. (Bachitra Natak)

Such had been the course of eventful history of the Sikhs, in which faith, humility, the heroic spirit and the ideal of service and sacrifice ultimately turned a peace-loving sect into a dedicated army of heroes, who fearlessly fought the mighty Mughal Empire for near about a century. In their subsequent history they have shown courage and endurance in situations of heavy crises, which has elicited high praise even from their opponents. This continuing strength of character is undoubtedly a result of the powerful impulse of idealism and heroism which issuing from Guru Nanak, has ever kept their vision fixed on the role which they feel history has thrown on them, as liberators and heroes. This consciousness is embedded in the humblest and the least educated among the Sikhs, who imbibe the exhortation to what in popular parlance is known as '*dharma yuddha*' or 'righteous war' along with their daily prayer and their community life.

CHAPTER 3

INVOKING INDIA'S HEROIC TRADITIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE AGE

Guru Gobind Singh came to a heritage calling for heroism and vision to infuse the spirit of idealism and patriotism among a people, whom centuries of alien rule had turned supine, and whose only reaction to their situation was a sullen attitude of aloofness. The Hindu, no doubt, had declared the invading Muslim to be on a level of the untouchables of his own society, but that did not conjure away the ugly facts of oppression and tyranny. Muslim rule was firmly and securely established over the major portion of this vast land of India, and whatever resistance the Hindu princes had put in the beginning was rendered futile by their own petty rivalries and the lack of either a unified vision which should call forth the spirit of patriotism, or a powerful central authority whose resources should be strong enough to cope with the onrush of the foreign invaders, fired with the zeal of a proselytizing faith and the lure of plunder of a land reputed to be fabulously rich. At the time of the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazni or the later invasions of Shahabuddin of Ghaur, had there been in existence a large empire such as that over which Harsha had ruled such an empire would have thrown out the invader, and the history of India had perhaps then been different from what it came to be during the six-odd centuries of Muslim rule. As it was, the land was divided into numerous principalities, big and small, and they fell before the invader without much difficulty. Some of the battles fought by the native princes were determined, no doubt, but apart from the resources of such princes, the social and political organization which they could use against the invaders, was lacking in that power and puissance which alone could have stemmed the tide of the invasions.

As state after state fell, the courage and confidence of the invaders naturally grew and Hindu, long familiar with a philosophy

which viewed the world and its phenomena as illusion, turned his gaze farther and farther away from the secular problem of what in the larger sense may be called politics; and in despair with the temporal, fixed his gaze on the spiritual and the hereafter. Anything like a clear appraisal of the political and social situation was precluded by such a view, and the fact of Muslim conquest was tacitly accepted. Resistance, wherever it was made, soon crumbled so that the story of the spread of Islamic power towards the east and the south makes amazing reading. The Muslim invaders overthrew their Hindu opponents with the inevitability almost of a mathematical law, and all through the long history of Muslim rule, it will tax a historian's memory, barring a few minor victories, to mention any battles won by the Hindu princes against the Muslims.

Muslim rule in India took the well-known lines of development which it had taken elsewhere, wherever the conquering Arabs, and later their successors in conquest, the Persians, Turks, Afghans and others spread the banner of their victory. Whole nations were converted from their previous faiths, so that a complete metamorphosis came about in the history and traditions of vast masses spread over huge areas. This can be exemplified from the case of Persia, now called Iran; Egypt; the countries comprising Asia Minor; and the so-called 'Arab' lands of the northern parts of Africa. In all these Lands the pre-existing cultures, languages and scripts were wiped off, and replaced by the new culture and language of the conquerors. The degree to which the old languages were wiped off differed with the different countries, but even where the vestiges of the older cultures were not entirely wiped off as in Persia and Egypt, there were overwhelming and revolutionary changes. Conversions to the new faith were almost complete and total. Here and there small religious minorities survived, fighting desperately for their existence, and reduced to an inferior status in the body politic. In Central Asia the situation was somewhat different, where fierce warlike nationalities accepted the new faith and many features of its culture, but retained a large proportion of their own national characteristics. These nationalities in their turn coloured the look and conception of medieval Islam not a little, and by becoming its standard-bearers, carried into contemporary Islam many elements drawn from their own history, while assimilating to themselves many features of the original Arab, Koranic Islam.

India was perhaps too vast for the kind of total cultural conquest which the Muslims were able to effect in comparatively smaller lands and among less numerous populations. Moreover, while resistance and hatred were met with by the Muslim conquerors elsewhere too, the institutionalized kind of boycott which they encountered in India in the form of the assumption of untouchability for all Muslims as such, was a peculiar phenomenon. While the hang-over of that attitude is largely responsible for our ills in this country during and after the days of British rule—communalism with all its attendant evils—it was perhaps this institutionalized boycott of the Muslims which helped Hindu society to escape total absorption into Islam. A kind of xenophobia has long characterized the Hindu people, which while in the post-imperial ages has kept them confined within the country and discouraged the spirit of adventure, did an indirect good in keeping vast masses of Hindus immune from the influence of Islam. The Muslims were, nevertheless, able to convert a sizable portion of the Indian population to their own creed, partly by fair missionary work among the lower orders, who had little reason to love their Hindu overlords excessively, and partly by methods of state coercion and tyranny. That Hindu priestcraft during these ages was not only devoid of vision and blindly fanatical, but also corrupt and hypocritical, is amply borne out by the castigation of such corruption by the saints of medieval India, including Kabir and Guru Nanak. All these saints endeavoured to call man to the true essence of God-consciousness and the brotherhood of man. Muslim priestcraft was no less corrupt, and the average Muslim was as ignorant of the nobler essence of religion as the average Hindu.

Medieval India presented not only the spectacle of state tyranny, in which the Muslim was in a comparatively privileged position as compared with the Hindu, but a situation of innumerable warring creeds and sects. There was not only the larger phase of this strife as between the Hindus and the Muslims, who reacted to each other with collective hate, but also as between Muslim and Muslim and Hindu and Hindu. The Muslim sects were also numerous, and their doctrinal differences were sharp and often led to mutual persecution. But in India the vast majority of Muslims were of the Sunni persuasion whose doctrines are well-

1. I am aware of the imprecise character of the term 'Hindu' and its foreign odour, but for lack of a more precise term, this may do. Throughout this book, this term is used with this caution in mind.

codified, and which directed through the ruling Sultans a clear-cut state policy of discrimination and aggression against the Hindus. Other Muslim Churches like the Shia had comparatively fewer adherents, and except in scattered places and sporadically, did not have much political authority. They were, consequently, not in a position to deal with the Hindu populations aggressively like their Sunni counterparts.

THE INDIAN BABEL

The Hindu religious scene was a veritable babel. Apart from the four major castes, there were also many sub-castes and sects on the basis of domicile, history or some patron saint, and very often these sub-castes, despite bearing the same generic name, would not inter-dine or inter-marry. There were hundreds upon hundreds of sects and orders practising certain rituals which divided them sharply and aggressively, so that their cosmologies, philosophies and creedal practices were vastly different and there was open mutual hostility among them. It was only because of the common opposition which all these castes, sects and sub-castes felt for the Muslims with their foreign creed that they could be lumped collectively as Hindus—a name given in a spirit of contempt by the Muslims, though it has stuck on, and its original, contemptuous associations are by now forgotten. Originally 'Hindus' was synonymous with, as a matter of fact, the Muslim and earlier the Greek word 'Indian'.

This common and mutual dislike of the Muslims, however, did not confer any kind of unity of outlook or action or any vision of the non-Muslim people of India. Barring the social boycott of the Muslims, they may hardly be said to have had a policy or article of statesmanship, or even the consciousness of having lost their freedom, or of themselves and their creeds being subjected to the will of arrogant alien conquerors. The Muslim conquest was accepted, with the characteristic Indian attitude of resignation and passivity, as an act of fate, and there was little resistance to it. Here and there certain princes kept up the fight which in most cases was unequal and doomed to failure. Such resistance was feudal, dynastic and sporadic. Anything like the spectacle of a prince or saint or leader making a call against the foreigner or the common defiler of religion is not known to India during this period. The Christian princes of medieval Europe led the crusades to liberate Palestine, the holy land of Christ's birth, from the Turks; and the Christians of ninth century France and fifteenth century

Spain fought heroically to guard and liberate their lands from the Arabs. Any parallel phenomenon in India has not taken place, till we come to much later times, when the Sikh Church undertook such patriotic tasks of liberation. But of that a little later.

HEROISM AMONG THE HIGH AND THE LOW

There appears to have been cases of individual heroism and martyrdom on the part of the Hindus—princes as well as commoners—in standing steadfast by their faith and family piety in the face of Muslim coercion. The Maharashtrian saint, Namdev, appears to have been threatened with being trampled to death. The incident is narrated in an ecstatic vision, and is included in the *Adi Granth*. Namdev, standing steadfast by his faith, despite his mother's appeal to him to save his life by compromising his religion, is stated therein to have been succoured by the Lord who came riding on the mighty bird Garuda in all His splendour, as in ancient mythologies. Whatever interpretation may be put on the miraculous divine intervention, there is no doubt of the fact of religious persecution and Namdev's heroic steadfastness. Kabir was prosecuted as an apostate, and for reasons which cannot be precisely determined, was ultimately let off. There are then the innumerable stories of Hindu women—princesses as well as commoners—who immolated themselves rather than surrender their chastity to some Muslim prince or chief or local notable. Everyone knows of the noble sacrifice of Padmini, the Rani of Chittor, who escaped Alauddin Khilji's lust by leaping on the burning pyre, and of hosts of unnamed ladies and princesses who, immolated themselves in like circumstances. These are, even more touching, the stories of simple village maidens who, true to the noble traditions of Indian womanhood, defied the overtures of their Muslim captors, and not lured by the life of comfort which their surrender promised, sought honourable death in the flames of fire or the waves of river, pond or well. Several such ballads, typical of many such acts of sacrifice, are current in the Punjab and Rajasthan countryside. Such incidents no doubt occurred frequently in other parts of the country as well.

Despite such acts of individual heroism, there was no organized resistance to Muslim aggression, so that it would not be wrong to conclude that the Indian people as a whole had during

2. **The higher castes were called by the learned 'Arya', but this label also did not help to forge unity.**

this period fallen into a state of passivity and had completely faded to respond to the call of the times. Society was static in its vision, looking to a legendary past, which was not understood in realistic terms, but was viewed only through the cloudy vagueness of a hoary mythology. Mythologies allegorize and picture certain moral abstractions, but in the process they become completely inapplicable to any real situations, and while imparting faith, at the same time make any understanding of or adjustments to reality impossible. Religion in India in this age consisted in reiterating divisions and distinctions, so that while the externals were emphasized, the reality was rendered more and more vague. More than anything else, there was utter lack of a vision. No one, for example, appears to have formulated the thesis of the basic unity of the native creeds of India, known roughly as Hinduism, or of the unity of the people adhering to such creeds. No one appears, again, to have thought of applying the lessons of the ancient mythologies with their tales of heroic wars between the gods and demons, Right and Wrong or Good and Evil to the situation obtaining in India in these centuries of Muslim rule. It appears to have occurred to no one to think of applying the assurance of the Lord in the Gita, to rise again and again to uphold *dharma* or righteousness, to the age in which Hindudom was groaning under the crushing heel of Islam.

GURU NANAK'S VOICE

Demoralization was bound to set in soon after the foreign conquest, which maintained itself largely on ruthlessness and terror. The privileged classes, like their counterparts everywhere, were not slow to make such terms with the conquerors as circumstances might permit. They took to state service, and in the process, adapted themselves to the culture and tastes of the conquerors. History does not record any prominent Hindus who might have served as high officials or commanders of the state in the pre-Mughal period, though after particularly the conciliating policy of Akbar, such dignitaries became numerous, and in the lower strata also one hears of a large number of Hindu functionaries of various orders. But even in pre-Mughal times there must have been a very prominent set of Hindu nobles and commoners in the state service, and in their privileged position, they must have affected superiority to the common people. Guru Nanak must have regarded this phenomenon as sufficiently highly developed and a mark of national degradation. That is why he

thought it necessary to voice strong disapproval of the 'Muslimized' Hindu mercenaries who affected Muslim ways, and who must have sold their souls for worldly advantages. In the Dhanasari measures says Guru Nanak, commenting on this situation:

The Khatri (Kshatrias, the wielders of the sword) have turned away from the true faith, and have taken to tongue of the foreigner.
(page 663)

Elsewhere, while detailing the general state of degradation of the Hindus, Guru Nanak says :

They have begun to call the Creator Allah; this is the age of the supremacy of the Sheikhs (Muslim divines); The temples of the gods were taxed under this innovation;
The Muslims ablution, pitcher, the call of *namaz*, and the *namaz*, the Muslims' prayer-carpet are in vogue;
God himself is conceived by them in blue robes after the Muslims style;
Everyone takes pride in calling himself 'Mian' : thus is your language got perverted.'
(page 119)

The course of Sikhism in its early phases, while showing consciousness of the need for what may be termed the national outlook in unifying the warring sects, and further as between Hindu and Muslim, did not have any clear-cut 'political' tendencies. Guru Nanak is unique among the saints in India in showing sensitiveness on the question of national honour and self-respect, as witnessed by the portions of his compositions quoted above, and by his great conscience-stirring hymn on Babar facing the Indian people, steeped in their moral degradation; and his enunciation of the eternal law of God according to which immorality and unrighteousness must inevitably be visited with ruin. A few excerpts from these hymns will amply illustrate the view-point advanced here:

1. The Lord took Khurasan under His wing, but loosened terror over Hindustan;
Who can blame the Creator, as He sent the Mughal, incarnation of death;
In such anguish of suffering have the people of this land wailed;
Did not that move Thee to pity?
(page 360)
2. The lure of wealth brings people to forget God, and to suffer such degradation:
3. **The Muslim honorific title 'Mian' still continues to be current among certain Hindu families—no doubt a relic of those times. The Guru's point, of course, is not opposition to Islam or Muslims but the degradation to which the flattery of Muslim rulers brought the Hindus.**

It comes not except by wickedness and at death must fall off.

Those whom the Lord dooms to forget Himself, He deprives of all goodness. (page 417)

3. Babar has rushed down from Kabul with his wedding party of lust, and unrighteously demands the surrender of India's womanhood. Decency and religion have hid themselves from fright; unrighteousness is rampant and triumphant.

Muslim and Hindu priests are thrust aside; the Devil is making unholy marriages:

Nanak, in this carnage everywhere rise wails and laments; blood flows all around to serve for the ritual saffron.

Just, however, is the Lord and just is His doom; He is ever just.

(Those who live in sin) their life's garment shall be torn to tatters and shreds—Let India remember my warning! (page 72i 23)

These brief excerpts, particularly the last, are eloquent in expressing the agony, anguish and shame of Guru Nanak's soul, in which the outraged soul of India herself speaks. The shame, the degradation, the helplessness—no one till then had felt or expressed these so keenly. This is what distinguishes the Sikh religious movement from other contemporary religious orders, which comparatively were merely revivalist sects, however widespread their appeal. None of the others had the creative character of Sikhism, which Guru Nanak's vision brought to it.

The Sikh Church, however, continued up to the time of the fifth Apostle, Guru Arjan (martyred 1606) to spread the idea of the Beneficent and Just God of Guru Nanak's conception, to wean the people away from fanaticism and superstition, and in general to work for their moral uplift. The early Gurus were advocates of universal love and peace, and kept themselves away from political matters, engaged entirely in their beneficent spiritual ministry. There are rumblings of growing troubles, particularly from the time of the fourth Apostle, Guru Ram Das. One Khatri of the Marwaha clan appears to have traduced him to some authority, probably the viceroy at Lahore, but his complaint was rejected and recoiled on himself, so that he returned laden with shame and ignominy. The Guru has alluded to the incident in passionate language in a hymn, affirming his faith in the succour of His saints by the Lord.

By the time Guru Arjan came to occupy the apostolic seat, it appears the Sikh Church was gathering enough importance to draw on itself the hostility both of the Muslim divines and the Mughal court. Among others, Sheikh Ali Sirhindi, who arrogated

to himself the title of Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Sani (Renovator of Islam in the Second Millenium) is stated to have sent a complaint to Jahangir against the growing influence of Guru Arjan as a religious teacher, to whom some Muslims also showed reverence. 'This the fanatical Muslim theologians and priests naturally would not stand, and as a measure of striking terror among non-Muslims trying to 'pervert' Muslims and also by way of punishing him for his temerity in blessing Jahangir's rebel son, Khusro, then a fugitive from his father's terror, Guru Arjan was sentenced to death with torture. Religious persecution and political animosity both appear, on Jahangir's own testimony in his 'Tuzuk' or Memoirs, to be the motives which prompted the barbarous sentence against Guru Arjan. He is stated to have been offered the alternative to embrace Islam to save his life. Guru Arjan met his terrible fate in a spirit of calm faith, as few in the vast history of mankind have done. His life was a continuous toil in the service of the Lord, singing hymns overflowing with divine love and thanksgiving, bringing civilization and true religion among men and teaching all—Hindus as well as Muslims—the way to righteousness. His barbarous torture and death sent a wave of anguish and deep suffering among the Sikhs, and suddenly confronted them with the ugly but insistent fact of the existence in the world of tyrannous and arrogant power, from whose operation not even the holiest like Guru Arjan were immune, and which must inevitably take its evil course, unless deterred by the act of man or God. Such evil could not be forgotten in the face of its impinging reality. God is the principle of Righteousness, but evil is very really there in His world. Suffering is the way of the man of God in the face of assertive and arrogant evil. And it was this suffering of martyrdom, which Guru Arjan embraced with such calm resignation as only one God-inspired, like him, could show.

HISTORY TAKES A TURN

As is well-known, the young son of Guru Arjan, Hargobind, who succeeded him as the sixth Guru, adopted as the Apostolic style two swords, instead of the rosary of his predecessors. And his seat he called a 'throne' instead of a 'cot' as heretofore. These marks of royalty and power were necessitated by the need to reorientate the general outlook and policy of the Sikh Church : It

4. **Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. 1.**

had to make itself militant in order to survive the onslaught of the powerful Mughal Empire, now openly treading the path of persecution of other faiths. Certain consequences followed. The Guru's presence now came to be styled a 'court'; those who flocked to him brought gifts of arms and horses, and banded themselves into a small army. From this time on began that state of conflict with Mughal rule which continued ever after with occasional intervals of calm and peace. Guru Hargobind had also to undergo imprisonment for a period by order of his father's persecutor, Jahangir, but was later set free. With Shah Jahan's forces he fought a few skirmishes, and in the end retired to the foot of the hills beyond deep ravines, to Kiratpur. His relations with the Mughals were of open hostility. The Sikhs in the meantime were acquiring the character of a militant force, a kind of private militia, which was later given, with the inspiration and thoroughness of genius, such a powerful turn by Guru Gobind Singh, grandson of Guru Hargobind, just mentioned above. With Guru Gobind Singh the might and force of Hindudom, till then lying dormant and helpless, rose with the splendour of a powerful flood and swept off the torpor and meek sufferings of centuries. This was the initiation of a mighty revolution, the lighting of a torch to set ablaze a vast land—but of that in another place.

ANOTHER MARTYRDOM

Jahangir's policy of religious persecution appears not to have persisted for very long. It was possibly a politic assertion of Muslim theocratic power in reaction to the policy of tolerance pursued by Akbar, which in the eyes of orthodox Muslims was not in keeping with the character of the Islamic state, as the Sultanate of Delhi for several centuries had now come to be regarded. Aurangzib, who wrested the throne in 1656 after a series of brilliant though unscrupulous strokes of strategy, unleashed a countrywide campaign of religious persecution of the Hindus. Temples were demolished, idols were desecrated, the teaching of Hindu religion was banned, and repressive measures were enacted otherwise to degrade and humiliate the Hindus. Jizya, the Muslim canonical tax on non-Muslims was reimposed, and places of Hindu pilgrimage were taxed. All these measures, backed by a determined state drive of repression resulted in large-scale conversions to Islam under duress. These measures of Aurangzeb were aimed at turning India into an Islamic state in actual terms—by converting its entire population to Islam. Not only that, even the Shia Muslims,

professing a minority creed within Islam, who are looked upon as schismatists by the Sunnis (the sect to which Aurangzib belonged) were sought to be coerced into the Sunni Church. For this objective, Aurangzib, whose persistence was almost superhuman, spend the last twenty-five years of his life, when he was past sixty already, campaigning in the Deccan against the Shia Muslim kingdoms which after their conquest were to form a Mughal province, later to become the state of Hyderabad.

The Indian Muslims have not concealed Aurangzib's true role as the King who aimed at converting the whole of India to Islam. Contemporary Muslim writers of memories have flatteringly and out of a sense of elation recorded all the enactments of Aurangzib for the coercion of Hindus. The tradition lingers to this day among the advocates of Islamic domination in the Indian sub-continent to regard Aurangzib as almost a sacred personage, the Ghazi or crusader for the faith. The poet Iqbal, by whom has been nurtured in great part the idea of Islamic domination which in time became the demand for Pakistan, in his philosophical work in verse, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (Secrets of the Ecstatic Bliss) has narrated an incident of Aurangzib's intrepidity on the sudden appearance of a tiger when at prayer. In introducing the story, after lamenting the 'apostasy' of Akbar and the subsequent proliferation of that in Dara, Shah Jahan's mystically-inclined son, done to death by Aurangzib, his younger brother—Aurangzib is significantly designed as 'Tarkash-i-mara khadang-i-akhirin': (The last arrow in our, i. e. the Indian Muslims', quiver).

Guru Tegh Bahadur, of a retiring temperament and singer of hymns expressing deep non-attachment to the world was, however, drawn from his saintly life into the vortex of the contemporary conflict when Aurangzib's campaign of the coercion of Hindus touched unbearable limits. According to the Sikh tradition certain Kashmiri Brahmins, in whose land the coercive conversion of Hindus to Islam was certainly an open and daily tyranny, came in deputation to Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur, his retreat at the foot of the hills near the eastern bank of the Sutlej. This Anandpur was destined later to play such an important role in the history of the Sikhs and to be the fountain-head of their heroic inspiration. It is stated that on hearing their tale of woe, the Guru sent word through these Kashmiri Brahmins to Aurangzib to convert him first, and if so, the rest of the Hindus would follow suit. It is not possible to determine the authenticity of this story

in all its details, but there is no doubt that stirred by the need to assert himself in the face of such open tyranny, the Guru sought to create resistance to this religious persecution. This is not the same thing as a general revolt against Mughal rule as such. That, as a matter of fact, was not in the mind either of Guru Tegh Bahadur or his son Guru Gobind Singh. It was an assertion and a gesture of national honour and self-respect—an act of protest, so to speak—but not a revolt in the ordinary political sense. For this purpose he undertook a tour of the lands lying south, in the neighbourhood of the imperial capital, Dehli. The Guru's progress lay towards Dehli and beyond up to Agra, through the tracts which now comprise the areas of Ambala, Patiala, Sangrur, Jind, Narwana, Kurukshetra, Rohtak and other tracts adjoining the Capital. On the route taken by him to preach steadfastness in faith, shrines exist, sacred to his memory. That the Guru was preaching resistance to his State programme of religious persecution is amply borne out by the fact of his arrest on some trumped up charge and the sentence of torture, execution and quartering passed on him. That Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life a martyr to the cause of the protection of Hindu religion is testified by the tribute paid to his father by Guru Gobind Singh himself, in his autobiographical fragment, *Bachitra Natak* (The Wonderful Drama). Thus runs the great passage :

The Lord (Teg Bahadur) protected their^s religious sacraments;⁶
 A mighty deed was performed in this (dark) Kali Age.
 He who made this great sacrifice for the good and the holy,
 Gave away his head, but uttered not the whisper of a groan.
 He did this noble deed for the protection of faith;
 He gave up life but not his ideal.⁷
 To perform tricks^s and such petty practices would be a shame for
 men of God.

'Their' refers no doubt to the Kashmiri Hindus, about whose appeal to the Guru this account is silent, but from the context some appeal is implied.

Literally, the paste-mark and the thread.

Some scholars would interpret 'Prabh' (Prabhu) in this passage as God. But the whole context, which recounts the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur, points away from such an interpretation.

There is a tradition, borne out here, that the Muslim divine trying Guru Tegh Bahadur asked him to show a miracle if he was a prophet as was reputed. He contemptuously repudiated the suggestion, as it would be unworthy of a man of God to save his life by tricks. He was determined to wear the martyr's crown.

He smashed the potsherd of his life on the head of the King of
 Delhi, and departed for the City of the Lord;
 None else has equalled what Tegh Bahadur performed.
 On his departure the world was plunged in grief;
 The world cried out in anguish, but the gods greeted him with
 shouts of victory.

The impact of the great sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur, was extremely powerful and far-reaching in its consequences on the Sikh people. The child-Guru, as Guru Gobind Singh then was,⁹ retired with his family and followers to a place further into the interior, protected by deep ravines, and accessible to the Mughal soldiery with difficulty. This was Paonta, situated on the western bank of the Jamuna, at a junction of hill-roads leading to the north-east towards the valley of Dehradun, and towards the north-west to Nahan, Kangra, Mandi and the area surrounding these. This was a purely Hindu area, inhabited by the hill folk, whose rulers were of Rajput origin, who were themselves refugees from the Muslim coercion of an earlier age. Here the Guru, as testified by himself, spent his time in receiving various kinds of skills, scholarly and martial; and engaged a great deal in hunting and other manly exercises.

The Guru, of course, continued here to be visited by his devotees from all parts of the land, particularly from the centre of the Parjab, A township grew at this picturesque and lovely spot. 'Paonta' literally means 'foot-rest'—the place where the Guru settled down to make his halt. Evidently a numerous camp grew around the handsome and heroic Guru, scion of a dynasty which stood for the protection of faith—the Redeemer, the Lord Splendid. Here the Guru, when he was come of age, ran into troubles with the hill chiefs, who looked upon him as a rival power, bidding fair to constitute a threat to their hegemony. They formed a great alliance against him, attacked him and a pitched bloody battle was fought at Bhangani, a few miles away from Paonta. This itself shows that the hill chiefs were the aggressors and invaders, and the Guru fought a defensive action. In this battle as many as four important hill chiefs were killed, along with a large number of their retainers, including some of their Muslim mercenaries, deserters from the Guru's service. According to the accounts of

9. His name from birth was Gobind Rai. He adopted the name Gobind Singh like all Sikhs after the new 'Baptism of Steel' which was introduced in Samvat 1756 (1699).

this battle preserved by the hill states, eight *ranis* performed *sati* along with their husbands' bodies. The Guru's victory was complete, but evidently he did not covet any territory and moreover, did not wish to enter into unnecessary further skirmishes and vendetta and counter-vendetta with the hill chiefs. Such battles, however, were forced on him later. It is not the intention here to give a detailed account of the Guru's battles, which can be read about in the Guru's biographical accounts. The points to be elucidated here are mainly two—the causes which prompted the hill chiefs to make concerted and repeated attacks on the Guru, and the Guru's own plan to raise the heroic spirit among the Indian people. These two points, therefore, are considered below.

OBSTRUCTIONS FROM WITHIN

Guru Gobind Singh had not only to contend with the powerful and vastly resourceful empire of Aurangzib, backed by aroused Muslim fanaticism, but also with the apathy and active hostility of influential elements within Hindudom. The fight of Guru Gobind Singh was not against Muslims as such, or against Islam. The Muslim masses, who were for the most part Hindu converts and only partially initiated into the creed of Islam, were indifferent to controversial issues, and only aware in a dim way of the difference between Muslim and Hindu in certain externals. The small minority who were descendants of the invading Turks, Afghans, Turanians and Mughals and other foreigners, and who had the privileged position as an army of occupation, and led the campaigns of coercion and Hindu-baiting. But even so, not every upper class Muslim was a sworn enemy of Hindus, and the general communal problem in the sense in which we have learnt to view it since recent times, did not exist. It was only in large towns where there were seats of authority that scenes of persecution of Hindus were occasionally witnessed. A general situation in which the Hindu might be driven to the wall, would arise only when a special policy to this effect was initiated, as happened during the reign of Aurangzib, or earlier in such periods as the reigns of Firoz Tughlak and Alauddin Khilji.

Generally, there was communal peace. When a campaign was on, as after the mighty developments within the Sikh Church with the initiation of the New Baptism of Steel, the Muslim countryside might be aroused to harass and pursue the Sikhs, as was actually done, partly in the name of religion and partly by the attraction of murder and loot. But usually there would be Muslims

fighting along with the Hindus. In any case, however, peaceful and broadbased in universal terms Guru Gobind Singh's appeal might be, his fight against Mughal persecution was sooner or later bound to arouse the general opposition not only of the Muslim nobility, but also of the Muslim masses. That was natural and inevitable, and for the Guru to be dubbed and hunted as an enemy of the Muslims, however wrong, was unavoidable. Some Muslims still were loyal and helpful to him to the last, but these were the exceptions. The generality of the Muslims joined in the hunt. The Muslim countryside was in turn ravaged a few years later by the hurricane which Banda Bahadur raised.

The more surprising thing was the Hindu opposition. Hindu indifference to Sikhism was understandable. Sikhism was, of course, not just another sect within Hinduism, emphasizing this or that ritual or practice or belief. If it were such, with one of the current deities or ritual practices as the cardinal element in its teaching, Hindudom would obviously have recognized as only a restatement of itself, and then it would have drawn a loosely assorted Hindu following, and settled down as a creed within Hinduism. As a matter of fact, after particularly the establishment of the Sikh Kingdom till the rise of the orthodox reform movement called the Singh Sabha, Sikhism did tend to lapse into general Hinduism. In that phase, the true meaning of the Guru's Word was only partially understood and perhaps misinterpreted through ignorance or deliberate perversion, and there was the open spectacle of Sikhism reverting to Sanatanist practices.

But Sikhism, while maintaining a vital relationship with Hinduism through certain fundamental beliefs, such as that of transmigration and in general ethical and philosophical ideas particularly in emphasizing non-attachment without commending mendicancy, did at the same time make fundamental departure which would not fit in with the notions of the average Hindu accepted as vital for millenia. The enlightened Hindu would find expressed in the teachings of Sikhism most of the lofty ideals which the sages of India had of old preached. The vocabulary, terminology and illustrative mythological literature used by Sikhism were overwhelmingly Hindu, except for the use here and there of a few spiritual and ethical expressions derived from Persian and Arabic and partly because these were commonly understood in medieval India and partly in order to foster the spirit of tolerance for the Muslims and generally to create an atmosphere of goodwill. Certain terms

were given in Sikhism a new orientation, such as 'seva' (service), 'Akal' (the Eternal), 'sangat' (congregation), 'Guru' (the Preceptor), 'Kartar' (The Creator, in the monotheistic sense), 'Gurdwara' (The Temple) etc., etc. But despite these special features which were not totally unfamiliar to a Hindu, Sikhism presented a new dynamic view of life, revolutionary in its implications. It repudiated the ascetic ideal and the life of the recluse. It hit at untouchability in particular and many aspects of caste—chiefly at the idea of the sanctity of the Brahmin and his exclusive prerogative to set up as the custodian and preceptor of religion. Further, it rejected a vast body of superstitions, beliefs and propitiatory and quasi-magical practices which had in the ages of decadence got identified with Hinduism. Again, belief in the *avatars* or incarnations of the Supreme Being, such as Rama and Krishna and the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and other gods and goddesses found no place in the unadulterated monotheism¹⁰ of the Sikh creed. So also was idol worship repudiated, and even the uneducated Sikh understood that rather than bow before, idols, he must bow before the Guru as symbolised in the Holy Book.

Sikhism made for a general realistic approach to the problem of life, and exhibited what may be called the historical imagination in reacting to the social situation. This again was a revolutionary idea, as against the general impression of the Hindu outlook in a mythological past, uncritical and vague in its approach to problems, to which it reacted unrealistically. Nevertheless, as long as the main emphasis of Sikhism till the time of Guru Arjan was on Bhakti (Devotion), Simran (i.e. Smaran or Meditation) and general piety, the Hindu still could recognize it as something not very unfamiliar. Consequently, during this period high caste Hindus, particularly of the Khatri (Kshatriya) caste, came under its influence, with a good admixture of the other castes, high and low. But with the revolutionary turn towards resistance and militarism which Sikhism appeared to take after the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, it presented to the average Hindu a somewhat unfamiliar emphasis. While Hinduism had a glorious heroic past, it had ceased to have a realistic appeal because of the mythological manner of its presentation of war. The Hindus failed to realize that the Asuras and Rakhasas (Demons and Monsters) of the

10. Sikhism is apparently monotheistic, though its cosmology is much wider than simple monotheism would imply.

legends and myths of his religious fictions were here and now in the shape of the tyrants of these later times. This link he could not provide, for his approach was fictional and mythological. Hence to the average Hindu, Sikhism was strange and startling, which he could not fit into his notions. The dynamic view of history which he did not have could alone have justified Sikhism to him. Hence, while Guru Hargobind and his son and grandson, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh, engaged in a mighty crusade, the Hindu stood aloof generally. It was those who stood practically outside the pale of orthodox Hinduism—the Jats, Kalals, Carpenters and other workers, who mainly carried the burden of the new revolutionary programme of the Gurus. The higher castes came in only in a trickle. That, however, is the general pattern of all ideological and social revolutions.

To turn now to the Hindu hill chiefs who came in conflict with Guru Gobind Singh. They were, despite their petty principalities, extremely proud scions of families which had long ruled over these areas. They were, besides, under the influence of an age-long religious and social conservatism, difficult to shake out of its old ruts. As a matter of fact, these areas to this day continue to be more conservative than the neighbouring plains of the Punjab. The society which these chiefs represented was characterized by a great incapacity to adjust itself to the changing demands of historical forces, which had long been a feature of Hindu society. Hindu imagination hitched itself to a hoary past, which coloured its entire approach to life; and by shutting out a dynamic view of history, rendered itself static and helpless against aggression. India of the past, of course, was a vast world in itself—a conglomeration of numerous kingdoms; and a unit or a country only in the sense that its people had a common social code, which provided the irreducible minimum that bound them in what may be called an ethico-socio-spiritual entity. This society, spread over such a vast area for that age of primitive communications, separated at every few miles by differences of customs and language, was moreover governed by a rigid caste-system, assumed to be established by the gods themselves and admitting of no reform or reorientation. The new ideals of Guru Gobind Singh, which could be fulfilled only by a people who could entertain the view of a dynamic society, and who could make adjustments to the unsparring demands of history and had vision and foresight, were not only not understood by the higher castes and classes among

the Hindus, but were actually violently opposed by them. It was still another instance of the patient stabbing the physician, or the riders on the boat attacking the pilot in mid-stream while the tempest was raging. Not that this is a rare phenomenon in history. Those who have sought to benefit mankind at the cost of their comfort and life, have been paid back only with indifference, calumny and hostility. So, Guru Gobind Singh met with disapproval from the Brahmins who thought he was subverting the ancient basis of society when he sought to bring all the castes (the four *varnas*) together, like his predecessors in the House of Nanak. To the conservative mind the new synthesis of Hinduism, which Guru Gobind Singh sought to formulate, was unintelligible. It looked upon the new movement in the nature of heresy and apostasy.

The Hindu chiefs and feudal lords, who had their own vested interests to serve, and like all members of their class, would make all kinds of compromises with those more powerful than themselves (in this case of Mughals) in order to retain their privileges, would naturally be with their overlords against a leader like the Guru, whose movement was subversive of authority. While on the one hand they were anxious not to fall foul of the Mughal viceroys, who held them under the terror of their authority, on the other they were as much afraid of a mass-movement of the less privileged orders. Such a movement meant a challenge to themselves and to their henchmen. Hence the virulent opposition of the Hill Chiefs of the lower Sivalik ranges, around the present districts of Nahan, Hoshiarpur, Kangra and Mandi, to the new Order of Guru Gobind Singh. They had inherited traditions of fighting from their ancestors, but their rule was that of an oligarchy, given to its privileges and pleasures, playing petty power-politics, and afraid of change, which, moreover, they did not understand.

THE HEROIC PAST

As stated by himself in *Bachitra Natak* (already referred to) Guru Gobind Singh felt called upon by the Lord to 'go into the terrestrial world and establish the faith; and further to turn mankind away from senseless practices'. The mandate of the Lord ran: 'Spread righteousness and defeat and destroy the wicked and evildoers everywhere: To spread righteousness, to uphold holy men and to uproot the wicked root and branch'¹¹

11. Larger excerpts from *Vichitra Natak* are reproduced in translation elsewhere in this book.

This statement of his life's mission thus expressed in mythological terms points clearly to the over-riding idea in the Guru's mind to prepare himself and his followers for a crusade in defence of faith and honour which the Mughal overlords of his day were so ruthlessly attacking, and to end a situation in which a non-Muslim could live only in the most object servitude. This, of course, does not imply all that a 'political' programme in these times would imply or include, like a revolutionary plan to wrest power and to deprive the occupants of the royal seat of their positions. As time passed, some of these objectives, by the inescapable logic of events, did get incorporated into the general movement of Sikhism, and sovereignty did as a matter of fact pass from the arrogant but effete Mughal lords to the unprivileged multitudes, so that Bulleh Shah, the Sufi poet of eighteenth century Punjab, felt constrained to sum up the political situation thus:

God in His Inscrutable Will has conferred kingship on the wearers of rough blankets¹².

The haughty Mughals are forced from frustration to swallow poison bowls.

There is in these times such a tendency particularly among the younger, university-educated interpreters of Sikhism to view the life-work of Guru Gobind Singh on the analogy of the careers of the creators of political and ideological revolutions of our times, so that wrong perspectives are obtained and the true and historical figure of the Guru-saint, God-inspired superman and crusader, but no carver out of political order is likely to be reduced to that of a mere revolutionery and ideologue. The Guru's life work was much deeper and of a much more lasting character than that of the creator of a revolution, albeit out of his work revolutionary movements and far-reaching consequences affecting the destinies of peoples and nations flow, as did from the work of other founders of faiths. He fixed men's minds on the ideal—the quest for right and truth—from which crusading action naturally flowed, intimately to bring down those in the seats of arrogant and iniquitous power.

The Guru's early life, first at Anandpur where his holy father, Guru Tegh Bahadur was living, and after his martyrdom, at the retreat of Paonta where a large force grew around him and he came to be looked upon as a power to be reckoned with by the neighbouring chiefs, is described in summary hints in *Bachitra*

12. Refers no doubt to the leaders of the bands of Sikh peasants.

Natak, than which naturally there is no more trustworthy testimony:

I was brought (from the eastern parts) into the Punjab land,
 And fondled by various nurses.
 I was looked after in a variety of ways,
 And given instruction in several arts.
 When I came of the age to handle affairs of faith,¹³
 My father departed to the Abode of the Lord.
 When the management of the estate¹⁴ devolved on me,
 I advanced the Cause of faith with my best endeavour.
 In various forests did I pursue the chase,
 And hunt the bear, the *nilgao* and the stag.
 Later I changed my abode to new parts,
 And turned my attention to setting up the town of Paonta.
 There I enjoyed a rich life on the banks of the Jamuna.
 And saw various kinds of wonderful sights.
 Many a tiger of that area did I kill,
 As well as pierce *nilgao* and the bear.

During all this period, the Guru was engaged in perfecting himself in martial exercises and no doubt encouraging his followers, whose numbers were ever on the increase by those who came to join him from the plains of the Panjab, to imbibe a similar discipline of arms. He was also, as stated in the lines quoted above, 'advancing the cause of faith,' which means increase in the number of devout followers of Sikhism who imbibed the faith from the sight and work of the Guru himself. Presumably a large portion of the devotional hymns of the Guru's own composition belongs to this period when, we are told, he would rise at early dawn, engage in prayer and meditation, and compose the hymns and prayers which are now part of the daily prayer of the Sikhs.

Here no doubt accounts of the increasing atrocities of the Mughals would reach the Guru. His influence and power were increasing. Out in plains the Sikhs were raising material resources to build up the Guru's strength, as is testified by some of the *'hukamnamahs'* or Command-Epistles of the Guru to the Sikhs, who were called upon from time to time to contribute money and equipment to the community store.

As the Guru was contemplating a crusade against the

13. The Guru was nine years old when Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred in 1675.
14. Anandpur was like a principality of which the Guru was in a sense the chief, with duties secular as well as religious.

oppressors of his day, invoking the spirit of sacrifice and heroism, he had to meet opposition from wholly unexpected quarters—the hill chiefs of the neighbourhood. As the *Bachitra Natak* says:

Then did the Raja Fateh Shah turn his hostility on us,
 And engaged in war without cause.¹⁵

This was really concerted attack on the Guru by an alliance of several hill rajas, already referred to. The result was the great battle of Bhangani, in which the Guru won a great victory. There were a series of other battles at and around Anandpur, to which the Guru later on moved. The accounts of these battles are given in the *Bachitra Natak*, composed by the Guru much before the time when the rising crisis led him to give a new shape to the Sikh Church in initiating the Baptism of Steel.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HEROIC POETRY COMPOSED AND SPONSORED BY THE GURU

During his residence at Anandpur, Paonta and his hunting excursions in the hills,¹⁶ the Guru must have come much in contact with the cult of Durga, called Devi or the Goddess, who according to Indian mythology, is the consort of Shiva, and in her various manifestations is Shakti, the Creative Force as well as Chandi, the Destroyer of evil, conceived to be embodied as killer of *asuras* or demons. She wears several names in various parts of the country. She is known as Chamunda, Kali, Kalika, Bhavani, Mangala, Hingula and by several other names. The mythological tale of the battles between Chandi and the *asuras* is narrated in the Markandeya Purana. In this tale Chandi, the goddess, is conceived as riding to battle on a Lion, wielding weapons with her eight hands, wading through the blood of the slaughtered *asuras*, wearing a garland of their severed heads and attended by hosts of male and female goblins, luxuriating in the carnage made by her, and drinking their fill of the blood split. Such is the conception of

15. He was the Raja of Tehri Garhwal, an area comprising modern Dehra Dun, and neighbouring Paonta on the other bank of the Jamuna.
16. The Guru was moving much in the area along the upper reaches of the Sutlej. Hence the appropriateness of naming the lake leading to the Bhakra Dam after him, Gobind Sagar. A large rock at Mandi marks the spot where he is reported to have meditated in the bed of the river Beas. At Nahan which he visited at the invitation of its friendly Raja, Medani Prakash, his camping spot is marked by a Gurdwara, at less than a furlong from the royal residence. Inside the place, in the State Hall, a sword, on the hilt of which the Guru's name is embossed in Gurmukhi, is kept as an article of special note. This was the Guru's gift to the Raja.

Chandi, familiar to the Hindu mind, and doubtlessly literally believed in and worshipped in her awesome images in temples sacred to her. Such temples are found in all parts of the country,¹⁷ and in larger places she may have a special temple erected to her, along with other temples sacred to other deities like Krishna and Shiva and others. But the Devi cult is particularly prevalent in the hill areas, and upto now in the districts of Hoshiarpur, Kangra, Simla, Nahan and in Himachal Pradesh in general her worship is the most popular. She is propitiated for all kinds of boons and against all manner of ills.

The story of Durga (Chandi) appears to have deeply fascinated the Guru, as symbolising the might of the Divine Arm in chastising and castigating the evil powers. As shown elsewhere in this book, deep and abiding faith in the ultimate succour of the good and the holy by the Lord of the Universe is a cardinal principle in the religion formulated by Guru Nanak, and communicated and re-emphasized with such force and vehemence by his successors. Such faith is in accord also with the oft-quoted famous words in the Gita, in which the Lord has held out the assurance of intervening in the affairs of the universe in the ages when righteousness has tended to suffer a setback. As amply shown elsewhere from quotations from the compositions of Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh, this faith is pivotal in the cosmology and philosophy of Sikhism, with only this difference that divine intervention was looked upon as the assurance of the ultimate triumph of Right despite its apparent tribulations, and not through the easy, miraculous intervention of the gods, which a superficial view of mythology would tend to encourage. Sikhism recognized the inevitable necessity of a bitter struggle, involving deep suffering and martyrdom for God's saints and crusaders in the war against evil. Sikhism gave poignant reality, by the martyrdom undergone by two of its Preceptors and the tribulations faced by the Guru and countless Sikhs, to the idea of Dharma-Vir or the Crusader for faith. He was conceived to be the divinely-inspired hero, fighting for the ideal and not for a worldly objective. Such was the Guru himself, and such the cardinal principle inculcated by him. The vision which emerges in the meditations of the Teachers of Sikhism is more in accord with the deeper reality at the core of the mystery

17. There are a large number in the plains, particularly the hills of the Panjab.

of the universe than the commonly preached mythological view of an inexplicable miraculous intervention. The commonly accepted view would tend to stifle effort and struggle, and to lodge the upholding of the Right in the mysterious power of the gods rather than in the pure will and undying idealism of the human spirit, resolved to undergo all suffering and to flinch from no trial in defending Right. This was the inherent difference which gave to Sikhism such power to initiate, to move and to budge, as against the traditional creeds which left the mind perplexed and unprepared for heroic endeavour.

The Durga-Chandi legend had in it all the elements which, as the Guru perceived, could serve as an analogy or allegory of the situation into which the people of India were thrown for centuries under the heels of arrogant, ruthless tyrants. Symbolical references to the Divine Might operating as mythological deities are scattered in hundreds of hymns of the Sikh Scripture, and the whole tradition and its meaning were familiar to the Sikhs, as to Hindus in general. In transparent references to the tyrants of their own days, the Gurus had symbolised them as the demons, so much familiarized to the popular imagination by mythology. To destroy tyranny the Sword must be unsheathed—the Sword as the might of India, to strike against the Demons of these later times. Unless the soul of India could be aroused to burn all this tyranny in this mighty flame, there would be no end to her ills. By arousing this spirit alone could the Guru fulfil the Lord's mandate, as stated in *Bachitra Natak*, 'to destroy the wicked root and branch.' On meditating this legend and its meaning, its deeper significance and its applicability became all the more apparent and powerfully appealing. The Durga-legend was still a living faith with vast masses of the Indian people, who believed literally in this goddess having destroyed the Demons, embodiments of evil, at some time in the hoary past. And this faith postulated the reappearance of the goddess as representative of the Divine Might (Shakti) to appear once again to destroy evil. It was prophesied and believed that at a time when the earth would be oppressed with evil, the last Incarnation of the Lord, called Kalki would appear on earth, and clear it of ungodly evil-doers. This event was thought to await consummation at some time in the indeterminate future, but there was the surest and firmest conviction that when the conditions so demanded and the right moment came, the Lord as Kalki would appear to initiate the new millennium (a new Sat-yuga).

The creative genius of Guru Gobind Singh lay in clearly reading the symbolical meanings of the legends of Durga, Rama, Krishna, Kalki and others. The Demons were not rampant only in the remote past', calculated according to Hindu mythology in terms of hundreds of thousands of years. Nor was the Promised Appearance of the Lord, similarly thousands of years away. That was precisely, however, as the Indian mind read the meaning of human history : the Lord's intervention was in the hoary past and an indeterminate future. No one thought as to what the meaning of the events of the recent past and the present was. It was thought as if by some inscrutable law, the divine processes were suspended now and from of late, and for the near future. A strangely imperceptive and unrealistic appraisal of the human situation! The Guru saw and wished his contemporaries to realize that the Demonic forces were there, and performing their devil's dance in this holy land of piety and faith. The Asuras were not far; they were there in the form of every marauder, every arrogant agent of those who held the reins of power. This was precisely the moment when a new Chandi must appear, when the Sword must be unsheathed and a terrible revenge be taken for all that these generations of tyrants had done to the land. There were the Demons, ever-present, and there must ever be Durga-Chandi in action against them, resplendent in her eight arms, mounted on the Lion of her wrath. This was the significance of the Durga-legend for the Guru, and this was why he got more than one version made and recited to those who came to do him reverence. Not with empty piety, divorced from action, but with the zeal for heroic endeavour must his followers be filled.

POETIZATION OF THE LEGEND

Three versions of the Chandi-legend are extant in the vast compilation called *Dasam Granth*, ascribed wholly or in part to the Guru. Two of these are in Braj, in various metres, as was the custom in this literary era, called Riti Kal or the Age of Tradition in Hindi poetry. This age followed a rigid poetic code, something like the extreme form of neo-classicism in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy and France. These versions are apparently by two different poets, in view of the distinct characteristics of style which belong to each.¹⁸ Moreover, in each

18. This is the view of their authorship which is strongly held by Macauliffe in his *Sikh Religion*.

of these there are long passages in the tone of adoration of the goddess as coming from one who subscribed to the creed of Durga-worship. This itself would throw strong doubt on the Guru's authorship of these versions, should anyone seriously think of advancing such a claim. To the Guru, Chandi is a symbol, an abstraction—the spirit of aroused heroism, the Sword, Divine Might. He is no believer in the mythological and historical goddess as the object of credal worship, who has been carved and moulded in figures and to whom temples have been erected. But that is precisely what the adoration pieces inserted in the legend-versions signify. They present the literal goddess of popular worship, and not the abstraction or the spirit. The Guru has in diverse places distinctly disavowed any association with avatar-worship, and has in a hundred ways affirmed his imperishable monotheistic faith in the One Eternal Lord of Guru Nanak's conception. This he has done to indicate his stand about Durga-worship, as also about the worship of Rama and Krishna and other gods, in their literal aspects as historical deities of popular worship. To him all these names—the synonyms of Chandi, particularly Maha-Kalika and Bhagauti, and the names Rama and Krishna, Narayana, Brahma and their periphrases—all stand for the One Eternal God, uncreated and immortal, and the creator of all 'these and of the infinite universe.'¹⁹

Besides these two versions in Braj, a third version of the Durga-legend exists in Punjabi Var or ballad stanzaic verse in a simple, spirited style, devoid of the baroque embellishments which would be characteristic of the professional poets of the Guru's court, who were reared in the tradition of ornate poetry then in vogue in Hindi. The very simplicity of the style of this version in Punjabi, called variously *Chandi-di-var* or *Var Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki*, lends strong force to the view that this must be the Guru's own composition. The Guru did not usually compose verse in Punjabi, though this tale and one devotional lyric '*mitar piyare nun hal inuridan da kahna*' are reported to be by him. I endorse with the strongest conviction the view which ascribes these compositions to the Guru. Their spirit is so much in keeping with the Guru's own great personality.

In all these three versions the progress of the tale is on

19. On the Guru's conception of God, a fuller discussion will be found elsewhere in this book.

traditional lines and does not in any considerable manner differ from the Puranic story. The usual details of the Demons having grown arrogant of their power and threatened the supremacy of the gods, and the gods' supplication to Durga to appear in the field to destroy the Demons, and the consequent battles and Durga's victory—such is the pattern in each. The Demons are of familiar mythology—Madhu and Kaitabh, Sumbha and Nisumbha, Mahikhasur and Raktabij along with others called Dhumar-lochan, Biralachh and such other dark primeval forces of evil, before whom Ravana and Jarasandha are a matter of yesterday. Durga is in the manner of the Puranic tale, equipped with eight arms, riding the Lion, attended by male and female goblins. The battles rage in full ferocity. Her victories are celebrated by the gods, and after destroying the demons, she restores the monarch of heaven, Indra, to his throne and retires to her abode on Kailas, with her consort Shiva, the embodiment of holy might.

The account of battle is in the prevalent poetic tradition of the age. The similes and attendant details are set, and anticipated. Certain onomatopoeic effects, mention of which would lead this account into a critical discussion of quasi-classical Hindi poetry, are introduced, all which is in accordance with tradition, which no poet with the ambition to be considered a master-craftsman would omit. In the end, from the windows of heaven adoration and flowers are showered on Durga by the grateful gods.

The Punjabi version of the legend is comparatively briefer than the Braj versions and narrates the fight of Durga-Chandi with only one monster, Mahikhasur—the Buffalo-Demon. He is the bravest of the brave, calling forth no end of mighty effort on Durga's part to defeat and destroy him. This is in the best tradition of Indian heroic poetry, in which the adversary is no weakling, but calls forth the entire resources of the hero's strength to defeat him. There are some stylistic effects, but these are mostly similes of a manly character such as would be familiar to Punjabi listeners of folk poetry of the Var.

This as a matter of fact is a Var and is so called (a *var* is the Punjabi analogue of a popular ballad). The language is the authentic Central Punjabi, spoken by the war-like Jat tribes of the tracts where the propagation of Sikhism had been most concentrated and from which the majority of the Guru's brave fighters were drawn. Its stanza is in the Var tradition, with a few in *shirkhandi* or blank verse. This too is in the accepted tradition

of this genre in Punjabi. Such are the general characteristics of this version, one of the best pieces of narrative poetry in Punjabi.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE CHANDI-TALES

The most striking features in all the three Chandi-tales are the battle scenes between Chandi (Durga) and the various Demons. The Guru himself as narrator, and the poets who rendered the legend into Braj, (granting that these two Braj versions are by poets other than the Guru) are not interested in inculcating the Durga-cult or the esoteric aspects of Chandi-worship. Their primary and main interest lies in making their versions of the legend the vehicle of one significance solely, and that is to arouse the dormant spirit of crusading for faith and honour among the Indian people, through graphic narratives of the tale most redolent of heroism in the mythology of the land. While the story of Rama and his war with Ravana is equally illustrative of the struggle of Right against Wrong, it is overlaid with much ancillary matter, which to a certain extent obscures the core of the heroic theme. But the Durga story is a story of the battle for the protection of Right in its most elemental form, and in the mystique which has developed round her figure through the ages, Durga is the embodiment of Righteous Might par excellence, battling eternally with Evil. To the Guru the figure of Durga is illustrative of that Divine Might which in age after age inspires men of God to battle for faith and truth against the evil forces, which are, by an inscrutable law of God, perpetually trying to disrupt the divine order, and are as perpetually put down. From his divine poems the Guru's interpretation of the Durga-symbol is unambiguously clear. It stands for the Eternal, the Timeless Creator. Thus in one *savaiya* (quatrain) occurring within the framework of the autobiographical *Bachitra Natak*, the Guru offers adoration to the Lord by mentioning the destruction of the demons who are traditionally described as destroyed by Durga:

Millions of demons, such as Sumbha, Nisumbha, He has destroyed
in an instant;
Dhumar-Lochana, Chanda, Munda and
Makhikhasur He has defeated in a moment;
Demons like Chamara, Rana-chichhura, Raktichhana
He has slaughtered at a stroke—
With such a Master to protect him, why need this servant fear
anything?

In the account of his pre-natal austerities the Guru calls the

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Lord by the name Maha-Kalika/Kalika (The Eternal Divine Might), which is an exalted form of the name of Durga, but is intended to be, like Rama and Hari and other deity-names to be a name by which the Eternal is designated. Bhagauti (Bhagvati), meaning 'Mistress of aU prosperity', which is one of the names of Durga, is constantly used by the Guru as one of the synonyms for the Lord as symbolised in the might of the Sword of Righteousness, which is drawn to protect faith and truth against evd.

Thus, there being no theological preoccupations in the minds of the narrators, the sole aspect of the story of Durga which they were anxious to adumbrate was the crusading or martial aspect. After narrating rapidly and briefly the danger from the power of demons, at which Indra, the King of the gods supplicates Shiva, the mighty Rudra, for help, comes his consort Durga or Chandi into the field against these Demons. There are several of them, extremely brave and capable of resuscitating themselves manifold, as their head are smitten. This is finely allegorical of the inexhaustible and self-proliferating power of evd in the universe against which the Divine Might is constantly warring without quite destroying it finally. This symbolism, in view of its eloquent philosophical significance, is allowed to remain in the Braj versions. The Demons put up a most determined fight, which is described on the pattern of the classical art of war in ancient India, as war with the wellknown four wings of the army—foot, horse, elephants and chariots. All manner of ancient weapons of war, familiar to readers of mythological tales, are brought into use. The kites and beasts of prey, like jackals are seen around the gory dead, and the goblins, male and female of Hindu demonology, called Baital, Siddha and Jogini are aU brought into the description. The sound effects are eloquent, and in places the descriptions touch great height of the poetic art. The battle rages, with indecisive results in various stages. The Demons, who are succeeded by others of their race, die hard, and call forth the utmost heroism and divine aid to finally destroy them. This, no doubt, is particularly emphasized not only for the purpose of poetic effect but also philosophically to symbolize the long-drawn out travail and superhuman courage in the crusader (Dharamvir) to defeat evd, which would not be destroyed in an instant through a miracle.

Demon after Demon—Madhu and Kaitabh, Mahikhasur, Dhumar-Nain, Chanda, Munda, Rakta-Bij, Sumbha, Nisumbha—the whole unending demoniac race comes to battle with Durga,

and ad are ultimately defeated. This is so in the first and second versions in Braj; and so also in the Punjabi version. The pattern of the battle-scenes is somewhat uniform, which is explained by two different poets attempting the theme in the same neo-classical tradition.

The Punjabi version, most certainly of the Guru's own composition, opens with the adoration of the Sword or Divine Might by the name of Bhagauti, the significance of which has been explained above. After offering worship to the Supreme Lord of Creation herein caUed Bhagauti (the name by which Durga is also known), follows the adoration of the nine Gurus who were Guru Gobind Singh's predecessors. This sequence is significant, inasmuch as the Gurus are and can be put only after God Himself, and no other deity, big or smad. The omission of the tenth, that is himself, from this rod is because of the humility and modesty characteristic of the Guru's mind, just as of his predecessors when speaking about themselves. This adoration is further fowed by the praise of the Lord who is apostrophized as the creator in the primal age of the Sword, that is Might; later, of the various gods, of the firmament and the earth. Further on, He is described as the creator of the demons and gods—that is, evd no less than good in perpetual battle, and as having willed the destruction of the Demons at the hands of Durga. The Lord gave the strength to Rama to destroy the ten-headed Ravana, and Krishna to hurl to the earth by the hair the tyrant Kamsa. Infinite is the Lord, whose knowledge even the saints and mystics who have performed stern austerities for aeons have not been able to compass.

The Guru's faith in the One Lord, and the purely symbolical interpretation of the idea of the gods and goddesses and of mythology in general is evident from this, as also from the entire spiritual literature of Sikhism for generations together. This, it is necessary to emphasize, as in the past and even till now, some people have had confused and erroneous notions about the faith of Guru Gobind Singh and his conception of the Supreme Being.

Then fows the account of Indra, harassed by the growing power of the Demons, approaching Durga with the appeal for succour. She readily consents to give battle to the evd-doers:

On hearing Indra's wail Durga laughed a mighty laugh;
She sent for her Lion, destroyer of demons in many a field :
She assured the gods not to be apprehensive—
For the Mighty Mother's ire was aroused the Demons to destroy.

The drum of battle is struck; terrific is the sound of the myriads of trumpets and bugles blown. The two hosts are ranged on the field. Follows the description of war in expansive manly similes :
 Heroes were pierced by spikes, like hail-stones stuck to a tree twig;
 Those cut with swords were writhing like men maddened with strong wine;
 Some were shaken out of their hiding as is gold separated from pulverized rock;
 Maces, tridents, spikes, arrows were speeding with vigour and passion;
 Heroes with mighty souls were falling dead like those bitten by black cobras.

Came the heroes into battle wave after wave;
 Mahikhasur thundered into the field like rain-clouds :
 'The mighty Indra himself fled the field before me :
 What is this petty Durga to face me in arms?'
 Came Mahikhasur into the field with knights of renown.
 He unsheathed his mighty two-edged sword.
 Rushed the heroes, and great slaughter ensued;
 Blood flowed along like the Ganga from Shiva's own locks.
 Was struck the battle drum and the hosts were locked in battle;
 Durga with a lightningjerk drew her sword from the sheath;
 The demon-destroying sword²⁰ was drawn to kill the devilish brood;
 Smashing through skulls it penetrated their frames,
 Cutting along through the saddle, the horse and the equipage it struck into the solid earth—
 Penetrating there-through it struck at the horns of the Terrestrial Bull;

Splitting the bodies of the foes, it waved over the Tortoise.²¹

Thus continues this mighty, cosmic war. At one stage as in stanza 25, the Demons appear to be about to gain the field, and the gods scurry about in great apprehension. But this only provokes Durga to a further mighty effort, and with her sword 'she cuts off the heroes of (the Demon) Dhunar-Nain, like unto a woodcutter felling trees.'

Others of the Demon-lords follow, and the classic-mythological Sumbha, Nisumbha, Srawana-Bij 'heroes tall as towers' enter

20. For the 'sword' in the original the word 'Chandi' is used. This is still another instance of the Guru using this most appealing word to express a variety of meanings, some of which have been explained earlier.

21. The Bull and Tortoise refer here rhetorically to the support of the earth, as imagined in Indian mythology.

the field.

The Demons are killed, but through their heroism in battle are covered with glory. So, 'After death Srawan-Bij was surrounded by the houris of heaven—each seeking to be the bride of this most noble groom.'

'In a great wrath Kalika (Chandi-Durga) grasped the sword in her right hand;

And cut into twain several thousands as mighty as the Demon Harinakash;

Alone she faced their serried ranks—
 Thousand times praised be thy sword-skill!

As the description warms up, the mythological account merges into the contemporary war scenes, with Mughal and Pathan heroes of the royal forces serving for the Demon-foes of Durga. This no doubt was only a natural slip into what these Demons really stood for in the Guru's mind, who through these mythological-fictitious narratives was re-enacting in a war-excited imagination the battle-scenes of his own day:

Durga the queen grasped her Bhagauti (sword) invoking mighty blessing on it.

And striking Sumbha the chief it drank his precious life-blood;
 Sumbha fell from his saddle.

The sword issuing from his wound was dyed in blood,
 As is a princess wearing robes of red.

Thus ends this heroic tale, whose power is great to annul his transmigration who chants it.' That is so, because invoking noble heroism or crusading for faith is an act of piety equivalent to all the religious practices which according to pious Hinduism release a man from the cycle of births and deaths.

OTHER HEROIC TALES

The heroic theme predominates in all the tales which have been versified by the poets attending the Guru's court. Not only did he particularly emphasize the heroic image of God, even at some risk of arousing misunderstanding as to his faith by using mythological names redolent of heroism (such as Bhagauti, Maha-Kalika and Chandi) for God or the symbols of His Might, but commanded that in all tales from the traditional religious literature the heroic theme be brought into the greatest prominence. Thus, in 'Ram Avtar', the story of Rama's exile and heroic life, the battle-scenes are numerous, and follow the fines of the Durga-battles. The battles of Rama against the Rakshashas are prolonged and

bitter, and full of doubtful moments when victory hung in the balance. This is only true to the pattern of his faith in the inevitable necessity of the bitterest struggle of Good to overthrow Evil.

The most significant heroic tale is that which is woven into the career of Krishna. The Krishna of popular and prevalent Hindu conception is the eternal Wonder Child or Adolescent playing enchanting music and engaged in dalliance in the idyllic surroundings of Braj. Innumerable poets have, and still are poetizing this theme of the youthful, playful Krishna. But in the 'Krishna-Avatar' of *Dasam Granth* while the traditional scenes are there, and the poet, a traditionalist in spite of his association with the Guru, has depicted that aspect of the Hindu Pan-Apodo even to the limits where it enters the forbidden zone. But he has not omitted to depict also the heroic Krishna, who hurls to the earth from his hair the tyrant Kamsa, oppressor of his father and mother. And nearly half the long narrative of about 2500 stanzas is taken up with the war against Jarasandha—Kamsa's brother-in-law and avenger. These battle descriptions are most detailed, with shifting scenes and theatres, and like the final stanzas of Chandi-di-Var, get merged into contemporary battles in defiance of ad verisimilitude and chronological consistency. This, of course, is explained the same way. In the mythical battles of Durga, Rama and Krishna the Guru's contemporaries saw the battles against the monsters of their own day, tyrannizing over the land anciently peopled by these gods and heroes. So, with unconscious preoccupation they slip into the contemporary. Into the Krishna-Jarasandha battles are introduced fictitious aides of Jarasandha, princes with medieval and contemporary Rajput names—such for example as Kharag Singh (who alone accounts for 350 stanzas), Amit Singh, Gaj Singh, Dhan Singh, Hari Singh, Ajab Singh, etc. There is among their aides one Achalesh (King of the Hills)—no doubt on unconscious formulation of the hill chiefs in the background of Paonta and Anandpur, ever intrigueful and menacing. Then, more wonderful still, into the Krishna-legend are injected Muhammadan warriors of the names of Tahir Khan, Sher Khan, Said Khan, Ddawat Khan, Dalel Khan, Ajaib Khan, etc. To a superficial view ad this would be a blemish, which perhaps it is. But its significance, which is great, lies in the fact that the re-poetization of these tales by command of the Guru was with the purpose of stirring heroic ardour among a people enervated by a passivist philosophy and an unrealistic mythology. This mythology

he revived and harnessed to a great national purpose. He was the crusader (Dharmavir) and to him the India of his day was what Kurukshetra is described in the opening verse of Gita as being—'Dharam-kshetra'—the land where the battle for the triumph of righteousness was to be fought. He viewed serried before him the Demons—Mahikhasur and ad the Ravanas, the Kamsas and Duryodhanas of his own day. And to fight these he unsheathed the sword, and created the heroic Order of the Khalsa. Of that in another place.

CHAPTER 4
**RELIGION VIEWED AS UNIVERSAL
 BROTHERHOOD**

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE SIKH CHURCH

Sikhism inculcated from its inception an attitude of positive, whole-hearted tolerance towards all faiths, including the Muslim, with which the antipathy of the Hindu at the credal and social levels was unconcealed. As said in another chapter, Hindu exclusivism was in the nature of a defence mechanism against the powerful attack launched by Islam both at the political and religious levels. And since Muslim rule was theoretically viewed as a theocracy, in which the Shariat or Muslim Canonical Law should be the base, the Hindu inevitably tended to be discriminated against. This bred hate, suspicion and accumulating intolerance. This phenomenon is so well-known that it need not be elaborated. The scene which confronted the sensitive and idealistic soul was one of the intolerable practice of fanaticism carried to revolting and inhuman lengths. And since such intolerance was fed by ignorance and the constant evocation of an unequal code framed so as to tilt the balance in favour of one party, there evidently appeared no way of extricating the land from this vicious circle of ever increasing bitterness.

Among the numerous sects and religious orders of the Hindus themselves, the gulf of rivalry and recrimination was as wide almost as between Hindu and Muslim. With a childlike purlblindness the Hindus remained divided among themselves into their sects, castes and principalities and never combined to face the common enemy, Islam, in the name of Hindudom. Here and there bitter resistance did occur, but it was localized and confined, and was very often the fight for their threatened privileges by the princes whose principalities were menaced by the invading Muslims. Not till the later part of Mughal rule did such a

consciousness arise, and that too not through the efforts of either the Brahmins or the Rajputs, the accepted spiritual and temporal leaders of Hindudom, but through such groups as the Marathas, the Sikhs and certain militant religious Hindu orders, all of which were composed largely of people from the lower levels of the caste hierarchy. This story has been touched on in more details in a different chapter.

HINDU AND MUSLIM SAINTS

The Hindu confrontation with Islam, while it took the form of an armed conflict much later, at a period when Muslim rule in India had been in existence for almost five centuries, and when perhaps by the operation of a mysterious law of history, Hindudom was rallying after a long period of decadence, had occurred at another level much earlier. This was in the thought and propagation of the saints—mainly of Hindu origin who preached the ideal of Oneness of Being and consequently the gospel of universal love. This gave currency to ideas of tolerance and general humanitarianism, and tended to work towards goodwill among sects and groups. There was a similar movement in Islam also, mainly stemming from the Muslim mystics called Sufis. It would be rash to conclude that the propagation of the ideas of the oneness of all existence and the criticism of fanaticism and exclusiveness had a palpable and appreciable effect on the people as a whole. Those who listened to the Hindu saints, generally called Bhaktas, and the Muslim Sufis and Pirs (the two terms were almost interchangeable) tended to live at two levels of experience; there was the every-day existence governed by all the taboos, hates and conflicts which traditional religion brought to the forefront. There were also among the more sensitive members of society, who came under the influence of the Bhaktas and the Sufis, and imbibed their ideals of spirituality, a kind of pantheism which made for the attitude of human brotherhood. Such people were a very small minority. Their ideas, attractive to the mind, had little effect on the life of the community—much less on the basic policies of the State. Ideals and spiritual urges are things too fine in substance to be able to do much to shake or mould such hard matters as policy and statecraft. The ideas and ideals of the saints remained confined to the realm of experience and imaginative vision, and did not operate upon the hard material of corporate life, so as to mould it and to forge it into a weapon to force changes in the fabric of society. Such operating, however, was, out of all saintly

66 THE IMPACT OF GURU GOBIND SINGH ON INDIAN SOCIETY societies and orders of medieval India, given to the Sikh movement to effect; so that it, of ad the spiritual movements, resulted in giving rise to a society or order with vast revolutionary potentiadties. This theme has been developed in its various facets elsewhere in this book.

Several erroneous notions are current among students of medieval Indian history and culture respecting the influence of the various kinds of mystics on the life of average man in India in those times. Such notions generady exaggerate vastly the influence of mystics and saints on the society in its vaster, organized aspects, including the state. Ideas have a way of acquiring dynamic force only when they begin to influence masses of mankind in those matters which are of vital concern to them in their daily life—when, in other words, they move from the purely notional realm into the realm of social reality. This can happen only with people who participate in the concerns of normal corporate existence, and seek to protect its values. This condition is lacking in the case of recluses and those to whom spiritual experience exists in a kind of social vacuum, at the level purely of emotion and imagination. The participation of such individuals and groups in life is in a fragmentary form, so that we have all the grades of participation in the corporate life—from institutionadzed charity, through voluntary reform to stirrings of urges to the reshaping of the structure of society and state.

During the medieval times in northern India, the shrines of Hindu and Muslim mystics, saints and as a matter of fact, of ad kinds of religious teachers, of various grades of spirituality and awareness, were resorted to by people of different castes and creeds, without much distinction. People came to them with various motives, largely worldly, such as to beg for boons or to avert disasters, confound enemies and invoke God's favour in other ways. It was only a small minority who came with motives purely spiritual or ethical—to learn the higher truths which might lead the way to a greater readzation of the life of the soul or of noble conduct. The greater among these mystics and teachers did impart such spiritual and ethical instruction, however, according to then-own lights and the credal background to their faith. Most often such instruction would have a kind of universal, non-sectarian character, as appealing to ad people without emphasis on theology or religious doctrine; so that the people in the course of time, through the preachings of such mystics became aware of the life

of the soul and of noble action—neither specifically Hindu nor Muslim. In this atmosphere a new religious and spiritual vocabulary, composed of words and phrases drawn from sources, Hindu as wed as Musdm, became current and passed into the common parlance. The emphasis would still remain Hindu or Musdm, but at the same time a new meeting-ground for the common people was being created, where they could have the consciousness of man as man, irrspective of sharp credal differences.

Hindu as well as Muslim saints of influence usually maintained a free kitchen for pdgrims, traveders and for the poor generally. This was motivated primady by the desire to spread the spirit of charity. Such free kitchens did, for the time being, bring the rich and the poor together in a kind of spiritual communication. But their influence in terms of reshaping social ideas should not be exaggerated. Ad people continued their adherence to their institutionadzed faith—the Hindus to their caste, untouchabdity and other taboos and their bedefs generally, from superstitions to the hazy notions of the nature of the soul and the after-life; the Musdms in their own creed with its sharp division between the believers and unbelievers, and its ritual of prayer and fasting, along with its belief in an after-life different from that postulated by the Hindus. The ban on inter-dining as between Hindu and Muslim remained, and no attempt appears to have been made to remove it. At the shrines of the Muslim saints, usually called Pirs, a separate kitchen, wherever Hindus were fed, was maintained for them. The Hindu ban on taking anything touched by the Musdm was tacitly accepted, and respected at all levels, from the lowest to the highest. No attempt was made to question it, much less to remove it.

Whde there was no close meeting-ground between Hindu and Muslim so as to make for a society where some fusion between the two might be said to have taken place, there were partial approaches, as was inevitable when the populations were so closely inter-knitted in their daily concerns. The common matrix of ethical and spiritual ideas was growing, and would naturally influence opinion and judgement in the better moments of the life of the individual. A new element was being added to language—Arabic, Persian and Turkirh words drawn from the various departments of life, such as general and revenue administration, law and trade. The spiritual life too had its own mingdng of the vocabularies

drawn from Hindu and Muslim sources. Anyone can make out a list of words from the Muslim background pertaining to the various aspects of life. But the currency acquired by such vocabulary cannot be said to have had the effect of bringing about understanding or peace, much less anything like fusion or synthesis between Hindu and Muslim. The two remained, despite such meeting points, distinct and separated and subject to the stress of their own past and their political situation.

SUFISM

There has been some misappraisal of the role of the Muslim Pirs, loosely called Sufis, in this period. Sufism is a philosophical-spiritual creed within Islam, incorporating some of the features of mysticism in general. Its doctrine, which is quite elaborately formulated and can be found expressed in its fulness in such works as the famous *Masnavi* (also spelt more accurately as *Mathnavi*) of Jalaluddin Rumi, *Kashful-Mahjub* of Hajwiri and *Gulshan-i-Raz* of Mahmud Shabastri and others. These are works of esoteric Sufistic lore. In the Muslim world, the basic idea of this mysticism stems from Plato and more particularly from Plotinus, who elaborated Plato's ideas of Love and Beauty and particularly the stages of transition from the material to the spiritual love, and from the illusion of plurality to the vision of unity or harmony. This idea, elaborated by the Muslim mystics and poets, branched off into such attitudes as the preference of intuition called *Ishq* (Love, both profane and spiritual) over the intellect, and a general praise of unconventionality and heterodoxy (known in Persian as *Rindi*) as against strict canonical orthodoxy. Mystical or quasi-mystical literature, therefore, ranges from the expression of truly spiritual experience, as in Rumi and Attar (in Persian) to wallowing in intellectual heterodoxy as in Hafiz. A new set of symbols in which wine, standing both for ecstasy and for unconventionality is the most prominent, got evolved. Another symbol is the evil, standing for illusion. There is then the Beloved, and a set of associated images, to symbolize the many phases of experience.

Sufism was considered a heretical movement by orthodox Muslims. The objection to it was based on its unconventionality and its refusal to subscribe implicitly to the Creed. The mystic would follow his vision only and his practice, apart from being based on the individual search after Reality, made for tolerance of other creeds and for heterodoxy. There was a wave of persecution of the Sufi mystics. Attempts were, however, made by such

philosophers as the three mentioned above, to enunciate and explain Sufi doctrine, so as to bring about a reconciliation between it and the basic Muslim orthodoxy—purging Sufism of its extreme individualistic elements, offensive to orthodoxy. The most celebrated such attempt was by Imam Ghazali, called *Hujjat-ul-Islam* (The Argument of Islam) in the eleventh century. After such attempts, Sufism generally came to be considered a liberal spiritualized movement within Islam, notwithstanding the fact that the Sufis themselves, even in the worst days of the prejudice against them, had never professed to cut themselves off from the mainstream of Islam. As a matter of fact, their assertion was that they alone truly understood the faith from within.

Sufism as it came to India, had only a tenuous relationship with its earlier version such as was understood and was prevalent in the Muslim world of Rum (Asia Minor generally) and Iran. In the Punjab and in India generally, the term Sufi was somewhat loosely applied to all kinds of Muslim preachers other than the orthodox Maulvis or Mullas. Any incumbent or abbot of a Dargah or Khangah¹ or even Mosque, might be so termed. These were, however, regular 'dynasties' called 'silsilahs' of Sufis, having their seats in numerous places, such as Multan, Pakpattan, Lahore, Sirhand, Panipat in the Panjab—as a matter of fact all over northern India, where there were considerable Muslim populations. In India Sufism did as a matter of fact imbibe some of the ideas of the Hindu mystics, insofar as these were not in conflict with Islam. In the parlance of Hindu saints particularly a vocabulary descriptive of ethical and spiritual concepts, drawn from sources both Hindu and Muslim got evolved, so that pairs like Ram and Rahim, Din and Dharma, Purana and Koran, etc. were in constant use to emphasize tolerance and to discourage sectarian rancour. But the stress on this aspect was mainly laid in the preachings of the Hindu saints. The Muslim Sufi, also called Pir, was usually a less offensive Muslim priest, whose manners were more ingratiating to the Hindus, and who did a great deal of proselytisation among the non-Muslim poor to Islam.

1. A Dargah or Khangah (or Khanqah) was a mosque and travellers' resting-place at the tomb of some holy man. Except for the tomb, it would for all practical purposes be a mosque. At such a place, devotional music by professional minstrels or by choric groups would often be held—a practice frowned upon by orthodoxy. This tradition of music is still very much current among Muslims, both in India and Pakistan.

The form of religion which evolved around the Sufi (or Pir) centres in India has been in effect the real Islam of the masses. It has duly insisted on adherence to the orthodox practices, like the performance of *namaz* and keeping the Ramazan fasts, etc., but has at the same time added certain elements of appeal to the emotional life. Such, for example as the choric chanting of mystical or devotional hymns, faith in an individual saint (Pir, which dterady means 'old man'), worship at and propitiation of the spirits of holy people at their tombs, immunizing people (particularly women and children) against sickness and the evd eye by amulets containing passages from the Koran or other sacred Muslim writings etc. So this variety of Islam was the one generally lived and practised and it stdl is. But it would be an extravagant claim to say that the Sufis or Pirs aimed at bringing about an understanding between Hindus and Muslims except in a vague, general way. The analogy of Pirs with the Hindu Saints and the Gurus of Sikhism in this matter would be entirely false. The work of the latter was more positive and aimed at creating goodwill and in the case of the Gurus, was an important aspect of their Ministry.

Indian Sufism was, thus, a liberal but accepted movement within Islam, and was part and parcel of it. Its main effects were not social but dterary—as having inspired in the Indian languages popular poetry expressive of general humanitarianism, tolerance, and certain mystical experiences, through symbols and parallels drawn from dady life, which went to the hearts and bosoms of the common people. In the Punjab, for example, the compositions of Sheikh Farid,² Sultan Bahu, Bulleh Shah and others (of various periods) are characteristic of this. A more mysticady conditioned poet like Shah Husain stands obviously outside the main tradition of popular Sufism in the Panjab.

The Sufis or Musdms Pirs, therefore, while their seats were centres of Musdm spiritual and religious teachings, were also visited by non-Musdms, particularly the poor, who imbibed there a mixture of ethical and spiritual instruction, in non-orthodox, dberal terms. The persuasive manners and the general atmosphere of goodwill at these centres must have led many of these non-Muslims to accept Islam, though the majority, without going to

2. Perhaps there were more than one saint of the same 'dynasty' whose work goes as Farid's. Farid is not a mystic in the strict sense of the word, but has an amalgam of sufism and general ethical piety, expressed in beautiful, poignant poetry.

the extent of getting converted, must have had their thoughts coloured by the Musdm-oriented teachings of such Pirs. With the Hindu saints, there would naturally seldom be any conversion, for within Hinduism such a process is unknown, though there would be a general conditioning of the thoughts of such visitors, as at the centres of the Muslims saints.³ The preaching of such saints, Hindu and Muslims, did colour the thoughts of the populace, and helped create the prevailing atmosphere of tolerance between Hindus and Muslims, which was occasionady disturbed only when a special campaign by some ruler was set afoot for the persecution of the Hindus. That has remained the situation to this day. The Musdm Sufis or Saints never influenced state podcy, nor tried to raise their voice against redgious persecution. Nor did the Hindu saints, for that matter. It was the peculiar character of the Sikh movement to concern itself with the social mdieu, which gave it potentiady and in the later stages, actuady, such a force to fight injustice, and to set up an organization whose character became revolutionary and capable of exercising a deep and abiding influence on historical events.

SIKHISM IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As said elsewhere, Sikhism, besides, enunciating the truths of the spiritual and ethical life, had also from the beginning, a strong consciousness of the corporate social life, including those aspects of it which would more particularly be called political. This was partly because Sikhism did not commend the life of the recluse. Its emphasis was on non-attachement⁴ in the spiritual sense mainly, and not in renunciation of the concerns of the corporate life, such as the family, the tribe and the nation. This made the Sikh vision comprehensive—a veritable scheme for a spirituady-oriented life in the world of social relations, even though

3. The initaition into 'Nath Jogi' order of Ranjha, in Waris Shah's fiction of *Hir Banjha*, must be an instance of prevalent practice. To the Jogis, all must have been acceptable. Moreover, the rural Muslim Jats, such as Ranjha was, would only be nominally converted to Islam. These people retained their Hindu moorings to an overwhelming extent. Cases of Muslims receiving baptism from the Gurus of the Sikh faith, though rare, were not unknown.
4. Such an emphasis is evident from names like 'Nirmoh' (Non-attached) a place where Guru Gobind Singh resided for a time. Other such names are Santokhsar (Pool of Contentment), Anandpur (City of Bliss), Abchalnagar (The Eternal City), Tarn Taran (Crossing the Ocean of the World)—all famous in Sikh history.

the extremist ascetic view would frown upon it. While there were hundreds of sects in medieval India, both Hindu and Muslim, in which religion sometimes took the militant form over sectarian squabbles or over local, temporary grievances, it was the distinction of Sikhism to have evolved a whole world-vision in which spiritual ideals and ethical values were meant to condition and influence all the human relations—personal as well as social and political. This vision was bound in the course of time, given provocation and persecution by the state, to result in resistance and a determined struggle to fight tyranny. This might not be a revolutionary attitude in the modern sense, but it had all the implications of such an attitude. This matter has been discussed in the course of this book, as well as in much contemporary discussion on Sikhism, and, therefore, need not be elaborated here.

One point which needs being stressed is the relation between Sikhism and Islam, particularly in view of the fact that organized Muslim authority came into conflict with Sikhism at a fairly early stage in its history. While the Gurus and their followers were sufferers at the hands of the Mughal rulers and their underlings, and Sikhism later became one of the powerful forces to wage a determined war against Muslim-Mughal authority, throughout its history, Sikhism had relations of tolerance and even friendliness towards the Muslim people and Islam. This dichotomy is not difficult for the modern mind to understand, used to distinguishing between individual and political approach to groups and nations. It is important to bear in mind this discriminating approach of Sikhism towards Islam.

Sikhism was critical of religious hypocrisy, hollow ritualism and bigotry, both Hindu and Muslim. The criticism of Hinduism, within which Sikhism as a spiritual-ethical philosophical movement arose, is much more detailed, harsh and far-reaching than the few casual references to Islam, arising mainly either in those contexts where the Gurus may be assumed specially to address themselves to Muslim audiences or where the purpose is to emphasize the lessons of tolerance and general human sympathy. All through, Guru Nanak assumes the inevitability of Islam in India, and the necessity of treating the Muslim as one of the twin elements in the vast Indian humanity. As such, his exhortation to the Muslims is to outgrow narrowness and fanaticism and to imbibe the ethical qualities enjoined by his faith. Just as the Hindu must wear a sacred thread of "mercy,

contentment, continence and truthfulness",⁵ so the Mohamadan was called upon 'to make love his mosque, sincerity his prayer-carpet, righteous living his Koran; modesty and sweetness of temper his fast, good actions his Kaaba, truth his preceptor, and good actions his creed and *namaz*. Through such practices alone could he be a good Mussalman.'⁶ Exhortation towards discovering and practising the ethical and spiritual essence of religion, as against its external husk of formularies are scattered all over the teachings of the Gurus. And such exhortations have continued to be addressed to the Muslims as much as the Hindus, though less frequently, in view of the fact that the vast majority of those who visited the Gurus for spiritual instruction and influence were of Hindu origin.

Sikhism, like the more idealistic forms of Hinduism, has eschewed the idea of any one religion or revelation enshrining in itself the exclusive secret or knowledge of the Godhead. Its position in this respect is tolerant and enlightened. According to its view, God in His mysterious way gives knowledge of the Truth to various forms. No one can claim to hold the exclusive key to salvation or by whatever name the highest spiritual ideal may be designated. That is behind Guru Arjan's (and his predecessors') decision of including in the Sikh Scripture the hymns of Saints drawn from various faiths, including the Muslim. Truth shines out of all in its various facets! A few quotations from the Word of the Gurus will help illustrate this view-point.

Says Guru Nanak:

- (1) Nanak, the True Teacher's great merit is to unite all.
 - (2) He who looks upon both Paths⁷ as one will alone be able to solve the Mystery;
He who regards others as heretics will burn (in hellfire);
The entire world is a reflection of the Divine : Immerse thyself in the Truth (Rag Majh)
 - (3) There are two Paths, but only one Lord (Gauri)
- This theme is expressed in greater detail by Guru Arjan :
- One calls Him Ram, another Khuda;⁸
Some call him Gosain, some Allah.

5. **Guru Nanak in Rag Asa**

6. **Guru Nanak in Rag Majh**

7. **i.e. Hindu and Muslim**

8. **Ram is the most current Hindu name for God; it is also name of the Man-god, son of Dasrath. Khuda is the current Muslim name of God from the Persian—literally, Master.**

He is All-powerful, bountiful, beneficent and merciful.
 Some go to Hindu bathing-places; some to Mecca;
 Some perform the Hindu ritual of worship; others bow down
 in namaz⁹.
 Some read the Vedas; others the Koran;
 Some wear blue, others White.¹⁰
 Some are called Turk,¹¹ others Hindu.
 Some covet Bihisht,¹² some Swarga.¹³
 Saith Nanak, he who has understood God's commandment.
 He alone knows His ways. (Ramkali)

In that state of revelation and communion with the Lord, wherein all distinctions and divisions vanish, and only the Truth remains, Guru Arjan says, in terms expressive of the widest universality :

I neither keep fast like the Hindus nor observe the
 Ramadan¹⁴ like the Muhammadans;
 I adore Him who is the ultimate Saviour.
 I worship Him who is both Gosain and Allah;
 I withdraw from the squabble of Hindu and Muslim.
 I neither go on pilgrimage to Mecca, nor to Hindu bathing-places.
 To One I bow, and to no other.
 Neither do I *puja*,¹⁵ nor *namaz*:
 To the One Formless Being I bow in my heart.
 I am neither a Hindu nor a Mussalman;
 Of Allah-Ram¹⁶ is made my life and limb. (Bhairava)

In other compositions of Guru Arjan, similarly, words connoting Hindu and Muslim ideas of God, worship and sanctity occur side by side such, for example, as *karim* (bountiful), *rahim* (Merciful), *khaliq* (Creator), *khuda* (God, Master), *maula* (Master, Lord), *pir*, *paikambar*¹⁷ (Prophets, Preceptors), *malik* (Lord), *haq* (Truth), *koran*, *kateb* (both stand for Koran)—all these and such other terms are Muslim : Again, *sarb pritpal* (Cherisher of all), *Om*, *bhagvant*, *gosain* (i.e. Om, Lord, Master), *narain*, *narhari* (names of Hindu deities)—all such are Hindu. The hymn ends

9. The Muslim prayer.
10. Blue and white are respectively associated with Muslim and Hindu ideas of sanctity.
11. Turk was a blanket term for Muslims.
12. The Muslim name for Paradise.
13. The Hindu Heaven.
14. The sacred Muslim month, devoted to daily fasting.
15. Hindu worship.
16. The entity made up of Allah and Ram—hence the common God of all.
17. Popular form of Paighambar.

with the powerful expression of a spiritual conviction:

Saith Nanak, the Master has rid me of all illusions :

Allah and Par-Brahman¹⁸ are one and the same. (Ramkali)

Guru Nanak, while expressing his anguish and deep suffering at the destruction caused by the victorious hordes of Babar, included in his universal passion of sympathy to all—Hindus and Muslims. While expressing the plight of the women-folk, ravished and ravaged in the course of the sack, he has mentioned Hindu women, wives of Hindu chiefs, such as Bhattis and Thakurs, as sufferers along with the wives of the Muslim Lords, the Turks. Babar's soldiery have thrust aside the Hindu and Muslim priests, and with the rites of the Devil, are making unholy marriages with Hindu and Muslim women (that is, raping and ravishing). Muslim women are calling upon God (Khuda) for succour in this hour of affliction; so are the Hindu ladies and those of castes down below. This suffering the Guru has expressed in the name of 'Hindustan' which in the context stands for the whole of Northern India, and not for any small region or group. This wide, catholic angle is characteristic of the Sikh faith from its inception, and has laid firm the foundation of that genuine tolerance and communal goodwill which even in the worst hour of conflict has been characteristic of Sikh behaviour.

GOODWILL IN RELIGION IN GURU GOBIND SINGH'S LIFE

Guru Gobind Singh has expressed himself more effectively and exhaustively on this theme. His use of the names and attributes of God drawn from Muslim sources has already been touched upon in detail in the opening chapter, wherein divine and spiritual matters are expressed in an idiom which should be welcome to the Islam-oriented view, and should at the same time create a strong climate of tolerance of Islam and Muslims among the Guru's followers. This is what actually happened in history. The Guru's wide and catholic outlook in matters religious has kept the Sikhs free throughout their history from the taint of such poisonous narrowness and calculated attitude of prejudice against people of other faiths, including the Muslims, as is rarely seen in the history of religion. This will be discussed in a little more detail in a later section of this chapter.

Just as the burden of the lines and hymns quoted above from the Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan is an unshakeable spirit of

18. The Transcendental Creator—Hindu formula for the Supreme Being.

tolerance and goodwill for the Muslims as such, apart from their role as rulers and persecutors of the native faiths and races, so also in Guru Gobind Singh's compositions this theme is voiced with much greater force because of the assertive tone in which his spirit expressed itself on this subject. Thus, in *Akal Ustati*, containing the Guru's meditations on the Divine Being and on faith and the spiritual life, occur the following assertions, typical of his attitude and teaching:

- (1) Some are Hindus, some Turks (Muslims) : some are of the Shia persuasion and some of Imam Shafi¹⁹: (For all these distinctions) mankind is all of one race²⁰.
He is Karta and Karim²¹, the Provider and the Merciful;
Never fall into the fallacy or delusion to think differently on this.
All adore Him alone; He is the true Lord of all;
Look upon all mankind as the manifestations of
One Divine form and one light.
- (2) Hindu and Muslim temples are all Houses of God;
So are the diverse forms of worship practised therein :
Mankind is one, although illusion points to differences :
The diverse concepts of Devas and Asuras,²² Yakshas and Gandharvas²³, Hindu and Muslims—
All arise from differences of country and clime;
Haven't all men the same eyes, ears, bodies, frames—
all amalgamated from earth, air, fire and water?
Allah and Abhekh²⁴, are identical; so are the Purana and the Koran (in guiding man to God);
All are cast in one form and one figure.
- (3) As innumerable sparks arise out of one flame of fire,
Distinct to the sight, yet reverting to the parent flame;
As from the dust innumerable specks do spread in the air,
Falling down to become one with the mass :
As from the river arise millions of waves,
To become indistinguishable again from the flowing stream :
So the Universal Form makes manifest by Divine will these living forms—
Arising and merging, arising and merging ever.

Shia and Imam Shafai are important Muslim denominations, i.e., the human.

Karta or Kartar is Sanskrit for the Creator; the other attribute is from the Arabic, with Muslim overtones.

Gods and Demons are of Hindu conception.

Minor orders in Hindu Angelology.

The Formless—Hindu attributive word for God.

In the vast vision of humanity, to be viewed with tolerance and human sympathy, the Guru in the same work (*Akal Ustati*) counts a variety of races, symbolizing unity, in plurality. Such are : Persian, French, Makranian, Sindhi, Kandahari, Gakkhar, Gurdezi, Purabi (Avadhis, Biharis, Bengalis, etc.); those of Kamrup, Kumaon and such other places. It was introducing a new strain into the strife—torn India of those times to have pleaded for tolerance towards all humanity with its infinite variety of forms, tongues, manners and beliefs. This spirit has come down to the Sikhs, and distinguishes them in this sorry world from peoples who have grown up with less tolerant doctrines.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN SIKH HISTORY

Guru Gobind Singh's fight was, as is patent to anyone reading the story of his career attentively, not against Muslims, but against tyranny established in places of power, that the strongest and most formidable practitioners of such tyranny were Muslims was an accident of history, handed down from nearly five centuries to the Guru's own age. Islam in India was established in authority as an alien occupying power, for all that for generations the Muslim rulers had been India-bred, and even descended on the mother's side from the Rajput princess whom Akbar made his queen. In official theory Islam was the dominant faith, and the non-Muslims were either to be converted or to be treated as inferior citizens. Not that there were not privileged classes among the Hindus, who took office under the Muslim rulers, Mughal and Pre-Mughal. This minority of privileged Hindus adopted civil and military service under the state, assumed the manners and modes of the rulers, and in general lived comfortably. Such classes are, of course, found flourishing under all imperial systems. The poor among the Muslims, except that they might feel psychologically identified with the rulers, had little share in power or prosperity, and were not in a less degree than the Hindu poor, hewers of wood and drawers of water. They were, of course, not subject to some features of the tyranny against faith and personal dignity to which in the usual course the Hindus would be subjected. Caste-stratification was as rigid among the Muslims as among the Hindus. In the case of the Muslims, the blue blood belonged to the descendants of Arab, Persian, Turk or Afghan immigrants. The native converts were relegated to a lower social stratum corresponding to the lower orders among the Hindus. These inferior Muslims would, they had the consciousness to do so, adopt high-sounding foreign

surnames and sobriquets, like Qureshi, Hamdani, Ghaznavi, Bukhari, Isfahani, Shirazi, Baghdadi, or titles such as Maulvi, Maulana, Haji, Sheikh, Pir, etc. to confer dignity on themselves. All this can be seen replicated among races and peoples where snobbery and climbers' tactics are widely practised.

It was in this background that Indian (in this case identical with Hindu) self-respect had to assert itself, and the rising tide of tyranny in Aurangzib's reign had to be stemmed. The Guru's objective does not appear clearly to have been either to prepare for a revolutionary struggle or to avenge the unjust execution of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. He accepted Mughal rule as a fact of history, just as he would accept Hindu or any other rule that might happen to be established. Like his predecessors on the throne of Guruship, he usually let political matters be, except that with unerring judgement he felt that new problems were arising, more menacing than ever before, and so he not only took himself away from the Muslim seats of state authority, to Anandpur and Paonta, but also gave himself and his followers superb training in arms and the art of war. Out of this background was to grow the Khalsa, Order of Devoted Crusaders, in the near future. That the Guru's attitude towards the reigning Mughals was neither that of a rebel nor a sworn opponent is evident from these lines occurring in the autobiographical *Bachitra Natak*, in the midst of the episode describing an invasion of the hill areas where the Guru was residing, by a Mughal force, at a time when for fear of the army of Prince Muazzam, Aurangzeb's heir-apparent, many of the weak-minded among the Sikhs fled the Guru. Still the Guru writes of the Mughals:

There are two Houses—Baba (Guru) Nanak's and Babar's :
Both these are ordained by the Lord Himself.
This one (Nanak's) is leader in faith, while in that one (Babar's)
inheres the sovereignty of the earth.
Those who pay not the Guru's tithe, will perforce be robbed by the
Mughals of their wealth;
Will be subjected to heavy torture, and have their house and sum
plundered.

(This implies not only that Mughal rule was tyrannical, but also that its tyranny fed heaviest on those who were weak in faith and piety, as by God's will.)

The Guru's persistent struggle against the Mughals, and the sufferings and martyrdom undergone by his side in its course are

matters of a later period, when through the machinations of the Sivalik Hill chiefs, who were Hindus, a mighty attack was mounted against the Guru by the combined forces of these chiefs and the Mughal viceroy of Sirhand. The principal role in this joint invasion naturally went to the Mughal viceroy, the dominant party, and it was from then on that the Guru's trials were added to the Mughal power, against which Banda the Mighty vowed and executed such terrible vengeance.

It is significant that the Guru's early fight was against Hindu feudal chiefs, anxious to preserve their hegemony and looking upon the Guru as a rival and a promulgator of dangerous and heterodox doctrines. In the first of these fights, the battle of Bhangani, a few miles above Paonta, the Guru was assisted by the Musdm saint, Pir Budhu Shah of Sadhaura, along with his sons and disciples. The Pir was later put to death by the viceroy of Sirhand for the crime of assisting the Guru. In the Guru's force were five hundred Pathan mercenaries who deserted on the eve of the battle, obviously under the lure of bribe, to the Guru's Hindu opponents. The Guru nevertheless won a great victory, in which four of the principal hill chiefs were killed, and according to the history of Sirmaur (Nahan) state, eight of their *ranis* performed *sail* along with the bodies of their husbands.

When years later the Guru was being pursued by Mughal soldiers after the superhuman resistance at Chamkaur, as is well-known, he was given shelter and safety by two Musdms, Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan. They had had dealings with the Guru in horses, and obviously looked upon him as a person to be revered and protected. Later still he was sheltered by the Musdm chief of Raikot, named Rai Kadah, in whose family was kept one of the Guru's swords as a proud heirloom.

In the *Zafar Namah*^{vi} again, Aurangzib is blamed for not being a good Musdm, for being false to a solemn oath and for treachery, and is warned to fear the Day of Reckoning when he will have to face the Prophet and to account for these crimes. Of the spirit of determined defiance or hatred of Musdms there is not

25. **There is a controversy about the authorship of this work, but it obviously reflects the Guru's own views on political matters vis-a-vis the Emperor. In spirit it is a bold declaration of ethical principles from one who does not deny fealty to the sovereign on the throne, while at the same time making a spirited protest, as from a man of God, against the tyranny and treachery of the sovereign's deputies.**

a word anywhere.

The Guru's references to the Prophet Muhammad in his compositions are not irreverent. He is mentioned as among the great founders of the religions of mankind though of course not as the greatest or the only among such teachers, in the manner of the Muslims. Towards the Koran and the Muslim religion the references are invariably imbued with the spirit of tolerance and goodwill. The Guru obviously could not subscribe to the view which holds the Islamic Revelation to be the last word in Divine Truth.

It was only in his last days of disillusionment about the Mughals and their rule that the Guru must have made up his mind to put his course on a system which stood for naked and undiluted tyranny, and brought little good. Out of that spirit must have come his mandate to Banda to proceed to the Punjab and to extirpate the oppressive Mughal rule there. During this desperate fight, of course, excesses were committed. Banda and his bands, infuriated at what for centuries the peasants had suffered at the hands of a tyrannical class of rulers, and at the most shocking outrage done in murdering the innocent children of the Guru by the butchers who were ruling Sirhand, fell upon Sirhand and its surrounding areas and reduced it to rubble and the Muslim residents to heaps of corpses. This was in the heat of war, under the impact of a mighty revenge, the like of which has only seldom been heard of in history. These conflicts, involving barbarous persecution of the Sikhs continued throughout half a century or more, ending only in the sixties of the eighteenth century, with the Sikhs gaining the upper hand in the area between the Jhelum and the Jamuna rivers, roughly speaking. That laid the foundations of Sikh rule in the future which got divided as the century wore out, between the States of the Sikh princes on the eastern side of the Sutlej and the vast consolidated kingdom of Lahore, which at its height stretched from the Sutlej westward to include the present North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan, Kashmir and portions of Laddakh, besides the rest of what was known as the Punjab before 1947.

In these vast territories, except by way of punitive military action during campaigns, there is no record of any harsh treatment of Muslims, their erstwhile oppressors, by the Sikhs. As against Mughal or Afghan rule, under which the non-Muslims were persecuted and kept under terror, Sikh rule all through was looked upon by the Muslims not in the way of a curse or an imposition,

but as an era of peace in which they enjoyed all manner of civic rights, such as obtained in those times. The Muslims fought as bravely for the Sikh Kingdom during the wars with the East India Company (1846 and 1849) as the Sikhs. One of the most moving laments on the fall of the Sikh Kingdom is contained in the Var or Ballad of Shah Muhammad, a Muslim, for whom the fight was between 'two mighty kingdoms, Punjab and Hindustan', and not between the Sikhs and the English, in which the Muslims might stand indifferent. Shah Muhammad has penned a glowing encomium to the 'Supernightly' (Maha-Bali) Ranjit Singh, and has traduced those who betrayed his successors' cause. His tone throughout is that of a partisan and admirer of the Sikhs, and not of an alien. In this Ballad, while alluding to the relations obtaining among followers of various faiths, the poet refers to 'Hindus²⁶ and Muslims living at peace.' It is significant that among those who proved treacherous to the Sikh state during the war were some Hindus and Sikhs, and no Muslim. As a matter of fact, some of the most trusted counsellors of Ranjit Singh, charged with delicate missions with the British and the Afghans, were Muslims. To this day, the descendants of the famous Minister, Faqir Aziz-uddin, now in Pakistan, cherish feelings of affection and reverence for the memory of Ranjit Singh. This feeling was shared by Muslims in general, before the recent bitter controversies began. In the Persian chronicle called 'Waqai-Chishti', by a Muslim, a deeply touching account is given of the exile of the child Duleep Singh, last Sikh ruler of the Panjab.

All this mass of goodwill the Sikhs could not have got from the Muslims unless they treated them without rancour or discrimination. Stories are current of Ranjit Singh keeping in restraint the more fanatical elements among the Sikhs, who would wish to impose religious disabilities on the Muslims.²⁷ The picture of Ranjit Singh and the Sikh rulers, both of the eastern states and of the principalities called *misl*s, prior to Ranjit Singh, is one in which Muslim persecution was unknown. As said earlier, apart from whatever happened on the field of battle or in the operations of war against Muslim chiefs, no state action was directed against the Muslims. There were revolts like that of 'Syed Ahmed of Bareilly

26. 'Hindu' includes Sikh.

27. There is the famous incident of Ranjit Singh, buying from a Muslim calligraphist a beautiful, ornate copy of the Koran for a large sum.

against the Sikh Kingdom as an anti-Muslim power; but as is well-known, it was inspired and aided by the East India Company to harass Ranjit Singh, whose 'friend' the Company was supposed to be. This Syed could see in far-off Punjab a heretical state, while the rule of the Company which had replaced the Mughal Empire, must have appeared to him in the light of an Islamic state!

A FEW SIDELIGHTS ON THIS THEME

Guru Nanak is known to have had a Muslim, a minstrel named Mardana, as his companion on his travels. This Mardana was a historical character—some verses in his name appear in the Holy Granth. This companionship was symbolic of the future attitude of the Sikhs towards the Muslims. The Muslim was to be treated as a friend, with regard and love. This tradition has actually been operative in the course of the history of the Sikhs. By a feat of tolerance most remarkable in our land of inter-religious strife, Muslims have continued to recent days to be usually the minstrels in Sikh places of worship, including the holiest of holies, the Hari-mandir or Golden Temple at Amritsar. These Muslims lived, died and worshipped as *Muslims*, and were orthodox followers of their faith; yet they led the Sikhs in performing minstrelsy in their places of worship. This class, called Rababis (players on the rebeck), were a common sight about twenty-five years ago. It was only in the background of the rising tide of communalism in the Punjab, and the objectionable conduct of some of their order repugnant to Sikh religious sentiment and general propriety, that there was a move to discard them. This was, however, at Amritsar only. In the Sikh States of Patiala, Jind, Nabha and Kapurthala, they continued their Sikh minstrelsy right up to the migration of the Muslim population of East Punjab to Pakistan, in 1947. These persons were known by the Sikh honorific title of Bhai, reserved for priests.

There is an authentic tradition among the Sikhs that Guru Arjan while laying the foundation of the Holy Temple at Amritsar caded in the famous Muslim Saint of Lahore, Hazrat Mian Mir, to bless it. This is another of those cardinal facts which have determined the direction of the Sikh attitude throughout history towards thorny questions like the treatment of Muslims. The Muslim has always been well treated.

The fact is well-known of Sikhs having spared the sacred territory of the Muslim Nawab of Malerkotla, when during the eighteenth century all the area around was over-run by the Sikhs,

and one of the bloodiest battles in Sikh annals, Ghallughara or the Great Holocaust, was fought a few miles from the town of Malerkotla between the Sikhs and the Afghan invader, Ahmed Shah. All through, the Sikhs respected the House and the territory of Malerkotla because of the ancestor of the Nawab, Sher Muhammad Khan, having protested against the slaughter of Guru Gobind Singh's tender children at Sirhand. Such a sentiment continuing in history is again unique, and on very good authority it operated even in the terrible days of mutual Muslim-Sikh slaughter in 1947. The Nawabs of Malerkotla to this day remember with gratitude the respect shown to their House by the Sikhs.

Sikh-Muslim relations in India, as a whole, are of the best. This can be seen in large Muslim centres like Delhi, Lucknow, Bareilly, Patna, Hyderabad and elsewhere. The Sikhs, like brave people everywhere, have long back forgotten the temporary rancour of 1947, when excesses got committed. In the Muslim University of Adgarh, with its strongly-coloured Muslim character, the Sikhs are the most prominent among the non-Muslim groups who participate to the full in the varied life of the University, without inhibitions or mental reservations. The Muslim in all parts of India has learned to respect the large-heartedness of the Sikh. This quality stems from the history of the Sikhs, which has been shaped by the Word of the Guru, whose burden is catholicity, tolerance and humanity.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE ABOVE

A considerable body of Persian verse has gone into the *Dasam Granth*. Much of the Persian composed around Guru Gobind Singh is supposed to be the work of Bhai Nand Lai, who had adopted the pen-name of Goya, and was without doubt a great scholar of Persian. His devotional and mystical poems are full of sincere feeling and are couched in the style and idiom of Persian mystical poetry, whose tradition was some centuries old. These Persian compositions of Bhai Nand Lai are held in high reverence by the Sikhs, and are chanted in the original or in Punjabi rendering in Sikh congregations.

The Persian verse, which is included in *Dasam Granth*, is mainly secular in theme, carrying the usual invocations to God, styled in the Sikh idiom made current by Guru Gobind Singh. *Zafarnamah*, the Epistle of Victory, reportedly addressed to Aurangzib, also forms part of this body of verse. There are twenty or twenty-one Persian couplets of another composition, recently

discovered, called *Fatahnamah*. These are in the same style and metre as *Zafamamah*, and might very well form a portion of it. These are, however, not in *Dasatn Granth*, but there is no doubt that they are part of another Epistle parallel to *Zafamamah*.

The whole point of this statement is, that Persian, the language of purely Muslim culture and thought in India, was not taboo at the Guru's Court—it was on the other hand in wide use. There is hymn of Guru Nanak's composition in *Adi Granth*, which is Persian mixed with Indian dialects. In a hymn of Namdev, the Maharashtrian saint included also in *Adi Granth*, there occur phrases and sentences in Persian. All this shows earnest attempts at cultural commerce and even 'fusion' between Hindu and Muslim, on the part of the Gurus.

A GLANCE BACK

There is a persistent belief among historians and writers, particularly those who have followed only superficially the course of Sikh history, that Sikhism has been a blend between Hinduism and Islam. Thus A. C. Bouquet in *Sacred Books of the World* thinks Sikhism to be 'the fruit of hybridization between Hinduism and Islam'. Khushwant Singh in his superbly produced *History of the Sikhs* affirms : 'Sikhism was born out of wedlock between Hinduism and Islam'. Nirad Chaudhari, in his sparkling *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* calls Sikhism the result of the application of Islam to Hinduism. Such expressions are typical of the Western or Westernized scholar's view, particularly when he views Sikhism from the social, external angle, and leaves out its spiritual and philosophical genesis. Such a eugenic or pragmatic attitude as is implied in the views quoted above, gives a completely distorted view of history.

Sikhism, doctrinally, is a continuation of Indian spiritual idealism, and enshrines in itself the deepest beliefs of what has come to be known as Hinduism. Thus, the doctrine of Karma, or Transmigration, of the cessation of the cycle of births and deaths, called Mukti or Nirvana, superior to any imagined. Paradise of Semitic conception; the computation of human history in terms of the four Yugas; the basis of ethical psychology in three qualities of Tama, Raja and Satya; the concept of Maya, the Veil of Material Reality—all these and many more are essential features which Sikhism shares with idealistic Hinduism, and which are characteristic only of those spiritual systems which have developed

within India. Sikhism, of course, discarded the concept of Incarnations or *avatars* of Vishnu along with image-worship of all kinds. But such reconsideration of traditional Hinduism does not throw Sikhism outside the pale of that vast comity of cultures which is known as Hinduism, despite the disclaimer by the Gurus and by Sikhs in recent times about Hinduism. The Guru meant by such disclaimer to disown the current religious prejudices and rancour, along with their insistence on discarding ritualism and hollow ceremonial and sectarianism of vulgarized popular Hinduism. They aimed at emphasizing the spiritual and ethical content of religion, and its inherent capacity to guide the human life towards the nobler fulfilment. The entire vocabulary and philosophical terminology of the Sikh faith stems from Indian sources. So does the illustrative mythology, used in Sikhism not to emphasize the literal adoration of deities, but to symbolize ethical and spiritual qualities, of which these deities are regarded only as allegories. The Muslim names and attributes of God and other words from the same source are clearly intended to impress the need of tolerance and goodwill. None of the overtones of Islamic theology—its concept of Allah, its idea of the Semitic chain of prophethood, its belief in the Day of Judgement, its rites of circumcision or animal sacrifice etc. are even remotely mentioned in the Sikh teaching with any approval. In view of all this, it is a surprisingly rash opinion which postulates any 'blending' of Islam and Hinduism to form Sikhism. The Gurus, whenever they have mentioned Islam, are seen to look upon it as alien, unfamiliar to be reconciled and made to yield to the general idea of a fact of the total national life rather than remain aggressive and separatist. Such is their attitude towards it.

The attributes of God as One, without a rival, uncreated and unincarnate—do resemble the similar attributes of Allah as in the Koran, whose monotheism is peculiar to itself. The Islamic God is a mighty Lord, of a terrible aspect, though withal described as beneficent and merciful. But to seek His mercy, intercession of the Prophet Muhammad is indispensable. All this is alien to the Sikh conception, which looks upon the Guru as Redeemer from Sin, as Teacher and guide to noble actions. Such actions alone lead to salvation and not any intercession by the Guru. As a matter of fact, in the insistence on good actions, Sikhism leaves no manner of doubt that its doctrine stands apart from Islam. The attributes of God as One, unincarnate etc. are all known to Indian spiritual

idealism²⁸, and their source need not be sought in the Islamic tradition. It is significant that Guru Nanak in the Creed (Mul Mantra) in Japji does not use any Arabic term, but such philosophical-spiritual term as have specifically Indian overtones. That is because Guru Nanak's God is not the Allah of Muslims, Destroyer of Infidels, but Kartar, the Creator whose love is unbounded, and whose justice is dispensed solely on the individual's merit. This God is, moreover, not monotheistically conceived as in a remote empyrean, with a host of angels and archangels surrounding Him, but is immanent as well as transcendent. Sikhism has virtually no theological dogma, angelology or demonology, except such as are used illustratively and allegorically. In such use Muslim concepts like Azrail (the Angel of Death) and Houris (nymphs honouring heroes who fall in battle) are not unknown, but the context makes it clear that their use is dterary and poetic rather than dteral.

Apart from the monotheistic conception of the God-head (actuady as stated earder, it goes farther than plain monotheism of the Islamic variety), another feature which must have bred the notion of a fusion between Islam and Hinduism to produce Sikhism, would be the mditarist aspect which Sikhism acquired under Guru Gobind Singh. The notion that Hinduism is quiescent and passive and Islam is mditaristic, is superficial and takes stock only of an isolated segment of the history of India, during which the Hindu, under the influence of a decadent philosophical outlook, went under before the conquering might of Islam. But to take such a view is to forget the heroic traditions of India, obscured on doubt after the sudden stunning blow of Muslim conquest, but revived in the name of Akal Purukha (The Immoral *Lord*) by Guru Gobind Singh. It is significant again that Guru Gobind Singh roused the dormant heroic spirit of the Indian people in the name of Akal, Maha-Kal, Bhagauti, Parma Purkha, Kartar and such other concepts of the Creator, ad drawn from Indian thought, with Indian overtones and associations. The imagery employed by the Guru, particularly the image of the avenging Chandi, the goddess and heroine who in

28. Om, the Vedic name of God, adopted by Guru Nanak, to which the numeral (1) is prefixed, implies the uncreated, eternal God. Advaita the philosophy of the identification of the Creator with the creation is reflected in Sikh thought. The concept of Maya, the illusion which creates separateness where in truth there is identity, is integral to Hidnu and Sikh thought.

ancient ages protected the gods against the demons, is the protectress of values Indian, and in the entire context of the invocation of the heroic spirit, her name stands for the dormant spirit of Indian heroism against the aggression of a power professing to serve Islam, seeking to rule over and suppress the Indians as adens. Chandi is both an Idea—the archetype of avenging heroism—as well as in her visible form the goddess of Hindu conception, who has eight arms and rides the Lion. Her opponents are the demons of Indian mythology—Sumbha and Nisumbha, Mahikhasur, Chanda and Munda, etc. Ad these associations, which are an integral part of Guru Gobind Singh's life-view and philosophy, are Indian conceptions. In *Bachitra Natak*, he stands in a previous incarnation before the Lord, called Akal Purukha, after long penance on Hemkunt, and is blessed by the Lord and sent into the world to spread *dhanna*. Heroism stemming from such sources and on such inspiration can certainly have not the remotest association with anything Muslim, except in the way of the tolerance of Islam as such.

There are, of course, Persian and Arabic words, occurring in all places, as the attributes of the Lord, and as synonyms for the sword and other weapons.²⁹ This is only the use of current idiom, without any specific attachments or associations drawn from Musdm theology or history. The more one reflects, the more one finds that Sikh philosophical and religious thought stems from roots Indian, and the Sikh concept of heroism is specifically Indian. The Guru's heroes, besides Chandi, are Rama and Krishna and not any Islamic or Perso-Arabian figures. There are few isolated words, which taken out of their context and given exaggerated significance might lead one to speculate on the vestiges of Islamic ideas in Sikhism. Such, for example, is the appdcation of the term 'But-Shikan' (Idol-Breaker) to the Guru in *Zafar Namah*. This term has definite Muslim associations of an unpleasant character, as reminiscent of the tyranny of the Muslim conquerors in riding rough-shod over the susceptibidties of the Hindus. Such a word only lends strength to the doubts as to whether *Zafar Namah*, as it stands, is the Guru's own composition, or even authorized by him. It is probably a later dramatization, as Indu Bhushan

29. Apart from Rahim and Karim, Qadir and Parvardagar, etc. there are the names of weapons; saif, tegh, tabr, tufang, khatang (Khadang); then there are nishan, fateh, deg, etc.

Bannerji has suggested. Anyway, it would be rash to build a philosophical structure on such isolated occurrences as these.

AN ARGUMENT

Considered logically, there was little need or occasion for Guru Nanak or any of his successors, including Guru Gobind Singh, to go to Islamic theology or Muslim society in India for example and exhortation. Guru Nanak has actually castigated those Hindus who flatteringly adopted the Muslim parlance and grooves of thought, as guilty of self-seeking and lack of patriotism. Islam with its alien tradition of thought, its outlandish heroes and customs and mores could not have served to inspire Guru Nanak and his successors, who aimed at infusing the Indian people with the zeal for spiritual quest and ethical endeavour, and to arouse them out of their torpor and ignorance. Apart from the question whether Islam in theory could have given much that the Gurus would have valued, in India as practised and preached, it stood for bigotry and fanaticism and was not less superstitious, obscurantist and strife-promoting in character than current Hinduism.³⁰ The Gurus wished in essence so to reinterpret and revive the spiritual tradition of India as to purge it of its dross and accretions. Islam could give little guidance towards compassing such an end. Its strong dogmatic tendency, its exclusiveness and its sectarianism, already inherent but strengthened after its introduction into the Indian milieu—all these presented a disease to be cured as much as the similar malady within Hinduism. Of the essential humanitarianism of the Guru's conception where was the evidence in Islam as the Gurus saw it.

There are superficial postulates about the brotherhood, democracy (whatever that may mean) and equality in Islam, which the Gurus might be supposed to draw upon. All these notions are chimeras. Islam in India was caste-ridden, deeply stratified, practising untouchability and the severest type of racialism. Far from exhibiting any democratic or egalitarian spirit, it was a pyramidal feudal structure, with a rapacious, tyrannical aristocracy on top, sucking the life-blood out of the mass of the people, both Hindu and Muslim. It was supported by mercenary retainers, pampered to kill, rape and loot. Its sanction came from divines and priests who were bigoted, hypocritical and corrupt, on

30. Incarnations and amulets provided by Muslim Pirs and worship of tombs was current. The Gurus condemned all such practices.

the evidence of Guru Nanak himself. Justice was only a dream, and 'decency and faith had hidden their faces'. By the time Guru Gobind Singh came upon the scene, things had grown even worse. Aurangzib's court consisted of mere parasites, degenerate aristocrats who had lost the personal chivalry of their forbears, and were a bloated race who even in war-time kept with them swarms of concubines. As a historian has remarked, 'the men who came with Babar were ruddy men in boots; but those who followed Aurangzib were pale men in petticoats.' Thus much for the Muslim society in India.

There may be a lurking notion that the militancy of Islam may have been emulated by Guru Gobind Singh. This assumption again will bear little scrutiny. Muslim militancy as known throughout history in India was aggression and high-handedness. The Guru wished to inculcate the qualities of martyrs and hero-crusaders (Dharma-Virs) among his followers. The Muslims in India could furnish little by way of inspiring the Guru to emulation. The presence of militant Islam in India no doubt led the Guru to draw the sword in what it would be right to call the assertion of national self-respect, visualized as war against evil, but the inspiration towards that came from native, Indian sources. Guru Nanak's visits to Muslim saints were as much in the nature of a quest for that Divine Truth, neither specifically Hindu nor Muslim, as an attempt at bridging the gulf which separated Hindus and Muslims. A bridge of universal, non-sectarian truths and ideals needed to be built which the Guru was building through his Word and his Holy Ministry. Where noble souls were found among the Muslims, like Sheikh Ibrahim Farid or Hazrat Mian Mir, the Gurus valued and honoured them and cherished their friendship. This was true as well of such among the Hindu Bhaktas as shared the Guru's ideals.

It would, therefore, be adopting an entirely wrong perspective to ascribe to the Sikh movement any desire to emulate Islam, to absorb any of its ideas or institutions or to adopt any part of its strategy or polity. Islam, as a fact of Indian history, was treated by the Gurus as an inevitable element in the national life, to be put up with, treated with tolerance but hardly to be admired or emulated. This is the true picture as it emerges from a close perusal of Sikh teachings and the course of Sikh history.

CHAPTER 5

APOSOLATE TO THE PEOPLE

RELIGION AND THE DEMOCRATIC SPIRIT

The idea of democracy is based, among other considerations, on faith in the inherent capacity of man to rise to moral and intellectual eminence through hard work and devotion. It negates the idea of eminence by birth, except in so far as the mystery inherent in heredity determines the limits of a person's capabilities and binds him down in certain ways which was almost beyond human control. But these factors—merits as well as limitations—are scattered about among human beings by nature through her inscrutable Will. The poorest and the lowliest are not debarred from receiving such gifts, and the richest and the proudest have no guarantee that their progeny shall have them. In other words, it is man's God-given powers, to use the parlance of religion, which determine his greatness or ordinariness. These powers inherent in the infinitely, their quality trained to new capacities, and the individual, through application and endeavour can attain the ideal development in any one of the directions conceived by the human spirit—as intellectual, artist, saint, hero prophet—or any other.

Religion, even while apparently not adhering to the idea of democracy in the modern political sense, and actually sanctifying the conservation of caste and birth, has always placed the idea of the individual endeavour at the core of its processes. The injunction in all religions to the individual to do penance and perform austerities, and to purify the self and to attain the state of enlightenment and bliss, is at basis an exhortation to him to call forth the inherent potentialities of his own character and personality, about which it is assumed that they have an almost infinite capacity for growth. Thus, it is through *sadhana* (endeavour), *simran* (smaran or meditation), self-discipline and all the self-denial which that may involve, that men are shown

the path of saintliness and of ultimate greatness. Out of such endeavour alone comes true leadership, which in the religious sphere is designated by its various grades, such as piety, saintliness, prophethood and ultimately godhood—such as is accorded to men of overwhelming spiritual power among all peoples in those eras when faith has been accorded the supreme place in the lives of men.

This idea of holiness and saintliness through individual character and godliness is at the core of that highly influential body of thought which developed in India during the medieval ages and had been generally characterized as the *Bhakti* movement. No holiness by birth or a predetermined ordinance, but the achievement of such bliss through individual endeavour, sacrifice and self-discipline—such is the basic postulate of *Bhakti*. This postulate has in it the most significant philosophical idea of democracy—the supreme importance of the individual as individual; Each individual is God's especial charge and protégé. He is unique in his capacity for spiritual development, and unique in his love of the Supreme Being and in being cherished by Him. Such an idea is basically democratic in its spiritual, if not in its social, political and other implications. The proliferation of modern political democracy, with its emphasis on revolution and social equality, by one of the astonishing paradoxes of history, has developed actually out of the modern man's attempt at finding a new, more enlightened religion, in the Christian lands of Western Europe. Such paradoxes are not unknown to history, in which movement may end in ways entirely different from those with which they began, and revolutionaries may set up as tyrants, and reformers of yesterday may be branded as corruptors of today.

THE DEMOCRATIC DIRECTION OF SIKHISM

Whereas the various religious movements of medieval India, generally comprehended under the capacious label *Bhakti* were mainly directed at the purification and sweetening of the individual personality through self-discipline and love, Sikhism took an added, and tremendously meaningful orientation. Whereas providing for the development of the individual personality in a degree much more intense than the other contemporary movements by the fact of its having a Scripture, a Church and the character of a community (in the widest and sociological sense of this much misused word), it at the same time developed certain institutions which gave permanence and power to its influence. The individual's

spiritual and ethical purity—while the greatest emphasis was laid on these—were placed in the midst of the social group, which in this case was the 'Panth' (literally way or path, i.e., order or community). The individual must serve the order or group, and as a matter of fact, mankind in general, and not only 'swim across the ocean of this life himself, but also help others to go across it'. Or, to put this idea in words still more powerful from Guru Nanak's *Japji*: 'Those who have meditated on the Name have made heroic endeavour; their faces are illuminated with the light Divine, and countless others have got salvation through them'. Later, the saint also became hero, martyr, crusader—as is discussed in detail in another chapter of this book. This basic difference made the Sikh Church potentially more influential in those fields which may be called social and political, and gave to it a power which any individual-oriented spiritual movement could not attain. It is this aspect of the character of Sikhism which has also made it widely misunderstood and misinterpreted among the Indian people, whose concept of religion for more than a millennium has been that of a path of individual spiritual endeavour and salvation. Further, such an idea is generally not dissociated from the inherent conservatism of heredity and casteism, so that a confusing jumble which emphasizes individualism as against the consciousness of social responsibility, and conservatism as against uncompromising insistence on the achievements of individual character has remained strongly embedded in Indian religious thought. The consequence has been, that the general character of the various Bhakti cults has remained conservative, although some of their emphases have gone into the consciousness of general Hinduism, without modifying its essential conservative core, consisting in notions like the supreme importance given to caste and untouchability. Sikhism developed along lines which ran counter to the purely individualistic idea in its insistence on laying on man the duty of 'seva' or service in the widest sense, and in its uncompromising repudiation of merit attaching to birth through a pre-ordained unalterable caste. 'This feature has made Sikhism viewed with suspicion by all manner of religious thinkers in India. But it is in possessing these characteristics that the essential greatness and democratic character of Sikhism lies.

1. The Sikhs, for example, have no priestly caste whatever. Any person with knowledge of religion and otherwise eligible, may officiate as priest at any time.

The democratic idea in this respect can be traced in the Sikh Church right from its inception. The first opportunity for the application of such an idea arose when the Founder, Guru Nanak felt that his earthly pilgrimage was coming to a close; and in order to carry further the Divine Message with the spreading of which he had been charged, natural question arose : who next? The story is well-known of the Guru putting to the test the capacity to lead the infant mission of his sons Sri Chand and Lakshmi Das, both of whom failed to come up to the Guru's expectations. So, after deep deliberation, the Guru put Lehna, the disciple with the unquestioned obedience in the seat of Guruship. His identification with the Guru in spirit earned him the name of Angad—limb of the Guru's limb. Next the succession again eluded the new Guru's sons and passed instead to the septuagenarian Amar Das, humble disciple, untiring in personal service, who uttered his life's sense of devoted discipleship in these words, growing from the inmost depths of personality:

Arduous is the way of Master's service;

It comes to him who gives away his head, and takes no care of self.²

It was this pure soul whom the Master in a moment of supreme and overflowing love, called 'shelter of the shelterless, refuge of the unprotected, honour of the unhonoured.'

The same pattern was repeated with the new Guru, Amar Das, passing his sons over, he conferred the crown of God's service on a poor orphan, Ram Das, whom despite notions of class and station, current among his folk, he honoured with his own daughter's hand. There was rage and gnashing of teeth by the Guru's sons at being passed over.

The story moves further, with the guruship henceforth remaining in Guru Ram Das's family. This was, as the great savant, Bhai Gurdas, interpreter of the Holy Word avers, because 'none other could bear the unbearable'. These are cryptic, mystic words. They express not only the power to bear the Vision Divine, to look upon the ineffable Reality face to face, but point also to the

2. In the *Asa-di-Var* says Guru Angad on the theme of the true men of God;

The true servants are those men of supreme contentment who kept even before their minds truth swerving never from it.

'Never have they strayed to evil; immersed in pure action have they ever performed righteousness; emancipating themselves from the shackles of the world, they were content with little of the fare of this world.

(Asa—pp. 466-67)

crown of martyrdom and heroism which henceforth the occupant of the Apostolic seat had to wear, in the way of God and the service of man.

Even in this later part of the history of guruship the search for merit and fitness continued. Guru Ram Das passed over his two older sons in favour of the youngest, Arjan Dev, who justified the choice by being the compiler of the *Holy Granth*, founder of the Harimandir (Golden Temple) and Tarn Taran, and composer of hymns of unsurpassed sweetness and divine love. He it was who for the first time in the history of the Church wore the crown of martyrdom and bared his breast to the indescribable tortures of Jahangir, mixture of hedonistic impulses and fits of primitive Mongol barbarity. The Guru's eldest brother, Prithi Chand (Prithia) never abated in his hate and rancour, and throughout life was endeavouring to injure the god-like soul whose days and nights were given to love and service. The story of the lengths to which Prithia's hate was carried, reads like the pursuit of a man by a demoniac spirit, for such truly his envy had made Prithia, whose poison never adowed him rest.

In later generations of guruship, it was the same. The names of Dhir Mai and Ram Rai are well-known as of those who set up their own paradel churches, imposing on simple folk with ad the outer symbols of guruship. But the tinsel inevitably wore off. These seekers after worldly glory and gain were not made of the metal which could lead the nascent church through the trials of a confdct with the tyrannical power of the Mughals, now taking more and more to oppression. It was the choice of the Child-Apostle, Harkrishan, who emerged as the ninth Master, Tegh Bahadur, and gave his head without flinching, fighting for truth and justice. It was again his son Gobind Rai, who moulded the people into a force to fight tyranny and to spread righteousness.

The story of Guruship among the Sikhs presents a long record of devotion and sacrifice, a true crucifixion of the earthly life to drink of the nectar of the lifdivine. This purity of its ideals was kept up because greatness within the fold inhered in the character and piety of the individual, and not on any adventitious circumstances, including even sonship to the Guru. This points the way to that development within the Church, which it is not wrong or misplaced to look up as the principle of spiritual democracy in which uncompromising adherence to principle was the supreme consideration.

THE PRECEPTOR-DISCIPLE IDENTIFICATION

The bond between the Preceptor (called Guru or some times while using the Muslim parlance, Pir) and the Disciple (called *sikh—shishya—or murid*) is that of love surpassing, which results in the merging of spirit into spirit. That is how the Sikh mystical idea sees in ad the ten Gurus immanence of the same spirit, which passing from Guru Nanak permeates them right up to Guru Gobind Singh, and now the Word, as enshrined in the Holy Granth. This is not pathetic fadacy, but the very basic truth of spirituality. Spirit communicates with spirit through the Word which may be sounded or silent, ineffable. It is through such communion that the spirit of the Preceptor merges into that of the Disciple, obdterating all distinction between the two. This is the secret of mystical Love which is at the basis of ad true redgion and idealism. In the Preceptor is visible the essence of the Divine Soul, so that in the mystical chain, to the disciple the preceptor is the door through which entry is vouchsafed to the Divine, the Immortal. This is the essence of the mystical doctrine, which is the universal path of spiritual ascesion to Moksha, Didar or the Beatific Vision, as the experience is named in Hindu, Sufistic, or Christian terminology. The disciple's love for the Preceptor-Master is expressed in words burning with the fire of passion in the Scripture. Says the fourth Master, Ram Das, in the hymn which captures through its flaming imagery the very essence of such devotion:

May I be a slave to one who grants me a sight of the True Beloved;
My spirit yearns ever for a sight of Him....

Shouldst thou send joy, it disturbs not my meditation of Thee;
Shouldst thou send suffering, so do I stdl think on Thee.

So I have a sight of Thee, may I cut this flesh to pieces and make of
it an offering in fire!.....

Let the storm blow never so wild, and the rain never so lashing,
the disciple still must brave these to have a sight of the
Master;

May the salt sea rage between, the disciple still must cross it to
have the Master's sight.

As life is suffocated without water, so is separation from the
Master death to the disciple.

As the earth is beautified by showers of rain, so does the disciple's
soul blossom on beholding the Master.

May it frost and snow never so serve, the disciple still must stir
out to have a sight of the Master.

The Master is Nanak's body and soul; his sight alone can fill
him;

Nanak's Master is omnipresent, everywhere, Lord of the universe.

(Suhī, pp. 757-58)

The mystical relationship of the Love which makes identical the Beloved Lord and the Devotee, is expressed in words beautiful beyond praise by Guru Arjan. The Lord is ever watchful of the concerns of his Lover-Devotee;

He keeps untarnished the honour of His servant, and inspires him to meditate on the Name;

He comes rushing to perform to success wherever are His servant's concerns.

He ever is at hand to help and succour him.

Whatsoever the boon the servant begs of Him, He grants it that instant.

May I be a sacrifice to the servant who has earned such love of the Master.

The praise of such a servant blesses the heart;

Nanak covets even the touch of such a one. (Asa, Page 403)

The ideal servant, the devotee whose life is dedicated to the Master has been praised in another place equally highly by the same Apostle, Guru Arjan:

(The ideal servant of the Lord is he) who never gave place in his heart to pride, attachment, greed and evil desires and whose thought strayed never beyond the Lord;

His commerce has all been in the jewels of the Lord's Name and His qualities—of this merchandise does he carry the load.

Such is the true servant—true unto death :

Living he has ever worshipped the Lord and to the last breath has ever kept Him in his heart.

Never has he turned his face away from the Lord's command.

He has lived ever in enjoyment of the Lord's bliss and goes rushing wherever He may ordain. (Maru, page 1000)

This Lord, all Supreme Love and so deeply merged into the devotee and merging the devotee into Himself is the God whom the Gurus worshipped from Nanak to Gobind Singh. This relationship of Love inheres no less between the devotee and the Lord than between the Master, that is the Guru, and the disciple, that is the Sikh. Without such love faith is only a husk, not the true reality, To create such love and devotion is the purpose of religion. It is when such love has been consummated that true identification takes place. After that the Master's joys and sorrows are identical with those of the Devotee-servant; between the two there is no distinction—one needs the other, and through love, both fulfil each other. When such is the relationship, there is no

suffering, for all suffering undertaken in the path of the Lord is joy everlasting. The Master lives and dies in the Devotee, exactly as the devotee in dying for the Master attains the Supreme Bliss.

The students of the various orders of mysticism—whether Indian, Muslim, Christian or other, are not unfamiliar with such an experience, intellectually at any rate. The highest experience which Sikhism aims at imparting to the devotee is in no way different from this same bliss or joy, called in Gurbani (the Guru's Word) Sahaj Anand (the state of spontaneous joy)—that is, the state which has become to the devotee an essential attribute of his personality, even though as the Gurus have borne witness, it is attained only after the most rigorous penance—the state in which, in Guru Nanak's words, 'one is as dead while living'.

An understanding of the two points so far made is essential for entering into the spirit of Guru Gobind Singh identifying himself with his disciples, and in ultimately conferring on them the supreme honour of deputizing for the Guru in all matters. At the basis of Guru Gobind Singh's ordinance in 'conferring Guruship on the Khalsa', that is, the Commonwealth, were these two sovereign ideas: One, an intellectually apprehended idea which recognizes the value and sanctity of the individual personality, and places its faith in the capacity of man's soul to grasp and pursue the good. This is ultimately the philosophical basis of the democratic concept. The other, the mystical faith whereby the true devotee and the Master are identified and after such identification the devotee has in him all that the Master has—the Master ever being present by the side of the devotee to guide and protect him. This mystical idea is peculiar to religion, and is unknown to the purely dialectical and intellectual rationale of social democracy. But it is this idea more than any other whose understanding is so essential in order to realize the mystique whereby the Lord is ever-present to the faithful, and the spirit of the Master-Beloved is ever there to guide the thoughts and judgements of the devotee. It is only when one has attempted to grasp something of this experience that the underlying philosophical-mystical basis of the Sikh faith may be understood.

GURU GOBIND SINGH—ONE WITH THE DISCIPLES

Bhai Gurdas Singh,³ while eulogizing the great personality

3. This person is different from the great poet and savant Bhai Gurdas, contemporary of the fifth and sixth Gurus.

and achievement of Guru Gobind Singh in his Var (a kind of badad-ode) has as the refrain of his poem :

Behold there, manifest the incomparable man,
the hero unsurpassed!

Glory be to Gobind Singh, Master-Disciple!

The reference in these words is to the famous incident, that the Guru after administering to the Sikhs the new Baptism of Steel, called Amrit or Nectar, offered himself before the disciples to be baptized himself. This indeed was a unique and deeply meaningful action, contrary to the usual custom. Nowhere else has it been seen that the founder of a faith has put himself in such a position of humility and begged of the disciples to confirm him in the faith by giving to him what he has already given them. The significance of this reversal of roles is deep and abiding. The Master not only thereby showed himself to be humble in spirit, truly dying the lesson which he and his predecessors had preached now for generations, but demonstrated also his identification with the disciples. The disciple, if he be true in heart and have truly dedicated himself to the Master's mission, is worthy to take his place, and in the Guru's words 'to meditate on the Name himself and to lead others towards such meditation'. Or, 'their own faces bright with the light divine, they bring salvation to countless others'. It is when the Guru has identified himself with disciples of such devotion and purity that it is just and right for him to change places with them. For, they are truly conditioned and ready to take his place—but only when the disciples be such. As the Gita says, the righteous man's action is 'consumed in the fire of spiritual enlightenment' (*jnan-agni-dagdha karma*). These disciples, when the Guru made a cad for their heads, offered these unhesitatingly, so that they fulfilled Guru Nanak's injunction to 'enter the quarter of love with thy head on the palm of thy hand.' They were 'dead while alive—dead in the flesh. They had put by all worldly ambition, and through their sacrifice had earned the title of the Guru's five beloved ones', who are mentioned in the daily prayer of the Sikhs along with the four martyred sons of the Guru—an honour which with characteristic generosity of soul, Guru Gobind Singh, 'the unique, the mighty' alone could confer on these sons of his spirit, not less dear than the sons of his flesh. Thus is love at the basis of this identification of the Guru with the disciples—and this is the seed of a development which may well be called democracy, equality or by any other political name, but

for which such labels are inadequate, for they lack the dimension of spiritual love, which is the true basis of such relationship.

Comes then the scene of the battles fought, the sacrifices made by the Sikhs—ad the heroic deeds performed by men inspired by the Guru, such for example as Bachittar Singh, who single-handed turned back trailing blood, the ferocious armoured elephant of the hid chiefs. And countless others. Then we have to consider one of the basic causes of the conflict which the hid chiefs had with the Guru—their objection to the Guru raising to a consciousness of their importance and heroism the common folk, mostly those whom the haughty Rajputs and their Brahmin mentors regarded as low-caste, the very dregs. This, they felt, was dangerous, subversive. Of course it was, for the Guru aimed at nothing less than 'to make wrens hunt down hawks'. Men are wrens or hawks, meek sheep or lions, as the spirit inside makes them. The Guru, whose injunction at Baptism was to annul caste, family and previous actions,⁴ was releasing in these humble men—artisans and peasants for the most part—energies which were to defeat and lay in ruins a powerful empire, established for over two centuries, and to turn slaves into men of dignity and heroism. Thus did he share with his God the attribute of Cherisher of the humble' (Gharibul-nawaz). In the words of the great poet, Kaviraj Santokh Singh in *Gurupratap Suraj Granth*, the Guru's aim is thus expressed:

The True Master Gobind Singh, out of great compassion,
Set all the four varnas⁵ on the path of righteousness :
The poorest of the poor, lowliest of the lowly,
Should henceforth be heroes, and never be trampled down.
Those who had not been entitled even to ablutions,
Could now be made superior to Brahmins :
Those since ages steeped in ignorance and utter illiteracy,
Would hereafter be learned savants, unique and supreme.
Thus were sheep turned into lions.
And crows taught the beautiful rhythm of swans stepping,
Serfs and labourers, with backs broken with toil
Shad hereafter command, riding on horses and elephants.
Men without knowledge or awareness of this world and hereafter,

4 This means, in the philosophy of Karma, the determining deeds, whereby a man gets the caste into which he is born. The Guru abolished this notion of predetermination and the stigma which popular belief attached to the poor who were mostly 'low-caste'.

5 Castes.

Shall meditate on the True Name and attain salvation.
 Any who grudge to acknowledge the True Guru's boon,
 Are the meanest, lowest of ungrateful wretches.

(Rut 4, Adhyaya 10)

The Guru's full-hearted tribute to the Disciples—the Khalsa, who at his behest grasped the sword to extirpate tyranny and evil—is justly famous, and is unique in world literature for the glorification of what in modern parlance would be called 'the people' as the source of all greatness and achievement. Here is in the words of a founder of religion the reply to that view of history expressed by Fichte, Carlyle, Hegel and other supporters of the fascist idea, that history is a shadow of the personality of a few extraordinary individuals. But in Guru Gobind Singh's words the mute, unnamed, countless millions, humble workers, appear to rise to claim exaltation from his generous heart, 'cherishing the humble'. This is contained in the famous reply to the irate Brahmin Kesho Das, who in his pride of birth and traditional learning claimed precedence over the peasants and low-caste folk who had bartered away their heads for the Guru's ideals, and whom he in turn loved with a love the intensity of which no image of any kind of earthly relationship can picture or adequately measure. Thus rods along with a magnificent movement this piece of mighty tribute, commonly known as 'Khalse-di-Mahima' (A tribute to the Great Khalsa),

My battles I have won through their favour, and through their
 favour have I dispensed charity;
 By their grace have I overcome all manner of evils; by their grace is
 there fulness in my house.
 Through their favour have I learned wisdom, and by their grace
 have I vanquished my foes.
 All my exaltation I owe to them; else are there millions like me,
 poor and insignificant.
 Favours done to these alone please me, and to none else.
 Charity dispensed to these alone is blessed; all other charity is of
 little worth.
 What is given away to these, will alone bring blessing in the
 hereafter—all else will prove fruitless.
 In my house and that is, is theirs—my life,
 my soul, my head and all my worldly possessions.

It would be affirming the obvious to say once again, that such love and devotion one will seek in vain as subsisting between a Master and his followers. Here was, in the words of Carlyle, a

real man speaking, whose words flamed into deeds, and whose deeds alone determined what he uttered.

As the Master sent forth these dedicated warriors into the harsh world of tyranny and oppression to set it right, he assured them of the protection of the Eternal Lord, in the words of the author of *Gur-Bilas* of the Tenth Master:

While you cherish my words,
 The Lord of the Sword-Banner shad be your protector.
 Seek to follow no false means of propitiation.
 And worship at the feet of the Sword-Banner alone.
 The book of the Ten Masters'
 Ye follow, to get purity and emancipation.
 Remember ever with your wakeful soul to honour weapons,
 And with these make ceaseless war on hordes of barbarians.
 I have conferred on you Life-spiritual-amidst-plenty',
 And brought ye face to face with the Light Divine.
 Cherish ye always the Saintly and the Righteous—
 Then shad your rule on earth be imperishable.
 Bow ye at the feet of the Immaculate Lord.
 And drink of the honeyed nectar of the Light Divine.
 I have put ye in the lap of the Mighty Sword',
 And have made manifest to you all the stages of the path.
 By maintaining prosperity-for-all and wielding the sword'
 Shad ye get triumph eternal.
 Bear ye ever love for the code of the Almighty.
 Contemplate ever the Lord of eternity;
 His sight ye shall get within your hearts.

(Taken from *Gurmat Sudhakar*, pp. 519-20)

According to the Guru's ideal it were only such men as these—dedicated, emancipated from desire and wakeful ever to the Lord, who could be entrusted with the task which the Guru felt called upon to accomplish on earth—to spread the Truth, and to protect Righteousness. This is also the meaning of the mystic number Five, which according to the Indian tradition, brings into the assembly of five good and God-fearing men, the spirit and wisdom of God, to guide them on to true and just actions. Hence it has ever been held in this land, according to the old saying, 'Among the Five is God Himself.' The traditional Indian word for those who are entrusted with the responsibility to guide the affairs of

6. That is, the Holy Granth.
7. The original is, Raj-Yoga.
8. One of the Guru's periphrastic names of God.
9. Original, Deg Tegh.

the community is Panch, which has come to stand for the Elect, the Chosen, in the spiritual and esoteric sense. It is in this sense that Guru Nanak says in stanza 16 *oiJapji* :

Such are the Elect who are acceptable to the Lord; they are supreme among mankind.

They shine in beauty at the portals of the Lord.

They are the wise, meditation-instructed.

Such was the conception of the Five about whom Guru Gobind Singh said, to those who took his Baptism of Steel, that wherever five Sikhs would be, he would be present in their midst. This is a matter for the spiritual-mystical understanding. A group or gathering is a mere crowd, however large, but inspired by the spirit of God, that is by an ideal, it is an incarnation of something noble—an idea or spirit.

While it is correct that Sikhism is in its essence and orientation democratic, it must be clearly understood that the basis of modern political democracy is essentially numerical, while the kind of democracy visualized by the Guru is qualitative, as depending upon the guidance to the people coming from the noble and the wise in spirit. Without this basis, the fabric of the Guru's vision will not be erected. This has been seen in the course of Sikh history. Wherever a leader has fallen from the ideal, however powerful or indispensable he might otherwise be, there will be no truck with his weaknesses or self-will (*manmukhta*). Thus, the great Banda, hero and crusader, was not immune from severe criticism and even ostracization when, misled by power and success, he thought to set up a creed of his own. Thus was Jassa Singh Ramgarhia ostracized when, despite his heroism he made a compromising peace with the Mughal Governor of Jalandhar. He was, however, accepted again when with contrition and sincere devotion he made up for his past lapse. And, most astounding of all, even Guru Gobind Singh himself, when to test the courage in faith of the Sikhs, made a pretence of showing respect to the tomb of the hermit Dadu, in defiance of the Guru's own injunction not to worship tombs, the Sikhs called him to account. Pleased, the Guru cheerfully submitted to the penalty imposed on him for his supposed lapse.

The leaders and guides of the Sikh people were ever men of faith and purity. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the greatest Sikh leader between Banda and Ranjit Singh, and in point of his purity of life and valour, unique in the annals of the community, was a man

whose heroism and devotion were boundless. For his heroism and his stern resistance to Mughal and Afghan tyranny, he was truly called Dharma Vir (The Crusading Hero). The two brothers, Ram Singh and Tirlokh Singh, who founded the royal houses of Patiala, Nabha and Jind, were men commended by the Guru himself for their devotion and sacrifice. The early Sikh chiefs and rulers were much more in harmony with the spirit of the Sikh people, who had elevated them, than their successors of recent times whose principalities were guaranteed an irresponsible security by British arms, despite all kinds of serious lapses and misdemeanour. The story is well-known of Baba Ala Singh, founder of the Royal House of Patiala, who pacified his Rani for an affront to her by a simple, unsophisticated Sikh by pointing out, in the spirit of the Guru's own words almost, that the glory of their house was due to the blessings and sacrifices of such men as these! The basis throughout Sikh history, of the relationship between the leaders and the masses was on this pattern. The leader was chosen for his greater love and devotion. Modern political practice has brought in a different set of values into elections, including those for the purposes of guiding the affairs of faith, as among the Sikhs. The change is a perversion, universally regretted and productive of much that is evil.

TWO MOVING EPISODES

When invested by a large combined force of the Mughal viceroy and the hill chiefs in Anandpur, the Guru's side was in sore straits. With attacks mounting and supplies cut off, the Sikhs were in terrible distress, but fought on bravely. False and treacherous assurances by the Mughal and Hill envoys to grant safe-conduct to the Guru, if he left the Fort, were proved to be totally unreliable. In this situation, finding that to hold out would be utter annihilation, the Guru decided to evacuate Anandpur, to continue the fight elsewhere. Consequently, at night the Sikhs left the fort, with the Guru's household.

At a few miles from Anandpur, the Guru had again to face a large hostile army at Chamkaur, where he shut himself up in the house of a village headman. It was hardly more than a small mud fortress, and according to the *Zafamamah*, with the Guru were only forty men, hungry and tired. The besiegers were thousands in number, including the troops of the viceroy of the Sirhand and the Hill Rajas, swollen by the marauding Muslim populace of the neighbourhood, attracted by the prospect of loot, and merit in

paradise by killing 'infidels'. The brave men inside stood sortie after sortie, fighting and killing the invaders, till two of the Guru's older sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh¹⁰ had also fallen fighting at the head of small bands repelling the attacks in the field outside the fortress. Now, as the battle was raging at its thickest and only a few were left, suddenly one of those wonderful incidents happened, of the like of which Sikh history furnishes numerous examples. The Sikhs held a war council, precursor of all subsequent 'Gurmatas' or 'Holy Synods' which are held by Sikhs assembled to take a solemn decision affecting issues of religion, conscience or principles in general. These Sikhs decided that rather than lose his life in the desperate fight there, as was inevitable if he stayed on, the Guru must escape, reorganize the faithful and fight the Turks¹¹ again. They reinforced their request to the reluctant Guru by invoking his own ordinance that a decision taken by Five pure-hearted Sikhs, deliberating in a spirit of devotion and faith, was tantamount to the Guru's own decision.

The Guru was compelled to bow before the law laid down by himself, and before such overwhelming love and devotion, with which the Sikhs were now making their appeal. Finding the future obscure, he placed his royal coronet (aigrette or Kalgi), his especial mark, before the holy assembly, circumambulated them four times, as had his predecessors in Guruship done to their successors when their time approached, and thus decided the succession. After him it was to be the Sangat, the Holy People, who would be the Guru-guide, preceptor and teacher. They must in their wisdom born of holiness and faith, take all decisions affecting the infant creed and preserve the spirit of the Gurus' inspiration in creating the Order of the Khalsa. The Commonwealth was no one's property—not even the Guru's—but belonged to those who constituted it and had dedicated their lives to it. Thus was in effect born a new kind of democracy in our land—the democracy of the vast obscure millions, taking vital decisions, affecting the future of empires and nations.

It was a dark night. The Guru escaped, not without raising the battle cry of *Sat Sri Akal*, so as not to be said to flee stealthily. The garrison were cut to the last man. Bhai Sant Singh, on whose

10. As to the name of the second of the Guru's sons who fell, there is some controversy, but the usually accepted view is that it was Jujhar Singh.
11. This word was used by the Sikhs during this period with a faint contemptuous sense, to designate Muslims in general.

head the Sikhs had placed the Guru's coronet, to put the besiegers on the false scent that the Guru was still there fell attacked by a large crowd. The Guru's suffering and travail and his skirmishes with the pursuing troops are a matter of history, and need not detain us in view of the immediate purpose of this discussion.

Then, a few years later, came the last hour, the journey into the Eternal, at Nanded, in the distant Dakhan. New was the time for a final decision as to the succession. Now again the Guru, following the spirit in which he had invested the Khalsa, the Commonwealth with supreme authority, arose from his death-bed, where he lay wounded by a treacherous stab from a hired assassin, and placing a coconut and five paise before the Holy Granth, in which is enshrined the Word of the God-Guru, he circumambulated it four times and left the people henceforth to rise to act in their holy wisdom, and in the spirit of God's Word as in the Book, to act in the best spirit of faith.

Venerate the Holy Granth as the Visible Form of the Guru;

The pure in heart may seek and find the Guru's instruction in the Word.

Thus in the poet's words is the Guru reported to have left his last testament. Henceforth the personal Apostolate stood abolished, and a people enjoined to act in that spirit of each-acting-for-all, which is true idealism and true democracy. Never in history has there been such a bold decision, implying supreme faith in the wisdom and selflessness of the common man.¹²

THE SPIRIT OF THE GURU IN THE COURSE OF SIKH HISTORY

Imperfect as all human societies are, and ideals by their very

12. A very moving episode in the Guru's life is what is known as 'Tearing of the Deed of Denial' at Muktsar. Some Sikhs from the Majha area (Amritsar particularly) in a moment of weakness, when the Guru was begirt with the enemy's force, wrote out the famous 'Deed of Denial' (Be-Daawa), denying that they were his disciples. But, shamed they joined the Guru in a still severer crisis near the pond of Khidrana, and gave heroic battle to the pursuing Mughals. All forty of them laid down their lives. Out of overflowing parental love, the Guru at the supplication of one of them, who was still alive, tore off the Deed of Denial, thus annulling their act of betrayal. They washed off their stigma with their blood. To honour them, the Guru named these Forty, Muktas (the emancipated) and the place of the battle came hence forth to be known as Mustsar (the pool of emancipation). These Forty are remembered in the Sikh prayer twice daily with Guru's sons and the Five Beloved Ones, who were the first to take the Baptism. This episode is one of the most moving in Sikh history.

nature inaccessible forms of perfection, there is visible in the course of the history of the Sikh people as close adherence and devotion to the Guru's ideals as may be humanly possible. This is borne out by numerous testimonies, coming chiefly from outsiders or even by the enemies who were so zealously persecuting the Sikhs. Thus, in a dramatization of a query as to who the Sikhs were, by Nadir Shah the Persian invader who sacked Delhi in 1739, and whose rear was constantly sacked by the Sikhs in turn, the Chronicler Gyani Gyan Singh has reported the description of the Sikhs in extenso as given to the Persian. They are described there by the invaders' informant as men who live in a community like brethren, sharing with all whatever they raise and bearing all manner of hardship with supreme fortitude. Rising to the height of imagination, the informant is represented as reporting : 'After cooking a meal they raise the shout, 'Is any one there hungry? Come, the Guru's Bounty is ready to serve.' At such a time even if an enemy were to come, they feed him as if he were their dearest friend, and take only what is left after. If nothing be left, they simply comment, "The kitchen is queer," and live ever cheerful'.

After hearing such accounts of the Sikhs' character, the illiterate but shrewd Nadir is reported to have commented, 'This nation is fittest to rule here in a short time.' This prophecy was fulfilled not long after.

To go back a few years in time, when Banda overran the areas lying around the present districts of Ambala, Patiala, Saharanpur and in the lower Sivaliks, his first act was to abolish feudal landlordism and to declare the peasants to be masters of the land which they tilled. Thus, under the impact of Sikhism in the Punjab, peasant-proprietorship was established, while in most parts of the country the tyrannical feudal system has continued till our day.

Qazi Nur Ahmed, who was some kind of a poet in Persian, in a style which lacks the polish of the poetry of that most refined language, enshrining a great literature in perfect form, was a chronicler of one of the Baluch feudatories of Ahmed Shah Durrani, King of Kabul, at whose hands the Sikhs suffered the most extensive carnage in their history, in two pitched battles. This Qazi, describing the progress of his master's overlord through the Sikh land, has used foul and vituperative language in describing the Sikhs, so much so that for 'Sikh' he invariably uses the near-wounding Persian word 'Sag', meaning 'dog'. But even this man's

foul imagination could not long rest in such vituperation, and in a passage whose testimony is worth a cart-load of history as coming from such a man, he pays a genuine tribute to the heroism and noble character of the Sikhs :¹³ 'It is unjust to call the Sikhs 'dogs' as heretofore; in battle they are lions. Among them there are no criminals or fornicators. They never attack an unarmed person, nor pursue a fugitive. Never in war do they lay hands on women, of whatever station.' And he goes on in this strain for a page and a half, referring still with unconscious humour, indicating his own level, to the Sikhs as 'dogs', 'evil-doers', despite his avowal not to abuse them and the great tribute he is paying to their nobility, character and heroism.

The horrible massacres of the Sikhs during the forties of the eighteenth century, under Nawab Zakaria Khan and later Mir Moinuddin (known to the Sikhs as Mir Mannu)¹⁴ of Lahore, are perhaps unparalleled in history till we come in very recent times to the vast purges or 'pogroms' in some dictator-countries. Sikhs carried in those days prices on their heads, of which cart-loads were brought to the capital for exhibition to the sight of the populace. Hundreds of the Sikhs were dragged adve to Lahore, to be beheaded in batches in the market-place, site of the famous Shahid Ganj Gurdwara in that city. Martyrdom on a mass scale had become a common experience to the Sikhs. They underwent it with calm resignation and faith in the ultimate triumph of the Guru's cause. A Punjabi couplet, current among the Sikhs in those times, illustrates the spirit which Guru Gobind Singh had released to work among his followers. In place of the complaints which normally might be expected; in place of abuse and vituperation of the Muslims, and that the Sikhs had to offer as comment on the horrors suffered by them was :

Mir Mannu Sadi datri, asin uhde soe;

Jiun jiun sanun wadhada, asin doon sawae hoe.

(Mir Mannu is our sickle; we are like wild grasses—The more he cuts, the more we multiply in numbers.) Where else in history would be found paralleled such superhuman endurance, such deep resignation, hope and faith!

After the Great Holocaust (Wadda Ghallughara) in which

13. The whole passage is often quoted, and can be read in the Quazi's work, *Jang Namah*, in Persian, edited by Dr. Ganda Singh.
14. His name had become proverbial among the Sikhs, as meaning a blood-thirsty tyrant.

twenty thousand Sikhs are reported to have been besieged and put to the sword by the retreating army of Ahmed Shah Durrani, and that the survivors had to say was this laconic comment, the language of heroes: 'This holocaust has shaken down the weaker among us; now the pure essence of the Khalsa alone is left.' And there it ended. The people began to reassemble, to prepare for new bouts and to wrest from the dynasty of Ahmed Shah the sovereignty of the Punjab. And this happened within barely two decades.

It was in this period of dire trials that the Sikhs, under inspiration of the Gurus' sustaining word, with their eyes fixed in hope on the day when the Righteous Order of the Guru's conceiving would be established, evolved a code language in which with heartening euphemism and cheerful humour, they gave to the very misfortunes of life, pleasing and sustaining names. In this code language, parched gram would be called almonds; hunger intoxication; a miserable pony an Arab or Iraqi steed; begging would be raising revenue; dying would be campaigning; a small quantity would be one and a quarter times as much, while a unit or one would be described as one and a quarter hundred thousand. In a spirit of heroic, manly humour, running away would be described as turning stag; the hookah, forbidden to the Sikhs, a she-ass; a dumping man, Tamerlane; riff-raff would be 'the tadless herd', that is, worthless cattle. With a supreme gesture of contempt for worldly goods or idle pleasures, money would be called husks; woman, a hag; an elephant, a buffalo-calf; sugar, a rare luxury for wandering and hunted men, would be denigrated as ashes. And so on—such code words running into hundreds. This was still another facet of that spirit of self-reliance and heroism which was generated by the Guru's Word.

IN RECENT HISTORY

In recent times, although the characteristically Indian, and Sikh, democratic ideal of leadership through merit and character has got mixed up, even replaced by the western idea of democracy by numbers and canvassing, still the Sikhs, attuned for about two centuries to managing the affairs of their community by common synod, have been able to make of the democratic process a much greater and more thorough-going success than their other compatriots. This is not an extravagant claim, and is easily demonstrated and sustained. Before the time of Ranjit Singh, who in the changed circumstances of the establishment of a secular state under him, abandoned it, the public affairs of the Sikhs were

decided and arranged on the basis of the resolve called Gurmata (literally Guru's Will) or Holy Synod, in which the elders led the mass into arriving at important national resolves. This was a long arduous training in democracy the hardest way—in times when on such resolves depended life and death martyrdom and the gravest hardships. There may have been some wrong decisions, some that were based on imperfect knowledge or understanding—but there is no doubt that all through, the Sikh elders and the people acted in the best and purest faith. Their resolves led the Commonwealth through suffering and tribulation to survival and greatness, to the extirpation of that tyranny which the Guru had been charged by the Lord to end root and branch. So, their endeavour and their method was pure and holy, and justified by its success.

Again, since the conquest of the Sikh Kingdom by the British Company in India, the Sikhs were thrown back on their own resources as a people, as before Ranjit Singh's time. And during the century or more since that event, they have always acted in moments of crisis with a sure instinct for that which is right and in accord with the spirit of the Guru's Word. They have arisen in this spirit to free the Gurdwaras (the Sikh temples) from the hereditary, corrupt *mahants* (abbots) and made heavy sacrifices—imprisonment, torture, death. They resolved, despite their infinitely small numbers, to join the freedom movement when the Mahatma gave the call. They saw that in the new struggle against foreign rule, the basic pattern of the conflict was the same as in the struggle of the Guru against the oppression of his days, to end the state of helplessness of the people. Still later, in threatening a life-and-death struggle in 1946, the Sikhs acted not a moment too soon, for without their resolve, Punjab and Bengal would most likely have gone—or much more of these than at present—to Pakistan. The consequences of such a development taking place can now be visualized only with a shudder. And yet, without this resolve of the Sikh peasantry, cherishing their racial memory of what the Guru stood for, the dreaded consequences would most likely have occurred!

On a survey of the fabric of leadership throughout India, one fact will be noticed very clearly. The Sikhs have thrown up, almost alone among the various groups comprising the body-politic of India, a competent resolute and shrewd rural leadership. The other elements in the life of the country, till we come to such ideologically-

directed movements as the Kisan Sabha or the Leftist groups, have been content to be led by the urban, educated and privileged groups, only partially representative of and imperfectly identified with the dumb millions. It was the distant image of the half-clad Mahatma, in whom the people saw one like themselves, that made possible the success of the middle-class urban leadership, in the rest of the country. But the Sikh leadership, whatever its faults of vision or its failings in matters involving rectitude, was a part and limb of the masses whom it set out to represent. As a matter of fact, the type of middle class leadership which had succeeded in grasping the reins of power in the rest of the country, would be inconceivable among the Sikhs. The reason for this is that long training in democracy, though on a different principle, which the testament of the Guru established among them.

The Sikh Prayer ending on a supplication to the Lord to send on to the earth universal Weal and Hope and Faith Eternal,¹⁵ is by All and for All. It remembers those countless unnamed myriads who laid down their lives for righteousness, bore trials and showed purity and steadfastness of spirit. It is the supreme voice in human language of noble tribute to Man—man as the embodiment of idealism, sacrifice and love. This is democracy, faith-oriented and faith-perfected.

Guru Gobind Singh is stated, before he left the scene of this terrestrial life, to have composed a Persian couplet expressing the gratitude of his heart to the Founder, Guru Nanak, for showing the way unto Blessing and Benediction unending:

Deg o Tegh o Fateh o Nusrat-be-darang
Yaft az Nanak Guru, Gobind Singh.

(The gifts of Bounty and Might and Victory and Glory unending
Poured in form Guru Nanak's benediction on Gobind Singh)

This is also the motto, the emblem of the Sikh People to this day, and has been through the ages. It enshrines the twin boons of Bounty and Might¹⁶ to be begged daily of the Lord. This in essence is a prayer by the People for granting them the spirit of humanity and the Might to endure and to do—for the moral strength to share with all what they have, and to defend with their lives Right and Truth.

15. '*Sarbat, ka, bhala*' and '*Charhdi Kala*' in original Punjabi.

16. *Deg, Tegh* in the original.

CHAPTER 6 ECCE HOMO

THE HERO UNIQUE

Ecce Homo ! Behold the Man—said Pilate, the Roman Governor of Jerusalem to the Jewish crowd, appearing to them to look closely at the prisoner Jesus, as they clamoured for his innocent blood to satisfy their hate and lust for revenge. Behold, for unless you behold the Man truly, you may not know the truth about him, may misprize him, may set slight value on his greatness. This is what has been done by many to the great Man to God, Guru Gobind Singh, in our land. Said the bard, Bhai Gurdas Singh, holding up to view this Perfect Man:

Behold! there manifest the incompassable Man, the Hero
unsurpassed!

Glory be to Gobind Singh. Hail! Master- Disciple.

The exhortation to behold, in the sense of the New Testament, or of the paean of Bhai Gurdas Singh is of the utmost importance. Behold the greatness of the God-sent Deliverer, and traduce him not from prejudice. Behold the greatness, the achievement of the Master who was ordained by the Lord to teach and to deliver, and who yet put himself in the ranks with the disciples, may, beneath them, to receive the baptism at their hands. Thus did he sanctify common humanity, condemned and despised for millenia in our midst by those code-makers who chose to forget the common origin of man from the Divine Essence, and invented instead a new fiction, whereby the poor, labouring folk were ordained to be born servitors in this world, and condemned to a place away from redemption in the hereafter. Such was Guru Gobind Singh—Redeemer of the lowly.

THE VISION SUBLIME

The God whom he worshipped is the Eternal, the Immortal—the Creator of the infinite worlds which exist, and which at His

directed movements as the Kisan Sabha or the Leftist groups, have been content to be led by the urban, educated and privileged groups, only partially representative of and imperfectly identified with the dumb midions. It was the distant image of the had-clad Mahatma, in whom the people saw one dke themselves, that made possible the success of the middle-class urban leadership, in the rest of the country. But the Sikh leadership, whatever its faults of vision or its failings in matters involving rectitude, was a part and limb of the masses whom it set out to represent. As a matter of fact, the type of middle class leadership which had succeeded in grasping the reins of power in the rest of the country, would be inconceivable among the Sikhs. The reason for this is that long training in democracy, though on a different principle, which the testament of the Guru established among them.

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THE VISION SUBLIME

The God whom he worshipped is the Eternal, the Immortal—the Creator of the infinite worlds which exist, and which at His

will, vanish into nothingness. He is Supreme Might, the sword to destroy evil. He is conceived with the vision which sees sublimity surrounding Him and which, helpless to compass His greatness, expresses itself in negatives, the only recourse which man has to express Infinity:

1. Without sign or mark and beyond caste and category:
His face and feature, shape and form, none can tell;
Beyond mutability, sensitiveness-illuminated, of illimitable
Might—
The Lord supreme of millions of Indras; King of Kings;
Lord of three universes, of gods, men and demons;
His Infinite Glory each leaf and grass-blade proclaims—
Who may recount the roll of all His Names?
Content the human spirit with mention alone of His
attributes! (Jap)
2. Of Indras and Super-Indras has He created millions;
Brahmas and Shivas numerous has He created and
destroyed;
He has enacted the play of the fourteen universes,
To gather it into Himself, entire,
(Akal Ustati; stanza—6)
3. Of the Universe, Destroyer and Creator;
Remover of sickness; sorrow, evil;
He who meditates an instant on Him,
Shall verily be redeemed from the Noose of Mortality.
(Ibid, stanza 10)
4. By services nor by rites or incantations may man win
His pleasure;
Puranas and the Koran avow His Infinity;
Action nor creed nor sophistry may penetrate to the heart
of His mystery;
The Immortal, Uncreated Lord—how may one attain to
Him? (Ibid, Stanza 165)
5. On the earth and in all time pervades His light—
constant, immutable, unalterable:
He knows not decrease or increase; ever equable is He.
He is occupant and the abode—glory incomparable.
(Ibid, Stanza 166)
6. Brahma He made subject to Time;
So was Shiva made incarnate in Time;
In time did the light of Vishnu appear—

He alone watches the play of eternity.
To Him I bow
Who made Shiva the Ascetic,
Who made Brahma the Creator of the Vedas,
Who made the entire cosmos;
Who created the Universe entire;
Made the gods, demons and demi-gods—
One Immutable Form Eternal—
Such is the Lord I adore.
To Him I bow,
Who created all that lives,
Who sends to His servants well-being and joy
And destroys in an instant His foes;
To whom is revealed the inmost soul of each,
To whom is known, the sorrow and suffering of all—good
and bad;
Who delights in showing mercy to beings all—
The insignificant ant and the massy elephant;
Who grieves when His saints do grieve,
And had joy in the joy of the godly,
To whom is known, lie open the inmost recesses of each
heart and soul.
When the creator manifested Himself,
Then did appear the forms infinite;
Whenever He shall withdraw all into Himself,
Then shall merge into Him all existence.
All the tongues innumerable which exist
Speak of you in their knowledge finite;
You remain inaccessible, inscrutable,
All-wise, omniscient, supreme intelligence;
Formless, immaculate, unattached,
Primal, Stainless, uncreated, self-existent;¹
The fool professes His truth to express,
Whom the Veda itself had failed to compass.
The fool, ignorant of His mystery,
Conceives Him as a stone,
And seeks to limit the Supreme Being as Sadashiva—²
Ignorant of Him who is formless;

1. The rendering of this line closely follows Macauliffe's in Sikh Religion.
2. One of the forms which the name of Shiva takes.

Each describes Thee in his own way,
 After his own understanding;
 Your greatness eluded ever the human imagination,
 Nor how you first created the universe.
 You are ever the One, unique, surpassing Beauty—
 Egg-born, womb-born, perspiration-born—
 And numerous varieties of the world of vegetable.
 In one place you are poised as Brahma, the Lord on the
 Lotus;
 In another are you withdrawn like Shiva;
 Our entire creation is a miracle manifest;
 You remain the Primal, Eternal Beauty—Self-existent.

(From the *Chaupav*)

7. None have I thought fit to receive my adoration from the
 moment I touched your feet;
 Hindus and Musdms in their scriptures express various
 bedefs; none have I fodowed;
 Smritis, Shastras, Vedas—ad expound various creeds to
 none have I given credence;
 Lord of Might!³ by your grace have I uttered the True
 Word, and not by my strength alone!

(*Rama Avtar*—Stanza 863)

8. The One pervades the infinite creation;
 Know ye all that there is only one Supreme Creator.
 He makes and moulds and then breaks—
 The Sole, the One Creator.
 None else can arrogate to himself this power;
 All that exists wears His form and colour.
 Countless Indras draw water for Him,⁴
 And countless Brahmas recite the Vedas in praise of Him;
 Countless are the Shivas sitting at His door,
 And countless Sheshnagas—lords of the sword-sting.
 Countless the beautiful suns and moons wearing His
 beauty,
 And countless monarachs like Indras has He created;
 Countless Indras, super-Indras and super-saints,
 And countless the crocodile, the Tortoise and Serpent-
 deities He has made.⁵

3. Literally, wielder of the sword.

4. Tl-at is, perform service for him.

5. Here are being counted the various deities of the Hindu pantheon.

Midions of Incarnations like Krishna has He made,
 And countless Ramas sweep His door;
 Countless are the Crocodile and Tortoise deities,
 Seen waiting at His wonderful portal.
 Countless planetary deities,
 And countless Dattas and Gorakhs has He created.
 Countless like Rama, Krishna and the Prophet has He
 made,
 But none shad be acceptable to Him without True devotion.
 Nothing shad avad to give salvation
 Except that one seek refuge in the Name.
 He who bedeves in the True Lord.
 Knows not any distinctions.
 Worship no one except Him,
 And contemplate no other creed.
 Believe alone in the sole Creator;
 This alone is the way to salvation,
 There is no salvation without Him—
 Contemplate this O friend, in thy mind.
 The worship of any but He
 Wdl lead man astray.
 He who is without colour and form,
 He alone is the Universal Form.
 Except the One Name,
 Think not of bowing at another place.
 He who has created the worlds visible and invisible,
 And will again assimdate them to Himself;
 Who ever seeks the salvation of his soul,
 Let him meditate on that One Creator.
 He who has created the entire Universe,
 The world with its nine continents—
 Those who worship Him not
 Shall perforce fad into the gulf of hed.
 For all meditate, meditate on Him,
 Who created the fourteen worlds.
 Contemplate Him ever—
 Thus alone wid you be blessed.

(*Brahma Avtar*, stanzas 7-19)

The Eternal alone is the Creator—
 The Primal, Eternal, Immortal Form, Maker and
 Destroyer.

He who is not affected by censure or praise,
 Who has no foe or friend—
 What purpose could induce him to take up to drive
 Arjuna's chariot;⁶
 The Deliverer, who has neither father, mother, nor sought
 increase of generation.⁷
 What could it benefit Him to come into the world and be
 known as Devaki's son?⁸
 He who has created the vast world of gods, demons,
 directions and spaces—
 What praise is it to call him Murar?⁹

10. He who had neither beginning nor end nor middle; neither
 exists for Him past, present nor future;
 He who is Lord of all the four ages—Sat, Dwapar, Tertia
 and Kali;
 Mighty saints have failed to know him by meditation,
 Countless Gandhrvas¹⁰ have failed to tune forth His praise
 in melody.
 All have failed in the endeavour to penetrate to His Secret.
 Narad and Ved Vyasa, and innumerable saints supreme
 Have failed to know him by meditation and a million
 million stern austerities.
 His inscrutable Beauty neither the music of Gandharvas
 nor the dance-rhythms of the hosts of fairies of heaven is
 able to suggest;
 Great gods have sought Him through purity and penance,
 and have failed to know Him.
 Millions of Indras are His water-carriers,
 Millions of Rudras¹¹ are assembled at His door,
 Millions of Brahmas, Ved Vyasas attend on Him—
 Uttering night and day with Neti, Neti¹² their sense of
 His Infinity.

(*Akal Ustati*)

6. This has reference to Krishna, who in the Mahabharata War drove the chariot of the Prince Arjuna.
 7. Literally, grandchildren.
 8. The reference is to Krishna.
 9. Destroyer of the demon Mur—another of Krishna's attributive names.
 10. Minstrels of the gods.
 11. Shiva.
 12. Literally, Not this, Not this

11. If Ram¹³ be conceived unborn, why believe that He was
 born of Kaushalya?¹⁴
 He who is called the Creator of Time, what brought him
 to suffer at the hands of Time?¹⁵
 If He be holy and free from rancour, why came He rushing
 to drive Arjuna's chariot?
 Him alone worship as God whose mystery none could
 fathom.
 Why worship stones—God lies not in stones;
 Worship Him as Lord, whose adoration dispels sin and
 evil,
 Whose Name gives deliverance from all manner of bodily
 and mental ailments;
 Meditate ever on Him, the True, for these hollow creeds
 are all fruitless. (33 *Sauaiyas*)
12. Imperishable, fearless, unfathomed, immeasurable,
 irrefragible, unique might,
 Eternal, Endless, unborn, unvanquished,
 Immeasurable eternally, uncreated, unknowable,
 indestructible,
 Unblemished, spirit sublime,¹⁶ Ravisher of gods, men,
 saints,
 Pure Form, Fearless—ever bow at His feet saints and
 mankind entire,
 Filler of the Universe, dispeller of sorrow and sin, supreme
 majesty, remover of illusion and fear.
 (*Gyan Prabodh*, stanza 33)
 On His countenance shines the immeasurable light
 splendid,
 Before His burning effulgence is dimmed the light of
 millions of stars,
 Lord of the Universe, encompasser of all that exists,
 Holder of the circle universal,
 Lord of the Lotus, the ever youthful Narayana,
 Lion-man,¹⁷

13. The commonest Hindu name for God.
 14. Mother of the hero-prince Rama, son of Dasarath.
 15. Refers of the sufferings of Rama in exile.
 16. Literally 'the spirit incarnate'.
 17. References are to Hindu mythology, and the various forms and incarnations of Vishnu or Narayana.

Effacer of Darkness, dispeller of sorrow and sin, adored
of gods, men and saints,
Destroyer-indestructible, creator, fearless—I bow to thee
dispeller of attachment and fear!

(Ibid, stanza 3)

Cherisher of the humble, dispenser of suffering, destroyer
of evil thoughts, remover of sorrow,
The Supreme silence, revisrdng, perfect Love, cherisher
of the universe,
Of immeasurable majesty, immaculate, indestructible,
perfection supreme, Might immeasurable,
Indestructible, fearless, without rancour, unstricken of
sickness, Monarch of sea and land,
Form Eternal, inaccessible, unconquered, deathless,
Youth eternal, gudeless,
One indivisible form unmatched, immortal,
Praised of gods, men and demons.

(Ibid, stanza 36)

HUMILITY AND IDEALISM—THE TWOFOLD ANCHOR

The god-inspired warrior, born to brave the might of arrogant
and inhuman tyrants, seeks the protection of the Lord in utter
humility and submission to the eternal wdl. In God is man's refuge,
and from Him is ad strength. Leaning on this Anchor, did the
Master launch his crusade against the overwhelming power of
earthly rulers and tyrants, in the firm faith that all earthly glory
is as dust. In immersion in God's will alone is strength :

1. Lord, what avails my poor intedigence to set forth
Thy greatness?
Thy praise is beyond my power,
Give thou thyself shape and form to this tale.
How may this worm express Thy greatness, known to
Thyself alone?
Even as the son knows not of the birth of the father,
How may I tell of Thy mystery?
How may one express Thy works?
The understanding is entangled in the insoluble maze !
Thy immaterial form eludes description—
Hence the style of praising thy attributes.

(*Bachitra Natak*)

2. With folded hands and head bent in obeisance stood I
before the Lord,

And said, 'The True Path may be initiated with your
help alone.'

Any who call me Supreme Being,
Shall ad fall into the pit of hell:
Know me to be His servant—
Understand ye this to be without doubt true.
I am servant to the Supreme Being,
Any have come into the world its play to watch:
I utter no more than what the Lord has charged me
with,
And suppress not Divine Truth for fear of mortal man.
Of thy Name alone bear I the tint,
And submit to no bedef else:
I meditate on the Supreme Rality—
The Dispeller of innumerable sins and evils,
All who have meditated on Thee,
Have kept ever free from sorrow and sin:
Those who turn to other diverse bedefs,
Remain confused ever in acrimonious wrangdng debate.

(*Bachitra Natak*)

Those who trun their faces away from their Preceptor,
Shad lose their possessions in the world and the next. In
this world are they ridiculed, and to heaven denied access,
In despair eternal bound—
Ever remain unsatisfied.
Such as forsake to serve the holy,
In this world they achieve no success;
And in the hereafter, fad into the pit of hell.
Ever are they targets of the world's ridicule,
And abide in hed in the end:
The renegades from the Master's feet—
Their faces shad be blackened in both worlds.
Of progeny they have no increase,
And die bringing misery to father and mother:
The traitor to the Guru meets a dog's death,
Bewailing ever his fate in hed-pit.
There are two houses—Babar's and Baba Nanak's—
Both ordained by the Lord:
One Supreme in matters spiritual,
And the other in lordship temporal.
Those who withhold the Guru's tithes

Their gold perforce shad Babar's people snatch
 With torture and penalty extreme;
 And later plunder their hearths and homes.
 Such false renegades when reduced to penury.
 Beg alms of the faithful:
 Such of the faithful as give away charity to such,
 Shall perforce be sacked by the impure.¹⁸
 Such turn their hopes to the Guru
 Only when their wealth has been plundered:
 Such seek to have sight of the Guru,
 But the Guru turns his face from them.
 Unceremoniously they go home,
 Unsuccessful, hope-bereft—
 Cherished neither by the Guru nor by the Lord,
 In despair in both worlds.
 Such as are immersed in serving their God,
 Sorrow and suffering touch them not.
 Power and prosperity ever attend them—
 Sin and suffering touch not even their shadow.
 The impure can touch not their shadow,
 And are they attended by the eight blisses.
 Ad their endeavours end happy.
 And the nine treasures flow into their homes.
 What can the foe design against him to whom the
 Protector extends His protection?
 The brute shall ever turn back unsuccessful,
 Never even touching his shadow.
 Those who seek refuge with the holy,
 Who can harm them even in thought?
 The Lord protects them like the tongue amidst the teeth,
 destroying all wicked evd-doers.

(*Bachitra Natak*)

4. Tell ye the Beloved Friend what we His servants are enduring:
 Without Thee soft quilts afflict like sickness, and
 mansions are turned into snake-pits:
 The wine-flagon tastes bitter as the hangman's pike,
 The wine-cup as the butcher's stroke.
 With the Beloved, to lie on straw is joy—

18. Here stands for the Mughal aggressors, ever on the rampage.

Without Him all pleasures are tasteless.¹⁹

(*RagKalyan*)

5. Let such be thy asceticism, O my Soul:
 Look upon thy home as the forest, by bearing in thy
 heart indifference towards the world.
 Make continence thy matted hair, austerity thy sacred
 dips and self-discipline thy long nails.
 With the Master's Word instruct thy soul, and smear
 thyself with the diet and dight thy sleep; and carry in thy
 heart love of mercy and forgiveness.
 Practice ever noble conduct and contentment;
 Ascend thus beyond the three Attributes;²⁰
 Banish from thy heart lust, anger, pride,
 Obstinacy and attachment.
 Then shalt thou behold the Divine Essence, and find the
 Supreme Being.

(*Ramkali*)

6. Except through (meditation on) God's Name, no
 dedverance is possible.
 Where canst thou flee Him who has in His power the
 fourteen universes?
 Ram and Rahim,²¹ whose names thou repeatest endlessly,
 cannot save thee;
 Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Surya,²² the Moon—all are
 subject to mortality;
 The Vedas, the Puranas, the Koran—all declare their
 helplessness to express His Reality.
 Indra and the Serpent-Kings²³ and saints supreme—ad
 endeavour to form His conception yet he eludes them
 ever.
 He whose form and features are a mystery—
 How can He be designated as of dark hue?²⁴
 Only by embracing His feet may one escape the snare of
 mortadty.

(*RagBilaval*)

19. Literally, cities appear cursed.

20. Tamas, Rajas, Satva—the dark, active and poised states of the mind.

21. These names here stand for the narrow creeds, whether Hindu or Muslim.

22. The sun-god.

23. Shes-nag—the mighty primal serpent.

24. Refers to Krishna, imagined to be swarthy in colour. Krishna literally means 'black'.

7. Lords of might,²⁵ gold-decked elephants, unparallel in grandeur and colourful display:
 Attended by millions of swift steeds, springing like stags, outstripping the speed of wind—
 Mighty-armed monarchs, with proud heads ever unbowed.
 What avails them all this glory—
 In the end they too shall tread barefoot the path of mortality! (Akal Ustati, stanza 22)
8. Conquerors of all lands and countries—their glory rolled forth by tambourine and kettle-drum;
 Attended by crowds of splendid trumpeting elephants and neighing precious steeds—Mighty monarchs innumerable of past, present and future—
 Without meditating on the Supreme King, the Lord of the Universe, all their glory shall be forgotten.
 (Akal Ustati, stanza 23)
9. Mighty Monarchs, lords of splendid
 Soldiers with far-striking arms, accoutred in armour to crush the foe;
 With hearts confident to remain steadfast even though mountains themselves might shake;
 Smashers of foes, crushers of evil-doers;
 Mighty to humble the pride of battle-spirited tuskers—
 Except for the grace of the True King the Supreme Lord all such tread the common way of all mortality.
 (Akal Ustati, stanza 25)
10. Unparalleled heroes, great and mighty, bearing the brunt of sharp steel unflinching;
 Conquerors of kingdoms, of power to crush foes and to humble the pride of spirited elephants;
 Mighty to reduce impregnable forts, and to conquer in a trice the four continents :
 Over all these the supreme Lord is the True Master—
 He alone the giver; the infinite universe His beggars.
 (Akal Ustati, stanza 26)
11. Fool, as life leaves thy frame, thy own wife shuns thee, fearing thee as a ghost;
 Son, wife, friends, companions—all hasten thy removal;
25. literally, intoxicated.

House, treasure, all thy buried gold turns stranger the moment breath leaves thee:
 Think, O think, thou immersed in animal folly :
 On the last journey thou goest all alone !

(33 Savaiyas)

12. Demons, gods, Serpent-King, goblins—all shall in all ages recite His Name;
 The entire creation in water and earth shall rise instantaneously to sing His praises;
 The note of the triumph of Righteousness shall resound and swarms of evil shall all meet destruction;
 The good and holy shall rejoice,
 And evil-doers shall vanish, crushed.

(Akal Ustati, stanza 27)

IN ADDRESS TO THE TYRANT²⁶

1. He who is under the shadow of the Huma,²⁷
 Will not submit to be overshadowed by the impudent crow.
 One who pursues the mighty lion,
 Will not follow after goats, sheep or deer.
 What could forty famished men do,
 When surprised in assault by thousands?
 They came after breaking a solemn oath,
 Attacking with swords, arrows and matchlocks.
 So forced, I took the field,
 And replied with a rain of arrow and shot.
 When all other resources are rendered unavailing,
 It is justified then to unsheath the sword.
 Strange the way you keep your promises—
 One should consider it evil to swerve from the truth.
 Wield not the sword in ruthless bloodshed,
 Heaven's sword shall one day strike thee too.
 Heaven's sword shall one day strike thee too.
 Man, be not thou unmindful of the terrible retribution of the Lord.
 Who is without desire and needs not man's gratitude.
 He is the King of Kings—without fear,

26. The person addressed in this and the next extract is Aurangzib, the reigning mughal emperor.

27. A fabulous bird in Semitic mythology, bringer of supreme good luck.

The True King of the universe and All Time.
 He is God, the Lord of the earth and the ages,
 Creator of the universe and all that is in it.
 He has created the little ant as well as the mighty
 elephant.

He cherishes the humble and destroys oppressors.
 He bears the name—Cherisher of the Humble,
 He needs not man's gratitude or his offerings.
 What though my four children have been killed—
 Living stid is the coiled serpent.
 What bravery is this that you extinguish sparks of fire,
 But raise a vast conflagration !

(Zafaniamah)

2. In the name of the²⁸ Lord of the Sword and the Axe,
 The Lord of the Arrow, the Spear and the Shield.
 In the name of Him who is the God of warrior-men,
 And of chargers swift as the wind.
 He who gave to thee kingship,
 Gave to us the wealth of faith in righteousness.
 Thine is aggression by guile and deceit;
 Mine is to seek redress by truth and sincerity.
 By favour of Akal Purush
 Such a shower of steel will I scatter
 That as thou earnest unsuccessful from the Deccan Hills
 And bitter and frustrated from Mewar—
 So, if thou turnest thy gaze hitherwards,
 That failure of bitterness shall increase manifold.
 Such a fire will I light under thy horse's hoofs,
 That thou shalt not be able to taste the water of Punjab.
 What though a jackal by deceit and guile
 Has killed two young ones of a lion,²⁹
 If this fiery lion live,
 For sure, he will avenge this outrage foul.

(Fatahiimah)

THE HERO'S PRAYER

1. I propitiate not Ganesh in the beginning,³⁰
 Nor invoke the aid of Krishna and Vishnu.

28. This is the Persian (and Arabic) style of beginning a letter.
29. Referring obviously to the slaughter of the two sons of the Guru at Sirhand.
30. Propitiation of the elephant-headed god Ganesha is common in India.

I have heard the names of such, but know them not;
 My love is all for His sacred feet!
 The Lord Eternal is my Protector.
 Mighty Steel! I am thy slave.
 Protect me as thy own :
 Uphold my honour, who have sought thy aid.
 Cherish me as Thy servant;
 Destroy my foes each and all:
 Uphold in the world Bounty and the Protective Sword;
 Protect me Thou from all harm.
 Protect me at all times—
 Me Lord, who am Thy slave !
 Cherish me, who am Thy servant,
 And fulfil all my missions by Thy grace.
 Thou art King of Kings—
 The Cherisher of the Humble.
 Shower on this servant Thy compassion—
 After all resources have failed, I have faden at Thy door.
 Cherish this servant, Lord.
 Lift up Thy slave with Thy hand.
 Bring to destruction all my foes !

(Frishjia Avtar)

2. Exalt me into the mountain Sumer from a straw :
 In cherishing the nimble art Thou unparalleled;
 Forgive my errors O Lord, I that am compact ad of errors;
 Those who serve Thee, their homes Thou fideest to over-
 flowing will wealth.
 In this Iron Age in the mighty arms of the Wielder of the
 Sword of Eternity alone is my trust!
- (Bachitra Natak)*
3. Invoking first the Mighty lord, on Guru Nanak meditate!
 Seek then the aid of Angad, Amar Das and Ram Das.
 Meditate next on Arjan, Hargobind and the Holy Hari
 Rai.
 Meditate then on the holy Harkrishna, whose sight dispels
 all suffering.
 Invoke Togh Bahadur, so may the Nine Treasures flow
 into your abodes!
 May they aid and succour ever ! (I)
 Thou who didst create in Primeval Time
 Might, and after, the entire universe,

Then creating Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva,

Thou didst create the ocean, Mountains.

Earth and erect the Firmament unpropped on pillars:

Then didst thou make Demons and Gods, and provoked
strife amongst them,

Thou too didst create Durga, Destroyer of Demons,

From Thee did Rama get strength to pierce with arrows
the ten-headed Ravana,

From thee did Krishna get strength to hurl by the hair
Kamsa.

Mighty ascetics, gods—consuming age after age in fires
of austerity—

All, all have failed Thy Mystry to unfold! (2)

(Opening stanzas—*Var Sri Bhagauti ji ki*)